“Planters and Preachers: The Transformation of Religion in Essex County, Virginia, 1739-1802”

by JAMES SLAUGHTER

The rise of the Baptists from obscurity in 1760 to the position of the dominant religion in Virginia by 1802 constituted a major transformation in Virginia history. A simple faith based directly on the Bible triumphed over the wishes of the elite class of gentlemen who dominated Virginia's politics, business, and social life. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Baptists had both the most popular religion and the political clout to help remove the Episcopal faith as Virginia's official religion. The success of the Baptists in building a politically and spiritually powerful denomination constituted a key event in American and Essex County history that is often overshadowed by the Revolutionary War.

The first settlers of present day Essex in the 1650's brought with them a strong faith in the Church of England. These God fearing pioneers quickly built houses of worship, and by 1700 Essex boasted four churches spread along the length of the county.1 Essex was divided into two parishes, St. Anne's on the north side of Mt. Landing Creek and South Farnham on the south side. The leading planters served on the vestry of each parish, and this influential body performed many functions of local government in addition to their church duties.2 The justices of the county court, many of them vestrymen, reinforced the church leaders in their efforts to promote Godliness in colonial Essex. Slackards who missed several consecutive Sundays of worship were sometimes summoned before the court and fined for "not frequenting their parish church pursuant to Law."3 The intertwining of government and religion reflected the commitment of the early colonists to build a community conforming to the will of God. With the passing of the frontier days in Essex in the 1700's, the religious zeal of the colonists weakened some, but the church continued to dominate many aspects of life in early Virginia.

Much of plantation society centered around the church. Life on the scattered farms was often harsh and lonely, and people usually did not need the threat of fines to bring them to church. On a pleasant day, the worshippers lingered after the service in a beautiful churchyard such as Vauter's to chat, hear the news, and invite guests for dinner.4 Gentlemen talked of horse racing, cock fights and the price of tobacco while the ladies discussed fashions from Europe and the busy Tidewater social calendar. After perhaps an hour, the gentry paraded away in their four horse carriages while the more modest planters wheeled their families home in one horse carts. Inside the church, the gentry usually occupied the front pew. The social life of the church became primarily an arena where the gentry asserted their superiority over the smaller planters. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Christian emphasis in the church was beginning to wear thin. Virginians outside of the gentry yearned for a church with spiritual nourishment. When exciting preachers arrived with a forceful gospel, colonists in Essex and the rest of the country flocked to the new denominations, and in the process altered the course of American religion. The Tidewater gentlemen, however, saw the upsurge in faith as a challenge not only to their established church but also the social order of the day. The gentry tried to subdue the new churches, and Virginia entered a long period of struggle for religious freedom.

American evangelical religion originated in New England in the 1730's in a series of spectacular revivals known as the "Great Awakening." In the 1700's the New England churches were suffering from the same decline in enthusiasm that afflicted the Virginia parishes. In the 1730's evangelic preachers began touring the towns and small cities, stressing new themes of spiritual rebirth and religion as an emotional experience. The New Englanders gathered in the thousands to hear these men, and the Great Awakening was underway. After New England had been "burned over" with the revival zeal, leading preachers turned their attention to the colonies to the south.5

George Whitefield, one of the most famous preachers of this movement, passed through Essex County in 1739. But the people of Virginia and Essex were not yet ready for an awakening. Whitefield recorded in his diary an incident at Piscataway Creek ferry that showed how many people viewed suspiciously anyone who spoke enthusiastically about religion:

"...we came to Piscataway Ferry...where the man of the house spared us some Corn and Sheaves for our horses, but neither Milk nor Bread in the House for ourselves. — However, I endeavored to feed him with Spiritual Bread; but he seriously asked one of us, if I was not a Quaker, because (as I supposed) he heard me talk of the Necessity of being born again of the Spirit. — If I talk of the Spirit, I am a Quaker; if I say Grace at Breakfast, and behave seriously, I am a Presbyterian. Alas! What must I do to be accounted a Member of the Church of England?"6

Whitefield gave an accurate summary of the religious

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temper of the times before the Great Awakening. The established church was an important social and political institution, but Piety and discussing religion were only for the elderly. Religion would soon become everyone's concern in Essex, however, whether for achieving salvation or suppressing a radical sect.

