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Little Egypt

FROM FARM HOUSE TO ELEGANT LADY

By Wesley E. Pippenger

Nestled in a grove of trees beyond the west end of Prince Street in Tappahannock is found *Little Egypt*. The dwelling house structure appears to have been an early farm house owned by James Griffing, Jr. and located on 211 acres next to the town line, which he patented as a minor in 1748. Exactly who built the house? We may never know.

Griffing's parcel sits within and amidst tracts previously patented by Col. Thomas Goodrich and his predecessors Bartholomew Hoskins and Clement Thrush. It appears that Hoskins, then Thrush, then Goodrich owned the main land parcels in the area consecutively and not concurrently. Col. Goodrich's property descended by his will in 1678 to his son and heir Benjamin Goodrich. Col. Goodrich and his son Benjamin were both supporters of Bacon's Rebellion in 1676. The two men were brought before the Essex Court with halters about their necks for such support and placed under a fine of 100,000 pounds of tobacco. The younger Goodrich is known for selling the 50 acres on which were established New Plymouth Town, later Tappahannock.

For the same land to be patented twice suggests that the younger Goodrich was still in debt from a recent fine and failed to pay taxes or otherwise comply with seating requirements; it was escheated, or returned to the Crown of England for later reissue. Perhaps due to his unfavorable political and financial position, it has been said Benjamin Goodrich went to England and was not heard of again. This removal from Virginia might explain why the 211 acres within an earlier patent was returned to the Crown for reissue in 1748.

The dwelling house structure was probably begun by 1750 in a Queen Anne style that was common to this portion of Eastern Virginia. The study of an early house becomes more difficult the older the house. Absent personal diaries or

family papers, researchers must work around the usual lack of specific information about the house in regular public records. Studying the land is far simpler provided the public land records have survived, as they have for Essex County.

No early public records have been found with a name linked to this property. It is not until 1957 that we find *Little Egypt*, so named because of the unusually fertile soil found there. Unlike other houses that were far from town and referred to by name, this one was close and perhaps routinely referred to by the name of its owners. Up until 1946 when J.W. Faulconer's farm was divided into the lots of Faulconer Park, and the circle street named for him, the parcel always joined the western line of the town of Tappahannock. The land's proximity to the town line has made it easier to sort various parcels held concurrently by some of the former owners.

The Structures

Structural bracing between the walls near the front door indicates the early structure was "one-over-one," with a chimney to the east. With what are now the dining chamber and a bed chamber above, the house would have included the front hall and a small room above it. Afterwards, the front parlor with bed chamber above was added, along with the west chimney. The resulting structure remained basically unchanged until the late 1980's when more modern rooms were added across the back of the house, leaving the original exterior windows and walls in place.

Overall structure is frame of sawn lumber, connected with hand wrought nails, with floor supports of hand shaped timber and a summer beam. Rafters are joined with wooden pegs. The exterior's beaded weather boarding, which was once much wider than the poplar German lap siding that is found today, may be seen above the door inside a small room off the dining parlor. Interior floors are wide-width

heart of pine. At least one interior door has a wooden lock and iron HL hinges with leather washers. The front hall's front and rear doors are of Cross and Bible design.

The early part of the house sits atop a cellar of continuous brick in the style of an English basement which was later slightly modified. At some point a wood beam was added in the basement, perpendicular to the early floor joists. By 2007, the beam as well as a floor joist that had been greatly damaged by insects were replaced: the floor joist was replaced with a new oak timber by Ted Rice, and the beam was replaced with a steel I-beam made by John Careatti. One support post that had been added was removed.

Six main wood sash windows with 9 over 6 panes, that slide vertically, appear to be original to the house. Other smaller sash windows on the second floor—three in front and two on the east end—appear to be original, while three in the rear are modern replacements. The gambrel roof is now of tin on top, with cedar shingles on the front and back sides. The early cypress wooden shingles, which were hand cut and scalloped on the bottom, were replaced in the 1980's with straight machine-cut ones.

During the 19th century, a coal chute entered the basement from west of the front door, in an area now used as a laundry facility. Later, an oil tank was buried about 15 feet into the yard in front of the dining parlor. In 2007, the present owners removed the tank and filled the hole with gravel.

Attached to the early lean-to was a separate kitchen house that had been built by J.W. Faulconer himself. Although standing in 2007, the kitchen house had greatly deteriorated and had been damaged by insects. It has since been raised off the ground and rebuilt by Gordon A. Wilkins at the request of the present owners.

