Major Robert Beverley and His Three Sons: Peter, Robert and Harry

By Charles W. H. Warner

Robert Beverley, the immigrant, who became known in Virginia history as Major Robert Beverley of Middlesex County came from a family long established among the British landed gentry in the County of Yorkshire. An ancient town by the name of Beverley is in this County. The Beverley family and the Fairfax family were closely related in England and continued a close association in 17th Century Virginia. Robert Beverley was probably the son of Peter Beverley of the City of Hull and his wife Susannah Hollis. Burke’s Landed Gentry states that the Beverleys sold their land in Yorkshire to the Pennyman family about the time Robert Beverley came to Virginia. It is interesting to note before concluding this brief sketch of the Beverleys in England that William Beverley of the fifth generation in Virginia was sent to school in England as many others were but remained there and married and became Mayor of the town of Beverley in 1806.

Robert Beverley came to Virginia in 1663 and settled in Middlesex County. It is obvious that he had acquired a good education for he was a lawyer and a surveyor. In 1670 he was elected to the House of Burgesses and in 1673 he was a Justice of Middlesex County. Robert Beverley became a strong supporter of Governor Berkeley and with others lent aid to the Governor and his forces in opposing the rebel, Nathaniel Bacon. After returning from refuge with Governor Berkeley and others on the eastern shore following Bacon’s death, Major Beverley was very active and successful in suppressing those who had supported Bacon. On November 13, 1676 Governor Berkeley gave him a commission appointing him Commander of all his forces. Governor Berkeley appointed Major Beverley as a member of the Council. This was the upper house of the colonial government and such an appointment was a great honor in the Colony. As a member of the Burgesses, Robert Beverley was largely influential in their support of the Governor in the rebellion. They elected him their Clerk.

Following Berkeley’s removal from office by Charles II, His Majesty sent Commissioners to Virginia to investigate the causes of the rebellion. The three offenses charged against Beverley by the Commissioners were: refusal to surrender the records of the House of Burgesses, his efforts to curtail the production of tobacco (he led a cutting down of tobacco plants in order to make a scarce crop force the price of tobacco up) and finally Beverley’s opposition to certain taxes imposed by Governor Lord Howard of Effingham. In all these matters the record shows he had the full support of the House of Burgesses and of the Council.

One hundred years later Thomas Jefferson spoke of him as a proto martyr of the American Revolution in these struggles with the crown. Personally Robert Beverley must have felt that the Crown was extremely ungrateful for his support of Sir William Berkeley as governor, the king’s own representative in Virginia.

As a result of the plant cutting and other opposition to the crown, on June 17, 1682 King James ordered Major Beverley imprisoned without trial on a ship in the Rappahannock River and that he be stripped of all official positions. The old man through the intercession of friends was later freed from the ship but confined to his county of Middlesex where he died on March 15, 1687. Many historians think he died of the persecutions to which he was subjected. He was a very controversial figure in Virginia history—very much disliked by Bacon’s supporters who referred to him as “the hard faced old Beverley.” Mr. Stanard who edited for long years the Virginia Magazine of History and Biography wrote of him—“a man loyal to the King, yet an ardent supporter of the liberties of the Colony of Virginia and of the House of Burgesses, of which he was long a faithful and useful officer, a courageous and active soldier, a true and staunch friend, and the possessor of a very general popularity and influence among the people.”

At the time of his death, through patents and purchase, he had become the largest landowner to that

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date in Virginia, over 38,000 acres of land. Major Beverley patented land in several counties including Essex, a part of which was located in that area which later became known as Blandfield plantation, the present beautiful structure having been erected by his grandson Col. William Beverley.

Major Robert Beverley married twice. His first wife was Mary, the widow of George Keeble of Lancaster Co. She appears to have been born a Carter. In the Lower Methodist Church of Middlesex Co. (originally an Episcopal Church) is a beautiful eulogy on her gravestone in the aisle. He married second Catherine, the widow of Major Theophilus Hone who was a sister of Col. John Armistead of "Hesse," Gloucester Co.

The three sons of whom this sketch is concerned: Peter, Robert and Harry were the sons of his first wife, Mary. It is interesting to note here however, that by his second wife Catherine Armistead, Major Beverley became the grandfather of John Robinson, the greatest political leader of 18th Century Colonial Virginia who exerted such great influence as Speaker of the House of Burgesses and Treasurer of the Colony. Patrick Henry referred to Robinson and his group as "the old guard."

