

KING WILLIAM COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Quarterly Newsletter
April 2023

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UPCOMING MEMBERSHIP MEETING

April 16, 2023, 2:30 PM
Administration Building
King William Courthouse
180 Horse Landing Road
King William, VA 23086

Please join us at the next meeting of the King William County Historical Society which will be held on Sunday, April 16th at 2:30. This will be an in-person meeting at the King William Administration Building.

At this meeting we will hear from KWCHS Members, Lee and Elaine Ramsey. Their home, Cherry Grove, is a featured location for this year's Historic Garden Week. Viewing the picturesque old home surrounded by a pristinely kept yard, it is easy to understand why the Ramseys decided to buy this house. But forty years ago, the building a relative had seen while deer hunting, was a far cry from what it is now. It had been vacant for 10 years, had no running water and exposed electricity, but it was exactly what they wanted. They moved in and renovated it room by room. The oldest part of the home was built in the late 1700s, and an addition was added in the mid-1800s.

The Historic Garden Week Tour will take place here in King William on April 21st from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and is hosted by The Garden Club of the Middle Peninsula. Tickets are still available for the tour and can be purchased online at: vagardenweek.org/tours/middle-peninsula

Refreshments will be available after the meeting.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Membership,

The old adage goes "time flies when you're having fun" and I can't remember a time when I've worked with the historical society that I've had this much fun. Whether it is a fascinating speaker and site tour or an archaeology dig day at the courthouse tavern site, each event has made me feel more engaged and connected with our county, its history, and the extraordinary membership of our society. We are sincerely grateful to the Upper Mattaponi Tribe for hosting us for our winter meeting at the Sharon Indian School in January. All in attendance were amazed by the accomplishments of the Tribe and the promise for the years ahead. We are also grateful for Debi Moren (museum chairperson) and The Fairfield Foundation and their continued public engagement every second and fourth Thursday each month, opening the museum and inviting the public to tour and help with the archaeological investigations. The best part of loving history is being a part of it.

All of this excitement has raised expectations for the year ahead. We are happy to report that you'll see more of the same this spring and summer. The Fairfield Foundation plans to continue with their schedule of public digs (again, every 2nd and 4th Thursday) and the museum council and volunteers continue to update their exhibits and add to the collections, making any visit worthwhile just to see what's been discovered and put on display since your last time with us. In addition to these activities, we are also planning to put this year's Alma and Harry Coon Fund to good use. As with years past, we will transcribe and make accessible for purchase the key-word-searchable Record Books, and we anticipate having FOUR available by the end of the year. Record Book 3 will be formatted for publication this Summer and we have contracts pending for Books 4, 5, and 6 (including editing) in-hand. Our hope is to also have these three ready for sale by Christmas (fingers crossed).

Lastly, we will embark on a new project and an update of one of our other properties. We are collaborating with King William County to conduct a structural evaluation of the Fire/Lookout Tower. If you check back a few issues ago in our newsletter, you'll see a great article by Gus Kasper on the history of this highly recognizable and historically significant structure. At the same time, we're making some upgrades at the Lanesville Christadelphian Church. When you drive by next, you'll likely see repairs to the siding and perhaps a bit of painting. You may also notice that we're sprucing up the grounds and removing some of the small, damaged buildings that are beyond repair. If things go according to plan, we anticipate having one of our next membership meetings at the church and we can show off the improvements to each of you in person.

It is exciting to report all of the progress we are making to preserve and make accessible the county's history. I hope each of you will continue your support of our organization through your membership and donations. And I look forward to working with you and seeing you at meetings and special events in the months to come.

Sincerely,

Dr. David A. Brown, President, King William County Historical Society

Responding to History Questions

We have had a number of requests for information about King William County people and places this first quarter. Individuals making requests obtain our email address from the King William County Historical Society Website, which has had recent updates with regards to project activity and accomplishments (kingwilliamhistory.org). Thanks, John Breeden & Ben Shumaker.

