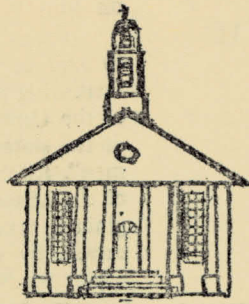


# Essex County



# Historical Society

ESSEX COUNTY 1692

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## ESSEX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING ON OCTOBER 24, 1973

The Essex County Historical Society met in the Court House, Wednesday evening, October 24, 1973, with Mrs. Henrietta Waring Wolfe, president, presiding.

Old business concerning Col. William Miller's grave was brought up and Mr. Arnold Motley stated that in the Abstract of Wills of 1776 the page on which Colonel Miller's will was had been sliced out of the book. There was also no record in the State Library except that it was indexed in 1776. Mrs. Daisy T. Gouldin stated that her DAR records showed a Revolutionary soldier, William Simon Miller in 1776, and that his property was located in Caroline County.

Mrs. Wolfe appointed the following to the nominating committee to bring in a slate of officers at our January meeting: Mr. Joseph Ewing, Chairman; Mrs. J. M. Evans, and Mr. John J. MacManus.

Mrs. William A. Wright made an announcement about the Old House Tour which is being sponsored by the American Legion Auxiliary on Sunday afternoon, October 28, 1973. Mr. Joseph Ewing stated that Mr. Látane Trice would be willing to put on a Jousting Tournament for a money-making project, since our funds seem to be dwindling and many members haven't paid their dues.

Mr. McManus gave a short resume of plans of the Bi-Centennial Committee. He outlined several of the projects which the Committee is planning: a roster of Revolutionary Soldiers from Essex County; a list of all structures and landmarks in the county during the Revolutionary period. They also plan to do research concerning the religious aspects of this period and what, if any, bearing religion had on the Revolution. The County Bi-Centennial organization is looking forward to having a pageant which would portray Essex County and her citizens participation in the Revolution. The next meeting of the County Committee will be held on November 14, 1973 in the Court House, everyone is invited to attend.

Mr. McManus also asked all members to look up any records, books, pamphlets, anything at all which might be useful to the committee. Many papers have been found in attics and boxes stored away—sometimes for generations.

A report was made on the work Mrs. Robert L. Pettigrew has done in typing up papers belonging to Mrs. Ferry which have been turned over to the State Library, for our files. These concern many historical events such as the burning of Tappahannock during the War of 1812.

Mr. Charles Warner announced that he had resigned

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## *The Significance of the Richmond Junta (Essex Junta)*

By ANNE FROST WARING

In the course of the last one-hundred fifty years, there have been two major "machines" or political organizations that have gained control of the thinking of Virginians in the area of politics. The Byrd machine was an openly acknowledged and well-known operation of influence at the time of its greatest power, but the existence of the other, the "Richmond" or "Essex" Junta, was not only virtually unknown to the citizens of Virginia, but was even denied by one of the very men who helped to carry out its impact on the state, editor Thomas Ritchie. As a matter of fact, historians find it hard to agree on exactly how many men were involved in this operation.

The Junta is thought to have been founded jointly by two men: William Cary Nicholas and Judge Spencer Roane, each the head of a distinct division within the organization. The most interesting thing about these two groups is that each was composed almost entirely of family connections, and thus run by men having not only a consensus of opinion, but also kinship to one another. Nicholas was at the helm of the "Old Party", which consisted of the Randolphs, Smiths, and other relations of Mr. Nicholas, while Judge Roane's "Essex Junta", perhaps the more influential of the two, was made up of Roane's first cousins, Thomas Ritchie, Dr. John Brockenbrough and William Brockenbrough; his son-in-law, William Selden, and various other cousins. These two parties were separate, working side by side, until 1812, when they combined to form the so-called "Richmond Junta". In time more members were added to the organization and it became composed of the representatives of the Central Committee of Jefferson's Republican Party in Virginia.

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# The Significance of the Richmond Junta

(Essex Junta)

by

Anne Frost Waring

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Thus these men adhered to and instilled in the majority of the people of Virginia a love of Jefferson and his ideals: an agricultural society, states' rights, the importance of the individual in the process of good government. They guided the state into supporting for the Presidency such leaders as Madison, Jackson, Van Buren, and Polk, while having members in the General Assembly, the banks of Virginia, the court system, and other offices of importance. This was accomplished through the influence of family, a well-disciplined legislative caucus that controlled office-holding, a party press—the *Richmond Enquirer*, and a tightly-managed court system.

