

KING WILLIAM COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Quarterly Newsletter
July 2023

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UPCOMING MEMBERSHIP MEETING

July 16, 2023, 2:30 PM
Lanesville Christadelphian Church
7442 Mount Olive Cohoke 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, July 16th at 2:30. This will be an in-person meeting at the Lanesville Christadelphian Church. The building is air conditioned, and a portable restroom will be available.

Our program will be a discussion about the county's natural history, tribal history and cultures, maritime history, and current land use with John Page Williams and Tilghman Broaddus, of Marlbourne on the Pamunkey in Hanover County.

Mr. Williams is a noted writer, angler, educator, naturalist, and conservationist. In more than 40 years at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the Virginia native championed the Bay's causes and educated countless people about its history and biology. Mr. Broaddus has lived on his family land his whole life and will also share his perspective on our county and two beautiful rivers. Refreshments will be available after the meeting.



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Membership,

We survived a relatively temperate May and June only to hit a wall of heat and humidity at the same time we turned the calendar to July. I must admit that this often pushes me inside to work on sometimes neglected projects in the comfort of the air-conditioned office. I pretend that there is a silver lining: catching up with emails, remembering to reach out to friends and family, and saving outside excursions for the evenings and early mornings. The end result is usually a more productive period than you might expect. And I'm sure you'll agree that this newsletter certainly confirms that our society's work is not only progressing on many fronts, but accelerating as the temperature climbs higher and higher.

I'm particularly proud of the work of our board of directors. In our most recent meetings, we've focused on reestablishing the foundations of good governance, especially as our organization matures and grows accustomed to the increased opportunities made possible through the Alma and Harry Coon Fund. We also expect more out of ourselves. We work well together, and as we resolve our most recent challenges we look towards neglected areas and refocus on what makes our society a true benefit to this community. With our finances in order, and our long-term projects making steady progress, we can appreciate the joys of sharing these moments and building our society's membership. We have plenty of ways to become more involved, too. Each week we've teamed up to answer history questions from inquisitive researchers. We've enjoyed welcoming an eager and engaged public to our museum and the archaeological site – washing artifacts and rediscovering the courthouse district's history on the second and fourth Thursday each month is exciting and endless in its possibilities. And it's just the beginning. We look forward to seeing all of you at our summer membership meeting on July 16th, and sharing with you our recent structural analysis of the Lookout Tower at the King William Courthouse and the exciting progress made on the record book transcription project.

With so much to share, and so much more to do, we hope you will consider sharing this good news with friends and family and encouraging others to become active members of our organization.

Sincerely,
Dr. David A. Brown



MEMBER NEWS

Update on Transcribing the Burned King William County Record Books

We are in awe of the skill and tenacity of document transcribers. Reading 18th- and 19th-century handwriting is more than just a skill, it's a gift that few of us will ever have. And we are particularly impressed with the excellent work of Eric Grundset and Will Bynum (and editor Wes Pippenger) who have helped us transcribe King William County Record Books 1, 2, and 3. Through their hard work we are able to offer for sale a key-word searchable transcription that includes the original high-resolution image of each page on the book's opposite panel. Not only does this make research into each book lightning quick, it allows each reader to compare the transcription to the original and appreciate the handwriting and age associated with each document.

Books 1 and 2 are available for sale currently with all proceeds going to the Museum Council for support of their endeavors. Book 3 is currently being formatted by Mr. Bynum and we hope to have it for sale at the end of the summer. We are excited to announce that we have under contract the transcription of two more books, along with their editing. All of this is made possible by the Alma and Harry Coon Fund, and we are grateful for the efforts of past historical society members and county clerk for allowing us to photograph each of the 9000 pages from the 19 surviving books.

I'm sure you will agree that having a key-word searchable version not only accelerates research, but opens up new avenues of inquiry. While our intent was to make these books more accessible for genealogists and other family tree researchers, these transcriptions will also open the history of King William County to many academics and local historians, students and lovers of architectural history and archaeology. We are excited to make a contribution, both to our county's history and the history of Virginia, through these efforts.

Each copy costs \$50 with the proceeds supporting the King William County Museum. For purchase, please email kwhs@kingwilliamhistory.org.



The King William Courthouse Historic District: Update

Progress on revising the nomination of the King William County Courthouse took an administrative turn recently when, after consultation with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR), we were advised that a new nomination would be most appropriate - covering the substantial area that included the houses, churches, towers, and other significant landscape features and archaeological sites that make up the "courthouse" area. While this will slow the progress of recognizing the deep history of the neighborhood, the silver lining is it gives us more time and flexibility with documenting what made this area special across its history.

To date, our focus has been working with DATA Investigations to reach out to property owners and fully document the architectural resources on each parcel. We've also worked with the Fairfield Foundation and DATA Investigations to involve the public with archaeological survey and evaluation of the several archaeological sites within the district. DATA Investigations has also undertaken significant research in the clerk's office, combing through records of property sales and wills, plats, and boundary descriptions, giving us a clearer understanding of how property ownership evolved in the study area. We've also talked with VDOT and the county administration, understanding how public buildings and roads evolved, mostly through the 20th and 21st centuries.