The first stirrings of the Great Awakening in Virginia appeared in the 1740's when Presbyterians began evangelizing in Hanover County, thirty miles southwest of Essex. The spectacular revivals led by Samuel Davies attracted crowds from miles around. Many Essex families undoubtedly attended these "New Side" Presbyterian revivals. When Davies preached in the Northern Neck in the 1750's, he probably crossed the river and reignited the enthusiasm in Essex. Some families embraced the evangelical faith, and the Presbyterians organized the first group of religious dissenters in Essex history. Forty-one men petitioned the Essex court in 1758 to announce their determination to practice their own brand of Protestantism:

"...we the subscribers intend to make use of a place on the Land of Mr. Thomas Miller in the parish of South Farnham in this county, as a place for the public worship of God according to the practice of Protestants of the Presbyterian Denomination, and we Desire that this our certificate which we make according to the Directions of an Act of Parliament commonly called the Act of Toleration, may be registered in the Records of the Court." 9

The signers of the Petition included Clarkees, Dunns, Smiths, and numerous other names in ones and twos. By registering with the county, the Presbyterians showed their willingness to conform to colonial regulations. The Essex Presbyterian congregation probably disappeared when the even more evangelic Baptists swept Essex in the 1770's. The Presbyterians nonetheless held the distinction of breaking the Anglican barrier in Essex County.

The American Baptists in the 1750's were a weak and scattered sect. The Baptist faith traced its roots to a radical offshoot of English Puritanism. In the 1760's, a hardy band of inspired farmer-preachers interjected a new evangelical faith into the Baptist church and sparked the Baptist explosion.10 Shubal Stearns founded this "Separate Baptist" movement, and the dozens of lay preachers he inspired helped the churches multiply. Lewis Craig of Spotsylvania County was prominent among these rugged, tremendously appealing ministers. He probably preached the first Baptist sermon in Essex when his circuit extended into the northern part of the county in 1768 and 1769.11 Craig's efforts culminated in the formation of Upper Essex Baptist Church on October 25, 1772, with forty members.12 The congregation first met at the Diamond Meeting House, which was located a mile northwest of Ruxburg just north of state route 627. The congregation completed the present thick walled brick structure located west of Caret in 1825. Upper Essex grew rapidly in the 1770's and 1780's and by 1810 the church counted over 250 members.

The spectacular preaching of Craig and his colleagues spurred the growth of the religion in Essex and across the state. The success of the Baptists brought persecution. Spotsylvania county arrested Craig in 1768 and charged that he and his fellow Baptist preachers were "disturbers of the peace; they cannot meet a man on the road, but they must ram a text of Scripture down his throat."13 The typical Virginia planter, however, was eager to hear a down to earth Gospel. The Baptist farmer-preachers delivered a fire and brimstone message that helped the planter cope with the challenges of life in colonial Virginia. The potency of the Baptist work peaked in the revival. Few religious experiences could match the excitement of these gatherings. The Baptist historian Robert Baylor Semple described how the preachers used "...a very warm and pathetic address, accompanied by strong gestures and a singular tone of voice. Being often deeply affected themselves while preaching, correspondent affections were felt by their pious hearers, which were frequently expressed by tears, trembling, screams, shout and acclamations."14 Theoric Noel, pastor of Upper Essex from 1775 until his death in 1813, had a reputation as one of the masters of revival preaching.15 The revivals formed the emotional peak of a plain spoken religion for a people alienated from an uninspired established church.

Beyond the soul-stirring satisfaction of the services, the Baptist faith encompassed an entire life style that gave the planter a sense of identity apart from showing humility to the gentry. The Baptist churches formed a close fellowship that contrasted sharply with the formalism of the established church. The community of Christians helped the Baptists observe their strict standards of morality. Excesses of behavior and worldliness brought punishment from the congregation. The Minutes of Upper Essex show a church member being dismissed for having a party where fiddling and dancing were allowed, and another was dismissed for allowing a child to play the piano.16 But the large part of church discipline concerned drunkenness and other "behavior unbecoming a Christian." The rigorous morality contrasted with the indulgent life of many in the colonial gentry. Temptations were growing in a prosperous Virginia. The raucous tavern life in colonial Tappahannock probably ruined more than one small planter, and the popularity of the Baptist Piety was partly a reaction to a perception that society was too decadent.17