The effectiveness of the Junta was also due to its secrecy. Thomas Ritchie, editor of the *Enquirer*, answering the charge of John Hampden Pleasants, editor of the *Richmond Whig*, who had referred to the existence of these "new lights", this "new school", or "Richmond Junta", refused to recognize the machine and said that such talk was "mere cant".<sup>1</sup> He wanted to know the times, meetings, and places of the group, maintaining that "there is no such thing as a Richmond Junta" and that "the whole story is as false as it is unmanly and unwarrantable".<sup>2</sup>

Therefore the citizens of Virginia were not aware of the great and powerful force which for nearly forty years, from 1808 to 1847, shaped the destiny of Virginia's political course.

There were three especially outstanding members of this operation who might be called the masterminds of the project: Thomas Ritchie, spokesman for the party through the *Enquirer*; Spencer Roane, a judge of the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals and a great proponent of the theory of States' Rights; and Dr. John Brockenbrough, president of the Richmond branch of the Bank of Virginia and a very prominent man of affairs in the city.

The first of these, Thomas Ritchie, was born in Tappahannock in 1778, the son of a Scotch emigrant, Archibald Ritchie, who had a flourishing mercantile business in town. His mother, Mary Roane, wanted her son to go into the law, but Ritchie, finding that profession not quite his forte, finally decided to teach. He travelled to Fredericksburg, where he found employment at an academy. It must have been here that he developed a strong belief in the importance of education, for later in his life he became a firm advocate of public schools, and even went so far as to be in favor of the education of women, a rare view for that time. After his work in Fredericksburg, Ritchie decided to become the proprietor of a bookstore in Richmond, which was opened in 1803.

That same year, Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States, despairing because the Republican Party's newspaper in Virginia, the *Examiner*, was moribund, asked Ritchie to become the editor of a new newspaper to represent the views of the party. The *Richmond Enquirer*,

established by Spencer Roane and edited by Thomas Ritchie, was born out of this request and was first issued on May 9, 1804 as a bi-weekly.

From the seat of his editor's desk, Ritchie was able to express to the state the Republicans' concern over the increasing power of the federal government, the autocracy of the United States Bank, and the lessening of the power of the states. With his proclaimed motto of "principle, not men", Ritchie blasted against the high tariff, the violations of the Missouri Compromise, and urged the people of Virginia to take immediate action to rid the state of the evil of slavery by gradual abolition. He supported more representation for western counties of the Old Dominion in the General Assembly, and wrote of the necessity of improving methods of farming. A compatriot of the "war hawks" in Congress in the early 1800's, he wielded great influence in the making of the decision to fight in the War of 1812, as he did forty years later concerning the annexation of Texas. Although a firm believer in the right of a state to secede, Ritchie criticized John C. Calhoun's idea of Nullification, saying "we thought he had reasoned wrong from right premises" and reiterating his belief in the importance of obeying federal law.<sup>3</sup> John Hampden Pleasants accused him of "being hostile" to Calhoun, to which Ritchie replied that even though he hadn't supported Calhoun's stands on some issues in previous years, he agreed on many of his other positions now because of his switch to a States' Rights viewpoint.<sup>4</sup> It was clearly a question of the politics, not the man.

Thomas Ritchie has come to be regarded as one of the finest editors the South has ever produced. He was a master in the use of sarcasm and invective, but however much he was criticized by other men of politics in his day, he responded always in an ethical manner, challenging his opponents but never insulting them personally. This came from a firm adherence to principle as the means of answering those who differed with his point of view. As Charles A. Ambler writes in his biography, *Thomas Ritchie: A Study in Virginia Politics*:

His influence upon men came not from a skillful use of political machinery but from an enthusiastic adherence to fundamental principles; from his power and versatility as a writer, and from his unselfish and patriotic love of the Union.<sup>5</sup>

Ritchie's cousin, Spencer Roane, was much the same in his attitude toward the use of principle, although he was usually more concerned with constitutional law than with politics. Born in Tappahannock in 1762, he was educated by his father, William Roane, Jr. and tutors to prepare him for admission to the College of William and Mary. After graduation and some time at the Law Society in Philadelphia, he started practicing law in Essex County in 1782. A year later he was elected to the House of Delegates of the General Assembly, and following this served on the Privy Council, became a state senator from Essex, King and Queen, and King William counties, and was elected to the General Court by the two houses of the Assembly. In 1794, at the age of 33, he became one of the youngest men ever selected to sit on the State Court of Appeals, a position he held for over twenty years.