Below are a few of the recent requests. Our history “knowledge group” has reviewed these but if other members have information on any of these areas of interest, please send us an email at kwhs@kingwilliamhistory.org

- **Heather Estes-Henderson:** I am working on my family history and wanted to know if you have any information regarding William P. Taylor. He was a large slave holder in King William County, Virginia. I am trying to find out if my relatives were enslaved by him. I am researching Benjamin Taylor and his family.
- **Amy Lipscomb Livers:** My husband and I are planning a visit to VA in late May 2023. I grew up in WV, but my father’s family was from central VA and we believe was in the area since the late 1600’s. I am looking for information on my great-great grandfather (a Civil War veteran), his father and grandfather (a Revolutionary war vet), all of whom I believe are buried in the area.
 - Richard Coleman Lipscomb 1816-1887
 - Thomas Lipscomb (3rd Gr Grandfather) 1785-1848
 - John Pemberton Lipscomb (4th Gr Grandfather) 1755-1804
 - John Lipscomb 1730-1792?
- **Mark:** I would like to make an inquiry before driving some distance from Warm Springs, Va. Would the society hold any information on revolutionary war Captain Mordecai Abraham of King William Co. Va. Born 1710, Death 20 July 1792 King William Co. Va. Also present at the Battle of Yorktown.
- **Doria Topazio:** I am trying to find information regarding Cat Tail School on Cummins Road in Aylett. It is on a county map from 1907. This school was for the Indian and black children in the area. It was built sometime between 1880 - 1940. Please help me find out more.
- **Doug:** There is evidence & history that Mr. Upshaw operated a store & pharmacy at the corner of what is now Upshaw & Millwood Rd. The property was established in 1900. Now known as Augustine, named after the Salyer & Family that harvested the lumber to build Upshaw home. Are there any records/history?

Our history “knowledge group” members are Gene Campbell, Bibb Edwards, Carl Fischer, Marie Jennings, Debi Moren, Bob Hubbard and Ron Parker.

- *Bob Hubbard*

Harry & Alma Coon Fund

Harry Coon and his wife Alma were married for over 60 years and lived in the Chicago, Illinois area. Harry was President of the Owen L. Coon Foundation and he and Alma were very successful in the music industry – including owning a recording business and operating a radio station in St. Louis, Missouri.

They shared a love for Colonial Williamsburg and in 1970 they purchased a historic home in King William County called "Seven Springs", circa 1732. They restored the home to its colonial tradition (but with modern conveniences). After Alma passed, Harry Coon eventually donated the home to the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and moved to live in Williamsburg on Duke of Gloucester Street.

While visiting Williamsburg and “Seven Spring” over the years he became impressed with the King William County Courthouse and the historic preservation work performed in the county by the King William County Historical Society. He became a member of the society and frequently visited and reviewed project activities.

Harry died in 2014 and unbeknownst to the historical society, established an endowment for them. Earnings from this fund are distributed annually to the society with the stipulation they must be used *“for positive community impact. This may include, but is not limited to, preservation and maintenance of current properties, acquisition of additional historic resources, providing public access and education through museums, exhibits, or educational programs.”*

The allocation of funds began in 2017. The society has used these funds to do renovation work on the Museum, update existing exhibits and create the new Tavern Exhibit. It has also funded the archeological work at the courthouse and updating the courthouse historic district information for the National Register of Historic Places. Other projects included transcribing many of the courthouse “Burned Record” books (1702-1885), developing online GIS Mapping of King William Historic Places, network installation for our leased courthouse buildings, installation of county signs and restoration work on Acqinton and Lanesville Christadelphian Churches.

The next allocation of the Coon Funds will be in April and the board of directors are planning how those funds will be used. There are already plans for transcribing additional “Burned Record” books and restoration work on Lanesville Christadelphian Church. Other considerations include upgrades for the museum, inspection and stabilization estimates for the Fire Tower, a book on King William County History and additional archeological digs at the courthouse. There remains a great deal of interest in continuing with discovery of the 18th century tavern, outbuildings and the abundance of artifacts waiting to be uncovered!