Just after the Civil War, James Roy Micou, III, son of the county clerk by the same name, inscribed his name in a small window while growing up and living here. The 1957 "Green Book" by the Woman's Club of Essex County,



James Roy Micou, III
(1859-1939)

records this legend, but for years the inscribed window could not be found. In 2007, owner Ted Rice retrieved a window from storage and installed it in a potting shed he built in place of the deteriorated lean-to, and was elated to discover Micou's inscription as he removed years of grime from the pane of glass.

To digress a moment about the Micou Family, it should be noted that during the complete time that

James Roy Micou, Jr. owned *Little Egypt* (1837-1866), he was clerk of Essex County Courts (1830-1887), even though for an overlapping time he also owned *Hollywood* (now

Berry Hill), just southwest of Bray's Fork. Micou's town house, which he may have called *Cedar Park*, was only a short walk down the street to his office at the courthouse. J.R. Micou, the clerk, was a grandson of French Huguenot emigrant Paul Micou. The clerk's son, James Roy Micou, III, who inscribed the little window at *Little Egypt*, moved to Chestertown, Maryland where by 1900 he was professor of Latin at Washington College, and where his portrait hangs today.

Carry's House

Carolyn Russell Faulconer ("Carry" 1898-1982) was the middle daughter of John W. Faulconer, Jr. and his wife Carrie Colgin Jones. For many years, and even today, long-time neighbors and friends referred to the dwelling as "Carry's House." She was widely known for her vivacious personality, her musical talents, her appeal for the party life, and a regular sip of sherry. Her focus wasn't on domestics rather that of her being with people. Carry Faulconer studied



John Waller Faulconer, Jr.
(1856-1926)



Carrie Colgin Jones
(1861-1925)

piano at Peabody Conservatory of Music, in Baltimore, and taught music at St. Agnes Episcopal School in Albany, N.Y. (1921-1923), at St. Margaret's School in Tappahannock (1925-1926), and in Roanoke Rapids, N.C. (1926-1932). Carry also taught piano and typing at *Little Egypt*. The local newspaper frequently announced when Carry had returned to town to visit her parents. Carry's late marriage to James Garfield Graham in 1940 ended after 8 years when he died of a lingering illness.

Brother, John "Waller" Faulconer, III (1892-1971), was a captain in the U.S. Army and instructor in military science, stationed at many different locations throughout his career.

Younger sister, Mary Elizabeth Faulconer ("Betty" 1902-2002), was born in and raised at *Little Egypt*. She attended the Fredericksburg Normal School, graduated from Farmville Normal School (now Longwood College), and taught school in Fauquier and Essex counties and Richmond City. She married Victor R. Krueger, was later widowed, and then married James B. Thornton.

Their eldest sister, Marguerite Nelson Faulconer (1890-1979), was born in Tappahannock and married John Ware, a farmer from Ware's Wharf, Essex County.

After their father died in 1926, sisters Carry and Betty took the lead among the siblings to keep up the family home. When Betty married and moved to Richmond, Carry was left as head of household.



Young Carry Faulconer at Little Egypt.

During the time Carry Faulconer lived at *Little Egypt*, the house suffered a dangerous fire. Evidence of this can be seen in the attic, the basement sill, and inside the exterior wall of the upstairs bathroom. Carry has been quoted as saying, "There's no sweeter sound than that of fire trucks [coming] when your house is on fire."

As Carry became frail, so too did the condition of the house. Paint peeled away and floors sank. The upper rooms of the house were used less and less—in fact Carry spent her last years using the front parlor as her bedroom. In Carry's weakening condition, her daily needs were frequently tended to by a neighboring relative, Zula Ferrara Ware, who assured Carry that the dining parlor would be made usable to her and a new bathroom built under the stairs in the front hall. But still, the house continued to deteriorate to a very dangerous state of disrepair. Six years after Carry's death, her sister Betty and nephew Wilson Cary Ware sold the house and property to Herbert and Rebecca Snyder. The Snyders rescued the house from total ruin.



Rear view, during the Snyder Renovations, early 1989.

Soon after 1988, the Snyders renovated the kitchen, and added a den, and screened porch to the back of the original house, and a master bedroom to the west of the original house in place of a closet that had been severely damaged by termites. During this same time, the Snyders raised the entire house off of its foundation and rebuilt the crumbling brick and mortar from the ground level to the sill.

