Some Interesting Pages of History

(The Times: Richmond, Virginia, Sunday, February 4, 1900). Short sketches of Commonwealth’s Attorneys of Essex for more than a century. During a hundred and twenty-three years only eleven men have occupied the position of Public Prosecutor.

The following extracts are from “Sketches of Commonwealth’s Attorneys of Virginia,” edited by Henderson Lee, Esq., and give a brief sketch and interesting anecdotes and traditions of each Commonwealth’s Attorney of Essex county for the period of one hundred and twenty-three years. It is curious to note that in this period of nearly a century and a quarter there have been no more than eleven incumbents of that office in the county.

John Warden was the first Attorney for the Commonwealth for Essex county after the Revolution. The term “King’s Attorney” was swept away by the Revolution as a relic of the Crown, and he was called Deputy Attorney for the Commonwealth. He qualified as such in Essex County Court February 17, 1777, under a commission from Patrick Henry, Governor. He was a Scotchman by birth, and was said to have been an erudite scholar and finished lawyer. He had been, we suspect, one of the King’s appointed, and little tainted with Tory proclivities. He made himself conspicuous, if not a little odious, in the rigid collection of the claims of the Scotch and British merchants against their American cousins, and brought upon himself many anathemas. His comical and quaint sayings and wit are still repeated as a part of the history and traditions of the times. Mr. Warden practiced in our Supreme Court of Appeals, and when he went to this highest court at Richmond he always made the boast that he was armed with Bacon’s Abridgment as his vade mecum. On one occasion, as he stood before that august body, in his brilliant elocution he put his hand in his coat pocket for his authority to enforce his point, and drew out a hunk of bacon placed there by some mischievous wag. Without being in the least disconcerted he remarked: “No harm done; I have saved my bacon.” He was a homely man in appearance, and once in a forensic discussion with the distinguished John Wickham, he said that he did not intend to be made the cat’s paw for any monkey, to which the great John Wickham retorted with his well-known flashes of wit and ready repartee: “Then, sir you be the monkey.”

APOLOGY WORSE THAN OFFENCE.

The Virginia Legislature once during its session seemed to have incurred his displeasure, and to have drawn forth the vials of his wrath. He openly, bitterly, and contemptuously assailed in the most offensive language that august body. The sergeant-at-arms was ordered to arrest him and bring him before the body. He was arrested and brought to the bar of the General Assembly. As he stood there before the August Assembly, the speaker addressed him: “Mr. Warden, you have been brought here at this bar for contempt, in assailing the dignity and violating the rules in the contemptuous charge that the Legislature did not have sense enough to carry g—ts to a bear: and you are called upon to purge yourself of the contempt.” Mr. Warden at once replied: “Mr. speaker, I will say to you and this August Assembly, over which you preside with such distinguished ability and honor, that I did use the language imputed to me that the Legislature did not have sense enough to carry g—ts to a bear. I now make a complete retract, and will say that the Legislature has sense enough to carry g—ts to a bear.” He then made a graceful and profound bow. This incident has been before narrated in the life of Patrick Henry.

John Warden reigned the office of deputy attorney for the Commonwealth, and on May 21st, 1792, the gentlemen justices appointed Francis T. Brooke to the same office. Among the minutes of the court on May 26th, 1792, we find the following order: “Francis T. Brooke, Esq., is requested to convey to John Warden, Esq., late deputy attorney for the Commonwealth of Virginia in this court, the thanks of the said court for his long attention and assiduity in the execution and discharge of his duty in that office, and it is ordered that the clerk forthwith notify the said Brooke of the same.”

Francis T. Brooke was appointed the second deputy attorney for the Commonwealth, and qualified as such on May 21st, 1792. He remained in office as such until 1796 or 1797—not certain; as James Webb succeeded him and was in office in 1797.

Francis T. Brooke was appointed judge of the General Court, January 12th 1804, and was appointed to the Supreme Court of Appeals January 30th, 1811. Judge Brooke was a great judge and his lucid opinions embellish the annals of the court.