Col. Peter Beverley was the eldest recorded son of Major Beverley and his first wife Mary Keeble. He was born about 1668 in Virginia and died here in 1728. He was Clerk of the House of Burgesses 1691-99, Clerk of Gloucester Co. 1702-14, Speaker of the House of Burgesses 1700-14, Treasurer of the Colony 1710-23 and was appointed member of the Governor's Council in 1719. In 1748 Dr. Henry James and his sister Mrs. Beverley Pope owned portraits of Col. Peter Beverley and his wife Elizabeth Peyton. She was a daughter of Major Robert Peyton of "Rougham," Co. of York, England and of "Iseham," Gloucester Co. Col. Peter Beverley and his wife Elizabeth Peyton were the ancestors of Whittings, Randolphins, Lees and in this county of the "Rose Hill" Hundleys, among many others.

Robert Beverley Jr., historian of Virginia, was the second son of Maj. Robert Beverley and his wife Mary (Keeble) Beverley. He was born on his father's plantation in Middlesex Co., went to England for his education and was there at the time of his father's death. Upon returning to Virginia he enrolled himself as a volunteer scriver in the office of the Secretary of the Colony. Soon he became clerk of a legislative committee. By 1696 he had achieved the important posts of Clerk of The General Court, Clerk of the Council and Clerk of The General Assembly. As a freeholder of Jamestown he served in the House of Burgesses, in the Assemblies of 1699, 1700-2 and 1705-06.

He inherited the "Poropotent" plantation in Gloucester Co. and "Beverley Park" in King and Queen Co. He served also as Clerk of this County. Robert Beverley Jr. owned considerable other property.

In June of 1703 Robert Beverley went to England to protect his interest in a litigation there pending before the Privy Council, and was detained for eighteen months in this matter. He was invited by a bookseller to criticize the manuscript of Oldmixon's British Empire in America. Stimulated by his litigation and resenting Oldmixon's account of Virginia in his book, he wrote his own book—History and Present State of Virginia. This was published in London in 1705, bearing in the front the Arms of Virginia and "by R. B. gent." The book was divided into four sections: The History of the First Settlement of Virginia and the Government thereof, to the present time; The Natural Productions and Conveniences of the country, suited to Trade and Improvement; The Native Indians, their Religion, Laws and Customs in War and Peace; The present State of the Country as to the Polity of the Government and the Improvements of the Land.

Robert Beverley Jr. in his final section, on the government of Virginia, analyzed the British governors as tyrannical and ill-sulted administrators and depicted British Colonial administration as poorly suited to Virginia and the needs of the frontier. This is very apparent upon any study of this section and his entire book reflects great interest in and admiration for the new land. Thus the History and Present State of Virginia is really the first great literary effort of political and philosophical separation from England and in this sense was a forerunner to the later sentiment of The American Revolution.

Due to a political dispute with the Surveyor General of Customs, Robert Beverley caused trouble between the General Assembly of Virginia and the British government. Therefore soon after his return to Virginia, he retired from a public career to "Beverley Park," his estate on the upper waters of the Mattaponie in King and Queen Co. Here he presided on the County Court, experimented with new agricultural techniques and speculated in frontier land. He revised and reprinted his book and in 1722 published another book entitled "The Abridgement of the Public Laws of Virginia." He died soon thereafter and was buried at "Beverley Park."

Robert Beverley Jr. married Ursula Byrd of "Westover", daughter of Col. William Byrd I and his wife Mary (Horsmanden) Byrd. She lies buried in the old church yard at Jamestown where her tomb is still partly legible.

Among their children was Col. William Beverley, born in 1696 and died in 1756, who married Elizabeth Bland, daughter of Richard and Elizabeth (Randolph) Bland of "Jorden's Point," Prince George Co. Col. Beverley heired large properties, including land in Essex County. He was Clerk of Essex County from 1716 to 1745. He was a member of the House of Burgesses and later on The Governors Council. His largest estate was Beverley Manor, a tract of 118,490 acres in Augusta County. He built "Blandfield" in Essex Co. where he lived and died. This magnificent Colonial Georgian brick mansion with its dependencies is on an estate of about 5,000 acres and remains in the Beverley family where today live Mr. and Mrs. Bradshaw Beverley and his mother, Mrs. William Beverley.

Robert Beverley Jr. is the ancestor of all the "Blandfield" Beverleys, the Welfords of "Sabine Hall" and of "Kendale," in Essex County. The mother of Senator Harry Flood Byrd, Jr. was of the "Blandfield" Beverley family.