In the 1990s, the Moncures replaced the screened-in porch at the back with a small reading room and added an

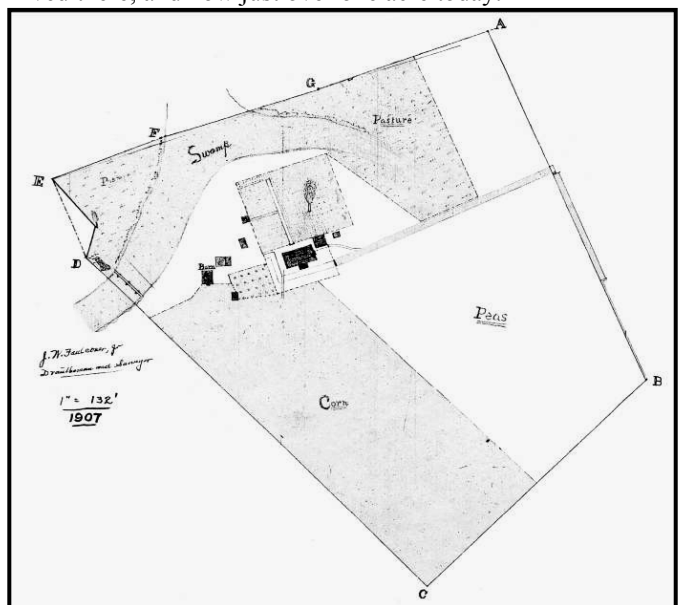
additional bedroom with bathroom. They stayed there barely six years.

Few structural changes were made to the dwelling house by the next owners, Ted and Shan Rice; however, during their last days of residency they remodeled the kitchen. Ted Rice retrieved an old iron heat stove from the cellar for his new wood shop, and removed nearly a dozen trees or tree stumps from the grounds. In 2004, he built on the former automobile garage site a 24' by 48' barn that he used for a wood shop and lumber storage, in addition to the parking of vehicles and yard equipment in two car bays. With a portable saw mill at hand, Ted frequently cut lumber from tree trunks he collected or inherited from others. There were often visible piles of various types and sizes of wood stacked about.

The current owners, David Henderson and Wesley E. Pippenger, have spent considerable time and resources to polish the fine points of the old house, and update the modern portions with state-of-the-art conveniences. They have reconfigured the barn with modern windows, doors, floors, lighting, heating and air conditioning, and cypress siding sufficient to house an extensive personal library and an upstairs studio.

The Land

The *Little Egypt* tract size has fluctuated over the years, as impacted by adjacencies being added and subtracted. Beginning with 211 acres in the 1748 patent, the acreage was as high as 993 when a part of Archibald Ritchie's holdings, 620¼ acres of Capt. John Jones' holdings, down to 32 acres while held by Thomas Henley, Richard Croxton and James Roy Micou, then about 20 acres when John Waller Faulconer lived there, and now just over one acre today.



Survey by J.W. Faulconer, Jr., 1907

In 1907, owner J.W. Faulconer, Jr. surveyed his farm. His diagram shows multiple out-buildings, an automobile garage, a kitchen house with lean-to attached, as well as gardens, an orchard, fields for corn and peas, and a foot bridge. The drawing also shows a long drive from the end of Prince Street that provided access to town.