JAMES WEBB

James Webb was appointed the third deputy attorney for the Commonwealth in 1797 and remained in office until Thomas Gresham succeeded him. He was a man of extraordinary intellect and force of character, and was

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the ancestor of the Smiths, Meriwethers and Joneses, who have always occupied honored positions in every department of life and adorned the pages of history. It is told of James Webb that he once prosecuted a man for murder, and he was convicted and sentenced. While under sentence of death, the convicted man sent for Mr. Webb to come to the jail, and the jailer opened the prison door and admitted Mr. Webb into his presence. The prisoner, addressing Mr. Webb, and exclaiming: “Sir, you were the instrument and cause of my conviction,” drew a razor already adjusted in his hand from behind his person, and cut his own throat from ear to ear, and fell at the feet of Mr. Webb in the last expiring agony and gasp of death. Mr. Webb, appalled by this awful and horrible scene and tragedy, was heard to say that he would never prosecute a human being again for murder. In a short time in his official capacity he was again confronted by another indictment for murder. When he opened his case, he referred to the tragedy and to the fact that he had not only made a secret vow, but had openly said that he would never prosecute for murder again; and it was a most unpleasant duty, but that his official duty could not be shirked and in a graceful exordium employed the beautiful classic of the great dramatist in the mouth of Brutus after he had stabbed Caesar in the Senate House. “Not the I love Caesar less, but I love Rome more.” The same incident has been told of John Fleming, the gifted Commonwealth’s Attorney of Goochland but it is an authentic and living tradition of James Webb to-day.

Thomas Gresham was appointed the fourth attorney for the Commonwealth on June 21, 1813, and remained in office until succeeded by Colonel George Wright. He is said to have been one of the most vigorous and accomplished lawyers, and the peer of any of the same name who have held similar and other positions in the State, as well as in other States of the Union, and on the bench and in the cabinet.

AN INTERESTING TRADITION

A tradition reaches us that on one occasion it was his duty to prosecute a man, and he did so very vigorously. That afterwards he had, as attorney, to imprison the same man for debt, under the old ca-sa that has been abolished, although the old ca-sa jail still lingers on the Court-house Square as a monument, if not a relic, of this old barbarism. The man impugning his motive in doing his duty, ascribed to him a mercenary motive and sordid greed for fees, and told his neighbors that Mr. Gresham would tightly hold and squeeze the eagle on a silver dollar until it shrieked.

To emphasize that he could be tempted, and purchased with a fee, and to give him, this fellow one Christmas eve, at night, placed in his walkway at his front door an old-fashioned log-fall opossum trap, and baited it with a silver quarter. As Mr. Gresham came out the next morning he discovered the trap. He went back and procured his old-fashioned iron fire tongs and returned entirely imperishable and with perfect equanimity of temper. After rescuing the quarter and safely lodging it in his pocket-book, he threw the trap and made his servant cut up the log and put it on his Christmas fire, blazing and cracking in the old open fire-place.

Colonel George Wright was appointed the fifth attorney for the Commonwealth in 1835, and remained in office until he died, in December, 1850. He was said to be a forceful lawyer and finely equipped attorney for the Commonwealth. He is said to have been a man of fine appearance and charming personality.

Judge Croxton in one of his most brilliant addresses, delivered with such unctuous and grace a short time since, described him as a most tempting and irresistible widower; that when he was in pursuit of his third wife, to whom he was then affianced, he was terribly afflicted with the rheumatism in his legs, and that he had lost almost all ambulatory vigor and power of locomotion; that he always visited his affiancé with coach and fine horses and servant, and carried a sliup bodied as an attachment and fixture. Just before getting to the house of his affiancé he would get his servant to slip him out of his coach on this board so that he, by walking, rubbing and extensive manipulating, and suppling his legs with St. Jacob’s oil, &c., he could walk nimbly and erect in the smiling presence of his lady love, when he reached his destination. The judge in pointing the moral and admiring the tale, admonished all widowers and widows present not to be deterred in such pursuits, even if they could not walk, but to take fresh encouragement, which deliverance was received with tumultuous applause.