The gentry saw these developments as a threat to the traditional social order. All Virginia men had traditionally joined together in festive carousing at occasions such as elections, cock fights, and horse races. But in the 1770's the planters were citing scripture rather than sipping cider, and the gentry became disturbed. The born again planters had chosen to live under different rules from the men who dominated Virginia. The gentry could not understand this upsurge of religion, and when the Baptist faith began to attract defections from their own ranks, misunderstanding turned to anger and ridicule. Tensions increased as the aggressive Baptist ministers lashed out from the pulpit in vicious attacks on the established church.18 When word circulated that the Baptists were organizing a second church in lower Essex, the justices decided to act.

The Baptist ministers at the foundation ceremony in 1774 for Piscataway Baptist Church, later Mt. Zion Baptist Church, probably knew they would be arrested after the service. But the men at Piscataway on that March day were accustomed to jailing and persecution for their faith. One of the preachers, Robert Ware, had suffered harrassment that typified the abuse Baptist ministers endured from some of the cruder planters. Semple described how "On one occasion, when Ware was preaching, there came one Davis and one Kemp, two sons of Belial, and stood before him with a bottle and drank, offering the bottle to him, cursing him. As soon as he closed his service they drew out a pack of cards and began to play on the stage where he had been standing, wishing him to reprove them that they might beat him."19 These incidents boosted the Baptist conviction that they were steering a true course in a corrupt world.

The gentry used a more sophisticated method in their attempts to squash the Baptists. On March 13, 1774, Justice Archibald Ritchie led the arrest of John Waller, John Shackleford, Robert Ware, and Ivison Lewis for "Preaching and expounding the Scriptures contrary to law."20 Lewis did not preach that day and was released. The others remained in the Tappahannock jail to await
trial. They prayed steadily, and preached through the bars to the loyal Baptists who came to comfort them.22 On March 21, the justices ordered a hefty twen- tieth pound bond from each man for his good behavior for the next year. Samuel Gresham and John Sorrell stepped forward to make bond for Ware, and John Goode and Thomas Upshaw paid for the release of Shackleford. John Waller, however, refused to give bond for preaching the Gospel and stayed in jail for another two weeks.23 The final irony of the jailing of the Essex Baptists came a century after the episode when Centennial Baptist Church, now Beale Memorial, bought the old courthouse and moved their church to the former scene of Baptist persecution.

Piscataway Baptist Church began that fateful day with only eleven members, but the uproar surrounding their founding undoubtedly swelled their numbers. James Greenwood was the first pastor of Piscataway, serving until 1811. Under his guidance the church grew to a membership of 229 Baptists.24 Piscataway Baptist Church began at the present day site of Beulah Baptist Church, to the south of the current location at Dunbrooke.

After the release of Waller, the Essex court wisely let the intensity of Baptist commitment run its course. Religious strife decreased as Virginians turned their energies to winning independence. The Baptists were ardent patriots. The highly democratic nature of their church organizations spurred their dedication to the fight for liberty, and the Baptists supplied many of the enlisted men for the war.25 The established church began its long decline during the Revolution. Reverend Alexander Cruden of South Farnham Parish fled to Britain in 1776, leaving the southern half of Essex County without an Episcopal Church for nearly a century.26

Baptists and Presbyterians began flexing their growing political muscle during the war years. Almost all of the members of the General Assembly were Anglicans, but the democratic spirit of the time and the sentiment of the voters combined to bring reform. In 1776, the legislature suspended the salary provisions for Anglican ministers, and the following year the Assembly revoked the use of public tax dollars for the support of the established church. But the Anglicans still enjoyed certain privileges denied to the other denominations, and the pressure for change grew after the war.