The goal is to provide a series of maps and a "Preliminary Information Form" for the district to the Society's board of directors for review and subsequent submittal to residents, neighbors, and scholars, and eventually to the DHR for evaluation. Once this process is complete, we will submit a formal nomination (with everyone's support) to the state and federal registers. Nomination to the state and federal registers is purely honorific, but it is also a powerful preservation tool. It acknowledges in significant detail the significance and integrity of the district. At the same time, it does not hinder what a property owner can or cannot do on their property. The state and federal government have programs to help property owners afford historic restoration and protective easements, but these programs are only undertaken through a property owner's initiative. We welcome everyone's comments and questions on this process and look forward to sharing more about the history of the courthouse in future newsletters.

Mark your calendar and plan to attend the Picnic Membership Meeting to be held on Sunday, October 15, 2023 at 2:30. Location to be announced.

PRESTLEY FARM

Prestley Farm – Almost a Century as the Gateway to King William

By Gene Campbell

If Carroll Lee Walker was still living, he would be 78 years old on June 23rd. On the occasion of his birthday, I thought it appropriate to remember him for restoring structures and “saving history” in King William and King & Queen Counties. One such structure is Prestley Farm. Many of us each day pass by the beautiful red barn on Rt 360 as you enter King William from Hanover County. Land on which Prestley Farm sits can be traced back to a 1693 land grant from the English Monarchs King William III and Queen Mary II to the College of William and Mary. King William and King and Queen Counties are named for these Monarchs. In the late 1700s Major Walker Tomlin of Richmond County and his wife Sarah Fauntleroy owned a tract of land on the Pamunkey River in King William across from the old town of New Castle on the Hanover side. Major Tomlin began acquiring farms along the Pamunkey River and by 1803 he had a total of 623 acres. In 1812 his son, John Walker Tomlin who attended the College of William and Mary in 1797 acquired 403 acres from the College which included Prestley Farm. The Tomlins had now amassed 1,026 acres of rich Pamunkey farm land. They also acquired property across the Pamunkey River in Hanover County. In addition to Prestley Farm or Warananoke Farm as it is sometimes called, their holdings consisted of “Old Virginia Farm,” and “Eocene Farm.” Both of these farms are located on the Pamunkey River on the King William side.

John Walker Tomlin and his wife Margaret had six children. John died in 1815 and left each of his six young children (the oldest was 10 years old and the youngest a few months old) a farm. His youngest child, Harrison Ball Tomlin, was given what he later named “Prestley Farm.” The farm remained in the Tomlin family till the late 1800s. In 1925 the Townsend family from North Carolina led by patriarch James L. Townsend, Sr. purchased Prestley Farm. Shortly after buying Prestley Farm, one of Mr. Townsend’s sons, Guy O. Townsend (father of William Guy Townsend) built the majestic red barn. Prestley Dairy Farm was an active dairy operation for more than 50 years. Two years from now in 2025, the King William County landmark will reach the century old milestone as the gateway to King William County.

James L. Townsend, Sr. was a pioneer in the dairy industry and at one time his family operated five dairy farms in the county. There was a large house on the Prestley Farm when Mr. Townsend purchased the land in 1925 but it was torn down in 1927 to make way for Rt 360. Located just behind the big red barn is the “Old Virginia Barn.” It was built in the early 1800s to house livestock and store feed and grain.

In 2014 Carroll Lee Walker completed the restoration of both of these structures under the careful eye and knowledge of William Guy Townsend and his wife Emilie. The citizens of King William and King and Queen are very fortunate that William Guy, Emilie, and Carroll Lee Walker had the foresight to preserve history. Carroll Lee restored many structures in both King William and King & Queen Counties.

Descendants of James L Townsend live in the county today and operate farms, namely Queenfield, Manskin Lodge and Riverside along the Pamunkey River. Riverside is the last remaining working dairy farm in King William County. I have known the Townsend’s all my life

PRESTLEY FARM

and they are hardworking, first-class people. They don't come any finer.

Many THANKS to Emilie Townsend for the information to write this article.



Prestley Farm in 2005, above. How it looks today, below.



The above article appeared in the June 21, 2023 issue of the Country Courier, provided here with the permission of Gene Campbell – many thanks, Gene!

MEMBER NEWS

King William County Historical Society Membership Meeting Minutes Sunday, April 16, 2023

The King William County Historical Society membership meeting was held on Sunday, April 16, 2023. President David Brown called the meeting to order at 2:44 pm.

The minutes from the January 15, 2023 membership meeting were tabled until the next membership meeting in July.

President David Brown reported that the financials are available upon request for review with Sally Pearson, Treasurer.

David reported that the KWCHS is working with the County to assess the fire tower located on Route 30 near the courthouse.

Debi Moren, Museum Chair reported for the King William County Historical Museum. Debi reported that on March 19, 2023 the Museum was granted a \$200 check for renovation of the shade garden from the Middle Peninsula Garden Club.

Dave reported that the archaeology digs are continuing every 2nd and 4th Thursday. The museum is also open during these times.

Member Nancy Hubbard gave an overview of the Garden Club of Virginia and Historic Garden Week. This year's tour is the 90th annual Historic Garden Week in Virginia.

Member Elaine Ramsey gave a history of Cherry Grove and its application with the Virginia Department of Historical Resources. Elaine thanked Vice-President Morgan Faulkner for the opportunity to speak and Nancy and Bob Hubbard for the opportunity to be on the Historic Garden Week tour.

There were approximately 30 members present.

The next membership meeting will be held at the Christadelphian Church in Lanesville on July 16.

Respectfully submitted,
Sally Pearson
For the Corresponding Secretary

Lanesville Christadelphian Church

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



*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.