ADVOCATE OF THE POOR

William A. Wright was the sixth attorney for the Commonwealth, and was appointed in January, 1851. He was succeeded by Thomas Croxton, who was elected May, 1852—William A. Wright declined to run. He was the last attorney for the Commonwealth who was appointed under the old regime, and Thomas Croxton was the first elected under the new Constitution, which made the attorney for the Commonwealth of the county the attorney to prosecute in the Circuit Court. During the period that Colonel George Wright held office, William A. Wright was defending in every case. At every term they measured swords and shivered lances, and people use to attend court to witness the forensic encounters of these gladiators. William A. Wright in his latter days was a great reader, and he devoured every novel and all current literature that came out. This added a wealth of freshness and brightness to his language, and he could be incisive and aggressive with his keen Damascus blade. He was always found on the side of the oppressed, and was ever the ready advocate and champion of the poor. What Bacon’s Abridgement was to John Warden, and Minor’s Institutes to the modern practitioner, old Hening’s Justice was to William A. Wright. Colonel George Wright, with his rheumatic pains and increasing corpulency, was more sensitive as he grew older, especially as to his corpulency and projecting physique. His corpulency had become so robust that he not only had to slide out of horse coach on that noted slick board, but he had to so adjust his centre of gravity by going down the steps backwards as to prevent breaking off at the ankles. On one occasion, when the two Wrights had finished argument in a heated case, the presiding justice of the old County Court delivered the opinion adverse to Colonel Wright’s contention. He had been so sanguine of success and so non-plussed at decision, that he intemperately and impetuously said if the court adhered to the opinion that he would turn his back on the court. To which William A. Wright retorted that the court had rather look at his back than b—y. The remark created much elation, and was scored as a clever hit, and was what the Frenchman calls a bonmot. William A. Wright was a student of law under Judge

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Lomax. He loved and reverenced the judge, and every word of Judge Lomax was a religion on his lips to him.

OUT OF HIS JURISDICTION

In the celebrated case of “Faut vs. Miller & Mayhen,” 17 Grat., Judge Lomax presiding. Wm. A. Wright was one of the counsel. When the report of the Master Commissioner came in for confirmation, the amount of debts reported reached $100,000 or more. The enormity of the amount in the report so startled counsel and intensified interest, that amidst almost a panic, it was a severe tax on the ingenuity and research of counsel to know how at once to meet the crisis, and to formulate exceptions to meet the emergency and grave contingency. William A. Wright, amidst the solemnity of the occasion and the gravity of the controversy, arose and said, “May it please your Honor, I doubt if the Court has jurisdiction of such an amount,” which seemed to relieve the situation and elicit the smile of the jurist presiding.

Thomas Croxton was elected the seventh Attorney for the Commonwealth, and qualified July, 1852, under the new constitution as Commonwealth’s Attorney of the County and Circuit Courts, and remained in office until 1865, when he was succeeded by Rufus S. Renolds.

Thomas Croxton was a graduate of the University of Virginia, and was Captain of Geo. E. Pickett’s staff for some time. He was elected to Congress in 1884; was elected on the Hancock ticket; was re-appointed Attorney for the Commonwealth January 11, 1892, and resigned the same February 20, 1892, to accept the position of county judge for Essex county, which position he now holds, honored and beloved by all. At zenith of his glory as Commonwealth’s Attorney, handsome and striking in person, and charming in speech, he was simply invincible before the jury.

Rufus S. Renolds was elected the eighth Commonwealth’s Attorney for Essex, and qualified July, 1865. He remained as such until displaced by the reconstruction laws of Congress. He was succeeded by Lewis H. Garnett, a student of William and Mary College. He filled the office with credit to himself and with highest integrity.

OFFICIAL DEBUT

When he was inducted into office, and made his first official debut, the first thing he was called on to do was to deliver the charge to the grand jury, as the law then required. It was conceived by him, as by every young and new beginner, to be a Herculean task. It was to be the occasion of great forensic effort, and the speaker was not only to be the repository of the whole catalogue of human crime and the expositor of the Revenue laws, but an encyclopedia of all law. He felt the burden, and asked that his glass be put on the table by him with little stimulant “red like wine.” Under the inspiration and excitement of the occasion, and adopting the model of the great Master Demosthenes, that there could be no true oratory without action, at the climax of his florid address and pyrotechnics, or in the language of Wm. Wirt, after “working the ocean into a tempest.”

“To waft a feather, or to drown a fly,” he was so full of action that he knocked over his glass from the table, and lost its contents. As graceful as Demosthenes, he caught the glass and said “Gentlemen of the grand jury, the cargo is lost, but the vessel is saved.”

Lewis H. Garnett was appointed the ninth Attorney for the Commonwealth for Essex, and qualified April 20, 1870, and was succeeded by T. R. B. Wright. He fully measured with honor and credit to himself, to the requirements of high office during the brief period of its occupancy. Those who were present, and are the highest authority, narrate an incident in his life.