In his years on the bench, Roane became increasingly alarmed at the nationalistic views of decisions handed down by the U. S. Supreme Court. If John Adams had not appointed John Marshall as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in 1800, and the choice had fallen on Jefferson, Judge Roane very possibly would have become Chief Justice, for he was Jefferson's first choice to fill the post. In the course of his career, Roane wrote responses to many

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decisions of the high court, which were published in the *Enquirer* under such pseudonyms as Amphictyon and Hampden. He hated the Court's upholding of the constitutionality of the United States Bank, and in his Hampden letters asserted that the Supreme Court had gone too far in its use of broad interpretation and implied powers, usurping the powers explicitly belonging to the states. In responding to the case of Hunter versus Martin, he claimed that the Supreme Court had no authority to reverse the decision of a State Court, since federal and state courts were each sovereign, separate, and distinct. The State Court concerned in this case was the Virginia Court of Appeals. Roane was constantly differing with Marshall over the role of the judicial branch in the federal government. He stood staunchly for States' Rights and strict construction of the Constitution. His impact on the court system in Virginia cannot be fully measured in its extent. It has been said that:

He will long be looked upon as a great ornament to Virginia's judiciary, and as one who feared not to do his duty as he staw it.\*

\*See note following this article.

Dr. John Brockenbrough, the third "genius" in this trio, was cashier of the Bank of Virginia and its president from 1811 to 1843. He was also born in Tappahannock, in the Brockenbrough house. His home in Richmond, erected in 1818, became the rendezvous of the Richmond Junta and later gained recognition as the White House of the Confederacy and the Confederate Museum. It was considered a high honor for a stranger visiting Richmond to be invited to a reception at the Brockenbrough residence. The neighborhood could hardly have consisted of men of greater distinction, for also living in this section were Chief Justice Marshall, Thomas Ritchie, Lewis Burwell, and Benjamin W. Leigh, among others. Furthermore, John Brockenbrough had married into the Randolph family and was very friendly with the Harrisons.

Dr. Brockenbrough, having considerable influence in financial affairs, was an ardent supporter of centralized banking, and a champion of state banks against the "monstrous" United States banks. Under his direction, the Junta succeeded in virtually bankrupting the two branches of the Bank of the U.S. located in Norfolk and Richmond. He wrote numerous articles in the *Enquirer* expressing his financial viewpoints.

During President Van Buren's administration, when the problem of national finances came to the forefront after the end of the United States Bank, Dr. Brockenbrough proposed to the President an independent treasury system, whereby federal deposits could be completely separated from state banks and greater security to both the national government and state banks would be achieved. Thus Van Buren's Independent Treasury came into being as a result of the ingenuity of John Brockenbrough.

Therefore, under the auspices of Ritchie, Roane, and Brockenbrough, the Richmond Junta came to generate its influence into practically every aspect of state government, state courts, and state finances, as well as in some areas of

## Officers of the Society

President \_\_\_\_\_ Mrs. Henrietta Waring Wolfe  
 Vice-President \_\_\_\_\_ Mr. Arnold Motley  
 Treasurer \_\_\_\_\_ Mrs. Percy R. Eubank  
 Secretary \_\_\_\_\_ Mrs. William A. Wright

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### PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE

Chairman, Mr. Charles W. H. Warner; Members, Mrs. William A. Wright, Mrs. J. M. Evans, Mr. Joseph Ewing

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Meetings are held quarterly in the Essex County Court House. Dues are \$2.00 per year. For copies of publication send 50c to Mrs. J. M. Evans, Box 8, Tappahannock, Virginia.

the national government. In the forty years of its existence, the Junta never failed to carry Virginia in presidential elections. Clay and Calhoun may very well have been defeated for the Presidency because of the pens of Thomas Ritchie and his fellow party members. The organization had members in the General Assembly of Virginia, including three speakers of the House of Delegates, and in the Council of State; the office of state treasurer was held for many years by a friend of the organization, many attorney-generals had contact, and three governors were also connected with the group.