- *Bob Hubbard*

Update on Archaeology at the Courthouse Tavern Site

We are happy to report that the Fairfield Foundation will continue to work with the historical society to host dig days every second and fourth Thursday each month through the spring and summer. Over the last year, archaeology has been a near-constant presence in the courthouse district. You may have seen the full parking lot in front of the courthouse with volunteers eagerly excavating test units searching for the tavern foundations and artifacts from the 18th and 19th centuries. You've also likely noticed small teams of workers digging smaller holes in the grassy field to the south of the parking lot, investigating the site of Hill's Hotel. We encourage you to stop by when you see us there, drive by slowly and roll down your window. We're happy to share our discoveries and offer impromptu tours for all ages.

As for the specific discoveries of the last few months, there have been many. First, we've confirmed what many of you already know: we have a great museum and it's a fine place to exhibit archaeology discoveries. Museum Council Chairwoman Debi Moren opens the museum nearly every day we are in the field and shares the magnificent display on colonial taverns, as well as a truly informative and professionally designed series of exhibits on the county's history. Second, we've identified the north gable end of the 18th-century tavern. While we've misplaced/not yet found the primary source that Mr. Dill used to document the destruction of the tavern, his claim that the building was destroyed in a fire in the late 19th century is indisputable. Thick deposits of charcoal and burnt material line the floor of the building's cellar and found within this debris are shotgun shells from the 1890s and a Confederate Military Reunion Medallion dated to 1896. Intermixed with these items are tremendous amounts of scorched brick rubble, melted window glass, burnt nails, and more that was trapped during the collapse of the structure after the fire ceased. What's more curious, though, is the size of the cellar. It is significantly smaller than the size of the building advertised in the Virginia Gazette at the end of the 18th century. This has led us to conclude that several of the brick foundations we've found aligned with the tavern foundations to the immediate north are likely part of wood frame additions. These additions document the changing condition of the property and its evolution over time, meeting the needs of customers and demonstrating the entrepreneurial spirit of the tavern's owners.

Lastly, the artifacts continue to amaze us each day. Our survey across Courthouse Road to the south has found small bits of 18th-century delftware, English and German stoneware, and wrought nails that suggest either Hills Hotel began in the colonial period, or there may be earlier buildings nearby. To the north of Courthouse Road, we have expanded our survey into the woods, east of the tavern foundations. In the forest there are pockets of brick rubble and ceramics showing clusters of artifacts from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. Could this be from other buildings (outbuildings? domestic buildings?) associated with the tavern's owner? We hope to fight through the new growth and continue investigating this spring and summer. And we hope to see you there with us.

- *Dave Brown*

THE FIRE TOWER

The Fire/Lookout Tower: Structural Evaluation

For many of you, the Fire Tower at the courthouse has been a steady presence, looming large across the county's seat for much of your lives. For come-heres like myself, it's a welcoming sign that I'm home (I live near the courthouse). For everyone, the tower is a locally significant structure that reminds us a not-so-distant past. Gus Kasper reminded us in his recent newsletter article that these towers were once much more common and that they served a real role in our communities. Each was operated by an individual responsible for looking out across the countryside for signs of forest fires. They were often one of the first electrified buildings in an area, and the operators used maps and hand-held instruments (and other tower operators) to triangulate where a fire was and coordinate the response to help put it out.

It is because of this significant role the tower and its operators played that our society's board of directors, in coordination with county administrators, are evaluating its structural integrity, pursuing its placement on the National Historic Lookout Register, and including it in the proposed National Register of Historic Places Historic District surrounding the King William Courthouse. The purpose of this multi-prong approach is to research, evaluate, preserve, and interpret this early 20th-century behemoth. The tower was transferred to the county over a decade ago and it is important to look forward to its future as part of the district. We are working together with the county to find ways to address both safety and accessibility and welcome your stories and questions as we move forward with this project. Please reach out if you want to share your memories of this beloved giant with us and let us know how we can work with you towards its preservation.