At the great national ratification meeting of the Bell and Everett ticket, in Baltimore in 1860, a gigantic stand was attached to the balcony of old Barnum’s Hotel, fronting Monument Square in that city. An immense throng and concourse from all over the Union were present under the most brilliant illumination and environment. The greatest orators and statesmen leaders of thought in the Union were present, and the scene was grand and brilliant. As one orator would finish a call would be made for another. A call was made for “Garnett of Virginia,” followed by another “Garnett” until it became general. The Garnetts of Essex were at that time, and have always been noted and distinguished in and out of Congress, and their fame has been coextensive with the broad limits of the Union. Hon. M. R. H. Garnett being at the time at the zenith of his glory in Congress, the enthusiastic crowd was anxious to hear him speak.

A CLEAR CLARION VOICE

Lewis H. Garnett, trim and erect in figure, with head thrown back, at once walked to the front of the grandstand and his clear clarion voice, as a young man, rang all over the square; and if he was not the Garnett of Virginia expected to come forth; if one was called and another answered, he filled the bill, and was the peer of any; and all conceded that no more resonant voice was heard, and no speech more replete with eloquence was heard that night and received with more tumultuous applause than the speech of Lewis H. Garnett, of Essex.

T. R. B. Wright was elected the tenth Attorney for the Commonwealth for Essex in November, 1870, and went into office on January 11, 1871, as the first Attorney for the Commonwealth under the new constitution of 1870. He filled the office until he resigned it in 1891, to accept the position of judge of the Ninth Judicial Circuit of Virginia, to which he had been elected by the Legislature of Virginia for the unexpired term of Judge Jeffries. He was re-elected at the next succeeding session of the Legislature for a full term; was an elector on the Cleveland ticket; graduate of the University of Virginia; First Lieutenant in C. S. Army, and severely shot in battle at Petersburg. With his pointed shafts and tenacious grasp as Commonwealth’s Attorney the guilty never escaped. T. R. B. Wright, following in the wake of the reconstruction times, was, as it were, the formative period of a new and untried government, when the newly-manumitted and emancipated slaves were admitted to the jurybox, enfranchised, and given all the rights with the full responsibilities and duties of citizenship. Crime held its red carnal, and law continued to be unbridled license, and the court docket seemed to comprise the whole catalogue of human offenses. The whipping post then reigned. Mr. Wright was never a great advocate of the whipping post for larceny, which has now been happily abolished, for if not a relic of barbarism and the past yet it is not in consonance with the “gladsome light of our jurisprudence” and civilization.

ON THE JAIL DOOR

A frail, delicate woman was once convicted of petit larceny and sentenced to stripes. The court had adjourn-
ed. Richard H. Banks, the deputy sheriff, had to carry out the sentence and judgment of the court. Dick Banks had as kind and noble heart as ever throbbed. He came to Mr. Wright, the prosecuting attorney, and feelingly appealed to him, and reported that he could not inflict stripes on the poor woman. The prosecuting attorney told him to lightly put on one or two, and inflict the balance on the jail door, and he would meet the requirements of the law in the case; and in the case of hardened culprits to put on in doses and instalments at stated periods, knowing that after the culprit took the first instalment that he would never come back for the second, but like the bounty-jumper would skip the country. We find in the Virginia Law Journal, vol.5, p. 79. Quillet of the Law. In a trial in the County Court of Essex, on Tuesday, on an indictment against Anthony Epps, for stealing four hens, Capt. Rennolds was introduced by the Commonwealth’s Attorney to prove that his hens were stolen by the prisoner, and went on to detail the evidence, and his reasons for the belief, by giving the confession of Baylor Gray, who admitted to Capt. Rennolds that he (Baylor Gray) was parties to the crime in receiving from Anthony Epps and selling the hens to Mr. Ellett, a country merchant, when the counsel for the prisoner objected. The court sustained the objection, and ruled out this evidence of Capt. Rennolds that he recovered two of his hens from the merchant’s hen-yard and two from the Judge’s chicken-coop. The Commonwealth’s Attorney, thus frustrated in getting out the evidence to fix the guilt on the prisoner by the ruling of the Judge, then interrogated the witness as follows:

UNABLE TO AGREE

Commonwealth’s Attorney—“Capt. Rennolds, the Judge has ruled that you shall not testify further. Did I not understand you to say that your hens were stolen?

Witness—“Yes sir.”

Commonwealth’s attorney—“Did I not understand you to say that you found two of these stolen hens in Mr. Ellett’ hen-yard?”