Chain of Land Ownership

- 1748, **James Griffing, Jr.**, son of James Griffing (d. 1739), obtained a patent in his minority, probably under the supervision of his mother, Margaret Griffing who by May 1743 married second to John Holder. In 1752, James Griffing, Jr. and his mother Margaret Holder conveyed to Archibald Ritchie a 20-acre parcel at the Rappahannock River on which stood the warehouses.
- 1754, **Andrew Crawford**, leased from James Griffing and wife Susannah, for 12 years. James Griffing and Andrew Crawford appointed Col. William Daingerfield and Col. Francis Smith to settle a matter of difference between them; a letter to this effect is presented to court by Archibald Ritchie. Griffing had earlier voted for Smith to be a Burgess in Essex County. James Griffing and wife Susannah authorized Andrew Crawford to put his overseer and Negroes to work on the land at any time, not to exceed six Negroes and an overseer, further stating that Crawford was not to take off one stick for fire wood until 25 DEC 1759, and acknowledging that the tract was under mortgage to Archibald Ritchie.
- 1754, **Archibald Ritchie, Sr.**, obtained by mortgage from James Griffing and wife Susannah. Although Archibald Ritchie, Sr., who is perhaps infamously connected to the Stamp Act, owned the property from 1754 to 1784, it is likely he rented it out as he had a fine brick dwelling a couple of blocks down Prince Street. In 1756, James Griffing licensed James Mills to cut, take and carry away fire wood up to April 25, 1760, and use his dwelling house in the town of Tappahannock; also to Mills, permission to use any outhouses or ovens of the land now in possession of Griffing, on the northwest side of a long causeway leading from the town of Tappahannock back into the country over which the main road now runs, also to cut wood on the opposite side of the causeway.
- 1757, **Archibald Ritchie, Sr.**, secured the conveyance from John Upshaw who was the surviving executor of James Griffing, the elder.
- 1779, **Archibald Ritchie, Sr.**, confirmed a prior sale from the estate of James Griffing, the elder. Details of a court suit indicate the heirs of the Griffing estate relinquished their right to property to Archibald Ritchie. Ritchie died 20 APR 1784, testate in Essex County. Land tax records between 1796 and 1800 show total acreage of the Ritchie estate, reflecting between 894 and 993 acres, including town Lot 12.
- 1800, **Capt. John Jones**, from the heirs of Archibald Ritchie, Sr. By 1813, Capt. Jones possessed parcels of 620 $\frac{1}{4}$, 14, 24, 240 and 603 acres individually. The land tax records between 1803 and 1811 show Capt. John Jones in possession of the 620 $\frac{1}{4}$ acres.
- 1814, **Thomas M. Henley**, from Capt. John Jones and wife Susan. Henley apparently had some latitude for acquiring land as administrator to the estate of John Jones, deceased. The 1814 land tax record shows Henley with only one tract adjacent to the courthouse, that of 540 acres. Land tax records for 1815-1817 show Henley in possession of one tract of 60 $\frac{1}{2}$ acres, bounded by that of John Jones and the line of the town of Tappahannock, and contiguous to the courthouse. Henley acquired three adjacent parcels (30, 30 and $\frac{1}{3}$). One 30-acre parcel was part of land of which Archibald Ritchie died seized and which was sold by son Thomas. While Henley owned the *Little Egypt* tract he was authorized to celebrate the rites of matrimony agreeable to the forms of the Baptist Church in America.
- 1818, **James Owen**, from Rev. Thomas Meekins Henley and wife Elizabeth. Land tax records show James Owen in possession of a single tract of 31 acres contiguous to the town of Tappahannock, and note that he acquired it of Thomas Henley.
- 1820, **William Baynham Matthews**, from James Owen, trustee for Thomas M. Henley and wife.
- 1820, **John Daingerfield, Jr.**, from Rev. William Baynham Matthews and wife Mary J.G. Wood. Land tax records for 1821 show John Daingerfield, Jr. in possession of a 32-acre tract that was before charged to James Owen.
- 1821, **Richard Croxton**, from John Daingerfield, Jr. and wife Judith S. Braxton. Richard Croxton, born 15 JAN 1788, died 15 OCT 1848 and was buried at the north end of his Prince Street property, Lot 57. His grave site can be found in a cemetery there today. Land tax records for 1827 and 1828 show Richard Croxton in possession of a 32-acre tract contiguous to the town of Tappahannock.
- 1837, **James Roy Micou, Jr.**, from Richard Croxton, Jr. and wife Frances G. Ware. James Roy Micou, clerk of the Court of Essex County for over 50 years, actually resided in the house beginning in 1837, even while owning another house, *Berry Hill*, south of town on the hill above Bray's Fork. Land tax records for 1837 through 1845 show James Roy Micou in possession of a 32-acre tract contiguous to the town of Tappahannock, and in 1857 in possession of 110 acres adjacent to the town of Tappahannock. The only known portrait of James Roy Micou, Jr., which hung in the courtroom at the Essex County courthouse, was destroyed by fire when the courtroom burned in August 1965.
- 1866, **James M. Matthews**, trustee, from James Roy Micou, Jr., clerk of Essex County. James Roy Micou, Jr. (1807-1892), was married in St. John's Episcopal Church of Tappahannock on 7 AUG 1835 to Ellen Harvie Jones, daughter of Capt. John Jones (1819-1902), who died in Chestertown, Maryland. J.R. Micou died the last Monday in June 1892 at 2 p.m. from physical exhaustion of old age. James and Ellen were both buried in the cemetery adjacent to St. John's Episcopal

Church in Tappahannock. Land tax records for 1870 show James Roy Micou in possession of 23 acres adjacent to the town of Tappahannock.