Captain Harry Beverley, third son of Major Robert (Continued on page 3)
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Beverley and his first wife Mary Keeble was a Magistrate of Middlesex County in 1702, Surveyor of King and Queen and King William County in 1702-14 and assisted in surveying the Virginia-North Carolina boundary line. About 1720 he removed to Spotsylvania County, where he became presiding justice. He was also Clerk of the House of Burgesses. Harry Beverley surveyed and laid off the Town of Tappahannock in 1706, giving the town the names of its streets: Queen, Church Lane, Water Lane, Marsh, Duke, Prince and Earl. He patented 2,700 acres known as Portobago in Essex County, which had been owned earlier by his wife's grandfather Major Gen. Robert Smith of Middlesex. He also owned 1,017 acres which the Upshaw family acquired in 1699. Capt. Beverley owned land amounting to about 32,000 acres in several counties.

His title of Captain derives from the fact that Governor Spotswood sent him on the sloop, “The Virginia,” as its Commander to acquire gold from Spanish ship wrecks. This ship was captured by the Spanish who held Harry Beverley as a prisoner at Vera Cruz for several months. He fortunately escaped, and returned to Virginia. Several of his shipmates died there.


Capt. Harry Beverley died at his plantation “Newlands” in Spotsylvania Co. in 1730. He and his wife Elizabeth (Smith) Beverley were the ancestors of several generations of Beverleys, who lived at “Newlands.” They were also the ancestors of many families in this section of Virginia—Roys of Caroline, King and Queen and Essex Co.; Birds of King and Queen Co.; Hoskins of King and Queen Co. and Essex Co.; Tayloes of Mt. Airy, Richmond Co.; Chinn's and Downmans of the Northern Neck; Sutins of King and Queen Co.; Montagues of Middlesex, Saunders of Middlesex and Essex Co.; and many other descendants throughout the nation.

REFERENCES


Officers Installed
At April Meeting

Mr. Sidney J. Hilton, Sr., President, Mr. Hill B. Wellford, Vice President, Mrs. William A. Wright, Secretary, and Mrs. A. Preston Ferry, Treasurer, were installed by Mrs. Charles N. DeShazo. Our outgoing president, Congressman Paul S. Trible, Jr., appointed a nominating committee, who brought in the above slate and they were elected and installed at this meeting, due to the terrible weather we had in January, when we could not have our regularly scheduled meeting.

Mrs. William A. Wright presided at the meeting held in the Court House, Tappahannock, Va. at 8:00 p.m., April 20, 1977. After the election, Mr. Hilton, president, took the chair. Minutes of the last meeting were dispensed with since they were published in the bulletin. Mrs. Percy R. Eubank, Treasurer, gave the Treasurer's report and it was approved and filed for the auditors.

Mrs. Charles N. DeShazo, Chairman of the Essex County Bicentennial Commission, reported that she did not know at this time the status of the Commission and whether or not the County would fund it again this year. However, she did state that they had enough money on hand to pay for part of the publication of the spring bulletin.

Mrs. DeShazo made a motion that the Bicentennial Commission, when it completes all of the projects undertaken, would give all papers and records to the Historical Society to be kept in its Archives in the Clerk's Office. The motion was seconded by Mr. Spotswood Taliaferro and carried.

Mr. Hilton then spoke of the future of our organization and which way we were going and how we could interest more people in belonging to the society. Trying to appeal to the younger people was discussed and most agreed that usually young people are not interested in history until they become older. A suggestion was made by Mrs. Lucy Graham that the President appoint a membership committee. It was also suggested that we could probably get more members and have more members present for our meetings if we met in the afternoon instead of the evening.

Mr. Hilton said that he would appoint two members along with the elected officers to serve as the Executive Committee and these suggestions would be discussed and decided upon. Since we usually have larger attendance when we have our summer meetings at one of the attractive old homes of the county, it might be that instead of having just one meeting a year at a home, we have two or more at these interesting places.

Mr. Hilton then turned the meeting over to Mr. Charles W. H. Warner, Editor of our bulletin, as well as other historical books and pamphlets, who gave an interesting address on Major Robert Beverley and his three sons. Following this address and collection of dues, the meeting adjourned.

Mrs. William A. Wright, Secretary
Officers of the Society

President ........................................ Mr. Sidney J. Hilton
Vice President .................................... Mr. Hill B. Wellford
Treasurer .......................................... Mrs. A. Preston Ferry
Secretary .......................................... Mrs. William A. Wright

+++ PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE +++

Chairman, Mr. Charles W. H. Warner; Members: Mrs. William A. Wright, Mrs. J. M. Evans, Mrs. Charles N. DeShazo.

+++ Meetings are held quarterly in the Essex Court House or in an historic home of the County. Dues are $2.00 per year. For copies of publications send 60¢ to Mrs. J. M. Evans, Box 8 Tappahannock, Virginia. +++

Harry Beverley Survey Map – 1706

Tappahannock Town

Barbour Printing Services, Inc., Tappahannock, VA.