Witness—“Yes, sir.”

Commonwealth’s attorney—“Did I not understand you to say that you found two of the stolen hens in the Judge’s chicken coop?”

Witness—“Yes, sir.”

Commonwealth’s attorney—“Then, as you cannot tell how and why the prisoner stole them, it therefore devolves upon the Judge to show how these stolen hens got in his coop, doesn’t it?”

Witness—“Yes; sir; certainly, sir; of course, sir.”

This ended the evidence for the Commonwealth, to the intense merriment of the Court, jury and bystanders, and after argument, the jury retired and came into court stating that it was impossible for them to agree. — Tidewater Index.

Thomas E. Blaney was appointed to eleventh attorney for the Commonwealth of Essex, and qualified February 26, 1892, to accept which position he resigned the position of county judge of Essex. He was elected attorney for the Commonwealth in May 1895, for the full term and re-elected May 1899, and still holds the position, which he ably fills and adorns. He was elected to the Senate of Virginia in November, 1897, from the Thirty-ninth senatorial district, and still holds the position. He is a graduate of the University of Virginia, and took the debater’s medal in Washington Literary Society there; was once editor of the Tidewater Index and Tidewater Democrat, and delegate to the National Democratic Convention at Chicago which nominated Bryan.

PROSECUTORS FOR CIRCUIT COURT

Besides these attorneys for the Commonwealth for the County Courts, the Code of 1819 authorized the judges of the superior courts of law to appoint attorneys to prosecute for the Commonwealth in the courts of their respective circuits, and Hon. James D. Halyburton was appointed Commonwealth’s attorney by Hon. John B. Christian and prosecuted in the Superior Court of Essex from October term, 1835, to April term, 1844. Judge Halyburton was appointed United States district judge for the Eastern District of Virginia, which he accepted, and Hon. James M. Jeffries was appointed by Judge Christian attorney for the Commonwealth in his place and prosecuted as such from October term, 1844, to May term, 1852. Hon. James M. Jeffries was succeeded by Hon. Thomas Croxton, who was elected May, 1852, attorney for the Commonwealth for Essex county, which, under the new constitution, made him also Commonwealth’s attorney for the Circuit Court. Judge John Taylor Lomax also succeeding Judge John B. Christian. Judge Jeffries was elected to the bench of the Ninth Judicial Court of Virginia in 1870 by election by the Legislature under the new Constitution.

This is sketched the imperfect and meagre history and record, yet the unbroken line and chain extending from February 17, 1777, to January, 1900, covering the period of official service of 125 years; and this long period comprises the official terms of only eleven Commonwealth’s attorneys for Essex, which, remarkable to say, comprehends the whole number.

When the history of Essex is made up the names and services of these men will form a bright page in that history. Whatever may be said of her future, we have the proud satisfaction of knowing that her past as least is secure, and, in the beautiful language of Browning, she can proudly and truthfully say:

“The future I may face, now I Have proved the past.”

Minutes Of The Society

THE ESSEX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY met at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Miller’s Tavern on Sunday afternoon, April 20, 1980, with Mr. Hill B. Wellford, President, presiding. Mrs. Wright, Secretary, read the minutes of our January meeting which were approved and Mrs. Taliaferro, gave the treasurer’s report. Mr. Wellford called on Mr. Spottwood Taliaferro, Chairman of the Nominating Committee, who stated the present officers would serve another year and they were unanimously elected.

Mr. Wellford then turned the meeting over to Mr. Charles Warner, Vice President in charge of programs. Mr. Warner called on Mrs. Catherine DeShazo to present a short history of St. Paul’s Church, then he introduced Mr. Muscoe Garnett of Suffolk, Virginia, who is a member of our society, and a native of Essex County, the son of William C. Garnett, Dunsville, who was author of “Tidewater Tales”. Mr. Garnett introduced our speaker, Mr. Edwin Ferguson, President of the Virginia State Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Ferguson was born in Suffolk and attended the schools there, before entering the College of William and Mary for his B. S. and Law

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Degrees. In 1940, Mr. Ferguson entered the Navy and attained the rank of Lieut. Commander. He is a past president of the Virginia Bar Association, a past Senior Warden of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Suffolk, and was also voted first citizen of Suffolk.

Mr. Ferguson gave us an excellent talk on the heritage which each of us have as individuals and as Virginians and how much this means to us as a state, where Tourism is the second ranking industry, because of our wonderfully preserved historic sites. His was a most inspiring address.