1892, **John Waller Faulconer, Jr.**, from James M. Matthews, trustee for the heirs of James Roy Micou, Jr., clerk of Essex County. J.W. Faulconer was a long-time farmer, but for about 20 years he co-owned a dry goods store on the northwest corner of Prince Street and Water Lane. His business records for the period 1917-1925 survive, including a complete store inventory for 1923. He was also an officer of Southside Bank. J.W. Faulconer died of heart trouble at his home *Little Egypt* on 12 NOV 1926. His wife Carrie Colgin Jones, daughter and only child of Capt. John Haley Jones and Maria Russell Nelson, was born 3 MAR 1861 in Matagorda, Texas, and died 21 DEC 1925 at her home *Little Egypt* following an illness lingering several years. John and Carrie were both buried in the cemetery adjacent to St. John's Episcopal Church in Tappahannock.

1931, **Heirs of John Waller Faulconer, Jr.**, from the estate of John Waller Faulconer, Jr.

1946, **Carolyn "Carry" Russell Faulconer Graham and husband James Garfield Graham**, from the heirs of John Waller Faulconer, Jr.

1982, **Betty Faulconer Krueger Thornton**, according to the will of her sister Carry Faulconer Graham.

1988, **Herbert H. Snyder and wife Rebecca B.**, from Betty Faulconer Krueger Thornton.

1995, **Richard C.L. Moncure and wife Mildred S.**, from Herbert H. Snyder and wife Rebecca B.

2000, **Mildred S. Moncure** from husband Richard C.L. Moncure.

2001, **Theodore Lee Rice and wife Shan Haley Rice**, acquire 1.03 acres from Mildred S. Moncure.

2007, **David Henderson and Wesley E. Pippenger**, from Ted and Shan Haley Rice.

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Essex County Deeds

Essex County Wills

Lancaster County Deeds and Wills

[Old] Rappahannock County Deeds

Virginia Land Patents

Wes Pippenger is currently Secretary of The Oak Hill Cemetery Company in Georgetown, Washington, DC. He is a past-president and life-member of the Virginia Genealogical Society and author of over 70 books and articles on records of the District of Columbia and Virginia. He is the recipient of a number of local history and civic awards. He is co-owner of *Little Egypt* and works for the Federal Government in Washington, DC. His collection of local history books and manuscript materials is extensive. ECMHS is delighted to present this article about his home, one of the county's most interesting historical restorations. Wes has generously allowed the ECMHS to include his original article, including many informative footnotes, in the Essex County Museum archives collection. His research is meticulous and detailed with 'juicy' tidbits about many of the historical figures he encounters as he wends his way through the painstaking process of culling relevant information from masses of documents and books musty with dust and age. We encourage our members and visiting history buffs to take the time to read the complete article at the Essex County Museum. You never know who will step out of the pages of history to greet you.

**Fall 2008
Upcoming Events**

- September 21** New Exhibit Opening
"Calm Before the Storm: Life in Antebellum
Essex 1800-1860"
Reception 2 pm – 5 pm
- September 27** Northern Neck Food and Harvest Festival at
Stratford Hall – all day event
ECMHS children's activities and a gift shop.
- October 10** ECMHS First Annual Fall Evening Gala
Ritchie House Courtyard – Fund Raiser
5 pm – 9 pm
- November 22** Museum Gift Shop Open House
New Items just in time for Christmas!
Christmas Toy Exhibit Opening

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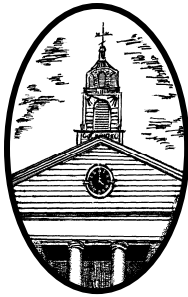
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The Annual Fund Drive Goal is \$10,000

On December 31, 2008, The Annual Fund Drive Closes

The money donated to this very important fund raising effort supports the annual operating budget for the Museum. To date, we have received \$4,661. Less than 10% of the families who received the annual fund drive brochure have responded. We sincerely thank each of you for your generosity and support. If you have not made a donation, please send your contribution now to ECMHS, PO Box 404, Tappahannock, VA 22560. All donations, regardless of the amount, are greatly needed and very much appreciated.



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