Map used for triangulation, showing the expected area the lookout tower was supposed to cover

MEMBER NEWS

King William County Historical Society Membership Meeting Minutes

Sunday, January 15, 2023

The King William County Historical Society membership meeting was held on Sunday, January 15, 2023. Vice President Morgan Faulkner called the meeting to order. The minutes from the October 16, 2022 membership meeting were approved.

The meeting was held at the Sharon Indian School of the Upper Mattaponi Tribe. A panel of former Sharon Indian School students discussed what it was like to attend the school and their experiences attending other institutions after segregation ended in King William County.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Vawter
Recording Secretary

Historic Garden Week to be held in the Manquin Area of King William County

Friday, April 21, 2023

10 am to 4 pm

For one week, April 15-22, the Garden Club of Virginia (GCV) will host tours of private homes and landscapes, public gardens and historic sites across Virginia, enjoying our beautiful state at the peak of spring. In addition, more than 1,000 world-class floral arrangements created by GCV members will enhance tour properties. This beloved statewide event will include 29 unique tours organized and hosted by 48 member clubs located from the foothills of the Shenandoah Valley all the way to the beaches of Tidewater.

This year, the Garden Club of the Middle Peninsula, a GCV member club, will host a tour in the Manquin area of King William. Four private homes, never before opened for Historic Garden Week, will be open for tours of their interiors and gardens, including Cherry Grove, Chestnut Grove Farm, Hollyfield Manor and Srykefyre. Club members will decorate the homes with dozens of custom-made floral arrangements, many made with materials from their own gardens. Two historic churches will be open as well. McKendree United Methodist Church will provide box lunches, homemade by church members. Order in advance by April 13th at mckendree23106.org. Garden club members will also have a Garden Marketplace at McKendree, with items such as plants, gardening tools, gloves, vases and baskets of planted herbs, annuals or succulents. Also, signed books on the American South and Civil War by Richmond native and Professor Emeritus Emory Thomas will be available.

Rock Spring Baptist Church will have a Dessert Bar, eat-in or take-out, the church choir will sing gospel favorites at 1 pm, and a brief lecture on church history will be presented at 11 am. Proceeds from the lunches and desserts will benefit the churches.

Tickets for the King William tour are \$35 per person in advance at vagardenweek.org/tours/middle-peninsula. Tour proceeds fund the restoration and preservation of Virginia's historic homes and gardens. This is a driving tour and parking is available at each property. This is an opportunity to visit some of King William's unique homes and walk where our ancestors laid the ground work for King William's rich history.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Annual Membership expires twelve (12) months after your last dues payment.

Family \$30

Student \$10

Individual \$20

Lifetime \$250

Artifact Level \$150+

Pamunkey/Mattaponi Level \$300+

Thomas T. H. Hill Benefactor Level \$500+

Corporate Sponsorship \$500+

Mail to:

King William Historical Society
P.O. Box 233
King William, VA 23086

CHERRY GROVE



Home of Elaine and Lee Ramsey

*The King William Museum is open by appointment.
Call 804.769.9619 or email
kwhs@kingwilliamhistory.org
Located at 227 Horse Landing Road,
King William, Virginia*

King William County Historical Society

The King William County Historical Society was formed in 1973 to preserve and promote the unique heritage and rich history of King William County, Virginia through education, research, and restoration of historically significant landmarks.

Our mission is to collect, interpret, and preserve those things relative to the history of the county while acting as caretaker of artifacts from the lives and traditions of the people who have gone before us.

To this end our efforts are wide ranging, including our publications, operating the county historical museum, and the stabilization and restoration of King William landmarks such as the Old Jail, Lanesville Christadelphian Church, and Acquinton Church.

Membership is open to all who share a passion for history, a reverence for the past, and an interest in preserving our common heritage for future generations.