Following this splendid program, the meeting adjourned to the Parish House for delicious refreshments prepared by Mrs. Robert L. Ellis, Jr., Mrs. Ludwell Smithers, and Mrs. Spottswood Taliaferro, co-chairmen, and their committee for Occupacia district. We wish to thank them for contributing so much to the enjoyment of the members and guest at this social hour.

THE ESSEX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY met on Sunday afternoon, October 19, 1980 at Beaver's Hill, the lovely old home of the Haile family, now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Mann, descendants of the builders, Capt. Robert Gaines Haile. The meeting was called to order by our President, Mr. Hill Wellford. Minutes of our April meeting were read and approved. The treasurer's report was given by Mrs. Wright, Secretary, in the absence of Mrs. Spottswood Taliaferro, Treasurer. The meeting was then turned over to Mr. Charles Warner, Vice-President in charge of programs, who made several announcements and read letters from interested parties wishing information concerning ancestors from Essex County. He then presented our speaker, Mr. Edward Wright Haile, another descendant of the builder. Mr. Haile gave a delightful interesting talk about the building of Beaver's Hill and the trials and tribulations of the Haile family and their occupation of this historical landmark.

Delicious refreshments were served following the address by the committee in charge, Mrs. Robert S. Handly, Mrs. J. McDonald Evans and Mrs. William A. Wright. We are deeply grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Mann who invited us to meet in their home following a rainy, cool morning which prohibited us from meeting outdoors.

THE ESSEX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY met January 18, 1981 at the Court House in Tappahannock at 2:30 p.m. with our president, Mr. Hill B. Wellford presiding. The minutes of the October meeting at Beaver's Hill were read and approved. The treasurer's report was given by Mrs. Spottswood Taliaferro. Mr. Wellford asked for the nominating committee's report which was given by Mrs. Mac Evans, Mr. Charles W.H. Warner, President, Mr. Calvin Warfield, Vice-President, Mr. Ludwell Smithers, Treasurer and Mrs. William A. Wright, Secretary, as there were no nominations from the floor, the slate of officers were unanimously elected to take office immediately following this meeting. Mr. Sidney J. Hilton, former president of our society, rose to express our thanks to Mr. Wellford and turned the meeting over to Mr. Warner, program chairman, who before introducing our speaker, also expressed his appreciation of Mr. Wellford's leadership and the working relationship which they have enjoyed.

Mr. Warner introduced, Mrs. Grace Spindle, our guest speaker, as one of his favorite teachers, who has taught English classes for 50 years, 29 of them in Essex County. Mrs. Spindle and her husband are members of Beale Memorial Baptist Church in Tappahannock, and Mrs. Spindle was asked in 1975 to write a history of this church. Mrs. Spindle gave a most interesting and delightful talk giving highlights of this history of the founding of Beale Memorial Baptist Church. She talked of the nine fine ladies and gentlemen who formed the nucleus of those who started the "Baptists" meeting in the "Old Free Church or Tappahannock Chapel" as it was originally called (Now the Modern Cleaners Building). This building was dedicated to the Protestant Episcopal Church, which meant the Episcopalians had first choice in its use, then the Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians. Mrs. Spindle said that there were seven other Baptist Churches in Essex County when Beale Memorial was started in 1875 as the 'Centennial Baptist' so it was the baby. There are many descendsents of these early families still members of the church. This book has been published so it is available to all who would like to read it.

Mr. Warner read a letter from Miss Elizabeth L. Burke of North Bank, St. Stephens Church, Virginia, correcting information concerning a place listed in "Old Homes of Essex County" published by the Woman's Club on page 21 as the "Old Blagman Home." Mr. Warner asked that the letter be made a part of these minutes.

North Bank  
St. Stephens Church, Va.  
December 15, 1980

Mr. Charles Warner, President  
Essex County Historical Society  
Tappahannock, Virginia

Dear Mr. Warner:

Miss Willie Weathers suggest I write you in regard to correcting information concerning a place listed in "Old Homes of Essex County" published by the Woman's Club. On page 21 of this book there is listed the "Old Blagman Home." There is no such name as Blagman.