The Junta was firmly entrenched in the court system, from county courts all the way to the Court of Appeals, under the guidance of Spencer Roane. Justices of the peace were chosen by the governor, who was appointed by the General Assembly, as were judges of the Court of Appeals. The justices made the decisions as to who would run for the General Assembly, thus completing the circle of the Junta's influence.

In the financial sector, three members of the group were presidents of banks in Richmond, with branches in Petersburg, Fredericksburg, Lynchburg, and Winchester. This included Brockenbrough's position at the Bank of Virginia.

In retrospect, it is obvious that this organization was a machine which affected not only the party of Jefferson and Jackson in Virginia, but which had great bearing on the views of the South regarding secession, States' Rights, and strict construction of the United States Constitution. Numerous presidents were elevated to power partly because of its influence, and a great number of Congressional actions took place with the aid of its support. For the Richmond Junta, although its political theories have declined in forcefulness, will stand as a monument to those leaders of this state who attempted to do what they sincerely believed to be best for Virginia and for their country, with the complete concurrence of the majority of their fellow Virginians.

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# FOOTNOTES

1. Charles H. Ambler, *Thomas Ritchie: A Study in Virginia Politics*, pp. 82-91.
2. John P. Branch *Historical Papers of Randolph-Macon College*, Vol. 3, pp. 276 and 277.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 274.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 271 and 272.
5. Ambler, *op. cit.*, p. 292.
6. John P. Branch *Historical Papers of Randolph-Macon College*, Vol. 2, p. 33.

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## ESSEX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING ON OCTOBER 24, 1973

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as the Historical Society representative on the Essex Improvement Council and that the office should rotate as was planned.

Mr. Warner then spoke to the meeting giving interesting historical sketches of many of Essex County's prominent citizens before, during, and after the Civil War. These were Captain Robert Gaines Haile, James R. Mann, John R. Mathews, Col. Kemp Gatewood, Judge Muscoe Garnett, Edward Macon Ware I and others. He mentioned many of their homes which are still occupied by their descendants or have been restored by recent owners. Mr. Warner said that the library at Ben Lomond, home of Mrs. Ursula Harrison Baird, is one of the best historical libraries in Virginia.

Before the meeting adjourned, Mrs. Gouldin told of a very interesting experience she had recently concerning a visitor to our county, a Dr. James Halbert who lives in Los Angeles and is pastor of Old Ship Church. He presented a deed he possessed from the trustees of the Old Bethlehem Meeting House. He was most interested in the present day Upper Essex and Bethlehem Churches, their graveyards and their past histories.

Mrs. William A. Wright, Secretary

## Editor's Note

In the *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 18, April 1910, p. 276, there appeared a letter of Frank Gildart Ruffin. He "was for several years State Auditor of Virginia, and was a man of much influence in politics". The letter was written to the Hon. Paul Carrington Cameron, of Hillsboro, N. C. It is dated June 1, 1870. Concerning Spencer Roane, Mr. Ruffin had this to write, "At the time when that paper (the Richmond 'Enquirer', edited by Thomas Ritchie of Tappahannock) was the most influential in the Union, he (Roane) was its guiding spirit, and contributed largely to its columns in brief paragraphs or in more elaborate essays. His residence was the headquarters of the famous 'Richmond Junta', and the resort of all members of the legislature of his own faith. His influence in his party was second only to Mr. Jefferson's, and was willingly subordinated to his, by himself."

The following shows Jefferson's regard for Roane. The background of the statement is Jefferson's opposition to Marshall's strengthening of the judiciary and the Supreme Court. This is taken from page 29 of *The John P. Branch Historical Papers* cited above. Jefferson wrote on January 11, 1821, "I am sensible of the inroads daily working by the Federal into the jurisdiction of its co-ordinate associates, the State Governments . . . the Judiciary branch is the instrument which, working like gravity without intermission, is to press us at last into one consolidated mass. Against this I know no one who, equally with Judge Roane himself, possesses the power and courage to make resistance, and to him I look and have long looked, as our strongest bulwark."

—Taken from *Road to Revolution*  
By Charles W. H. Warner,  
Garrett and Massie, Publishers,  
Richmond, Va., 1961, p. 164.

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