On the enclosed sheet I have given facts about the Blackburn home named Clover Dale. My information comes from the William Blackburn's will recorded in Essex Court House in 1863, what my father told me and the Burke Bible. My father was born at Clover Dale and Ann or Nancy Burke was his grandmother. He told me she inherited not only Clover Dale but also money and furniture from her uncle, William Blackburn. She had so much property that after the Civil War she had to go to Washington to sign papers which said she would not give money to any cause to take up arms against the Federal Government. I cannot verify this story so I did not include it in the write up of Clover Dale. I have a daguerreotype of William Blackburn.

I hope this information will be of interest to your society.

Sincerely,

(Signed Elizabeth Burke)

Clover Dale

Near the rectory, a mile from Farmer's Fork there was a two-story brick building said to have been built by William Blackburn in 1790. The walls were thick and paneled. The fluted mantels and window frames were beautifully carved. William Blackburn left Clover Dale to his niece, Ann B. Micou. Ann or Nancy as she was sometimes called married James Burke in 1845. They had

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two sons J. W. Burke and James C. Burke. James C. Burke lived at Clover Dale with his mother before and after his marriage. James C. Burke left Clover Dale and moved to North Bank in King and Queen County. When the Burkes left Essex, Clover Dale was used as a parsonage for Enon and Bethlehem Baptist Churches. Later Clover Dale was sold to Ernest Anderson who in turn sold it to Donald Allen. This handsome Flemish bond house burned in the spring of 1980. However a great-granddaughter of Ann B. Micou has two of the lovely mantels and the parlor paneling.

Mr. Warner announced that Mrs. Robert L. Ellis would be Refreshment Chairman again this year and thanked her as well as Mrs. Cliff Dowell and Mrs. Philip Winston, co-chairmen of the Refreshment Committee for today.

Mr. Wellford said if there was no further business to come before the meeting we would adjourn to the Woman’s Club House for refreshments.

ACCAKEEK, Richmond County, was the site of the April Meeting of the Essex County Historical Society Sunday afternoon, April 5, 1981 at 3:00 p.m. “Accakeek”, is the beautiful country home of our president, Mr. Charles W. H. Warner, on the Rappahannock River. He welcomed a very large gathering of 250 or more friends and members who turned out on a rainy afternoon. Due to the large attendance and the impossibility of seating everyone, the business part of our meeting was omitted. Mr. Warner gave a short talk about the history of the farm, the families who have owned it and told of the construction of the house which is two stories over a high foundation, of beautiful colonial brick in English and Flemish bond with pink corner brick and jack arches over every window and door. The house is of Georgian design (1730-1770). The west side overlooking fields, forests and the Rappahannock has a view of three counties and twenty five miles of the river. The west side has two story porch of colonial design with columns. The house extends beyond the porch which is centered, with three 18 light windows in each side of the door on the first floor and the second floor.

The east side is of plain colonial design with a terrace and a beautiful heavy colonial frame around the double doors. A very large chimney is on each end of the house. The house has wide Colonial flooring throughout, a circular stairway in the large entrance hall, paneling in the parlor and library and handsome woodwork throughout. Colonial designed chandeliers hang from the ceiling. Accakeek Farm was originally the site of the Accakeek Indian Village who were a part of the Totuskey tribe. James Williamson of “Cobham Park”, England patented over

3,000 acres here about 1650 and named the area Cobham Park. This section on Accakeek Neck, between Totuskey and Pecks creeks remained with his descendants for 150 years, the Tomlins and Pecks. Mr. Warner is a descendant of James Williamson through a granddaughter who married Capt. Thomas Carter (1672-1733) of “Barford”, Lancaster County.

The Garlands, Packets, Browns and other Northern Neck families have owned sections of this farm. The Delano family, large landowners in this area have farmed Accakeek for many years. Dr. Charles Andrew Warner of Tappahannock acquired this farm in 1950 from the children of Judge Chinn of Warsaw who were the heirs of their uncle Henry T. Douglas. The Warner’s enlarged the farm to include all of the Neck, oil portraits of Dr. Charles Andrew Warner and his wife Gladys Roy Hoskins Warner are in the parlor and that of Capt. Thomas Carter of Barford is in the dining room. A portrait of Charles Warner I is in the library. Mr. Russell Landers was the architect, and Mr. Joseph L. Blanton, the building contractor. The building of Accakeek House has followed thirty years of extensive development of this farm.

Following the talk and a tour of the house, guests were invited to have refreshments. A lovely social occasion was enjoyed by all.

ANNE T. WRIGHT Secretary

Officers of the Society

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