Churches from across the Commonwealth bombarded the Assembly with petitions on the religious question. The surviving Essex Petitions provide a fascinating portrait of the deep concerns of the citizens of the county over religion. 165 members of the established church sent in the first petition from Essex in 1779, calling for a continued government role in religion. The Anglicans began their petition with an attack on the solution proposed by Thomas Jefferson:

"And we...the inhabitants of the County of Essex being much alarmed at the appearance of a bill entitled Religious Freedom, consider it as very injurious to the Christian religion and will be attended with the most baneful consequences if permitted to have an existence in this State."27

The remainder of the petition was clearly aimed at the Baptists. The Anglicans asked "That all licentious and itinerant preachers be forbid collecting or assembling of negroes and others at unseasonable times. That every minister of every denomination have a seated place of worship...That no doctrine be permitted to be preached which may tend to subvert government or disturb civil society." The members of the established church, however, made some concessions that showed how much opinion had changed in Essex since the jailing of the Baptist preachers a few years earlier. The petition urged that a freely elected vestry levy a tax for the support of all Pro- testant ministers in the county, contrary to the long tradi-

tion of self-appointed vestries. The Baptists, nevertheless, were determined to sever all ties between church and state. The Anglican petition of 1779 marked the last large protest by the established church in Essex. In the 1780's, the Baptists of Essex and the rest of Virginia became the dominant voice lobbying the Assembly for complete religious equality.

The end of the Revolutionary War escalated the religious controversy. The first petition from the Essex Baptists in May of 1783 requested "the full equal and impartial liberty of all Denominations."28 William Webber, Moderator, and John Waller, Clerk, signed for the group. In the late 1780's the Baptists and the Presbyterians began demanding that the "glebe" farm lands owned by the established church be seized as public property. Essex Baptists sent three petitions to the Assembly on the religious issue between 1785 and 1790. The signatures revealed how the members of many Essex families with long traditions in the established church had converted to the Baptist faith.29 Among the hundreds of names were Edmondsons, Upshaws, Brookes, Daingerfields, Cauthornes, Parkers, and other families that had deep roots in the Essex gentry. The Baptist faith had smashed the lower class stigma attached to the religion by its opponents and the new faith was quickly gaining the upper hand in the political struggle.

The American Anglicans reorganized as the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1785, but this change brought no immediate relief for the beleaguered denomination. The near collapse of the Episcopal Church in Virginia was evident in Essex County in the 1780's and 1790's. Episcopalians in Tappahannock and the area south subsisted on family services, and many converted to the Baptists. Committed Episcopalians such as this English visitor to Tappahannock grieved over the lack of a functioning church:

"I lament more and more every Sunday that we have no place of public worship to go to. There is a church to be sure, about three miles off, but unfortunately there happens to be no preacher. Being Christmas Day you miss it more than common, so universal a day of worship in all parts of the civilized world..."30

Vauter's Church still functioned in St. Anne's Parish in northern Essex, but attendance was desperate. In the early 1790's, the vestry of St. Anne's attempted to conduct a fund raising lottery, because "few Protestant Episcopalians now resort the Church and contribute to its support..."31 The Parish vestry still included the great planter families of north Essex—Beverley, Waring, Garnett, Baylor, Micou, and others—but obviously much of their membership had migrated to Upper Essex Baptist. Even their lottery scheme failed, but this ancient church survived to see much better days.

The final Baptist victory came in 1802 when the General Assembly ordered the sale of the Episcopal glebes and directed that the overseers of the poor in each county administer the proceeds. This act, coupled with the passage of Jefferson's Statute of Religious Freedom in 1786, resolved all of the complaints of the dissenters. The half century dispute over the relation of church and state in Virginia was settled. Religion and politics, however, would always be intertwined in Virginia and America.

Perhaps the Baptist church in Virginia would eventually have suffered from being too dominant. The arrival of a new evangelical group prevented this. The Methodists broke from the Episcopal Church in the 1780's, and appeared in Essex before 1790. The new denomination held services at Mann's Meeting House, located on the site of the present day Macedonia Baptist Church, south of Center Cross.32 The Methodists offered a captivating evangelical appeal similar to the Baptists, and the two denominations competed fiercely for converts.
The conclusion of decades of Protestant struggle left American Christianity stronger. The Episcopal Church rebounded in the nineteenth century and again became an influential Protestant denomination. The Great Awakening of the eighteenth century began a remarkable cyclical process in American religion. Years of apathy would end with a burst of revivalism arriving like a thunderstorm upon the nation's conscience. The vigor of evangelical religion in Essex County today testifies to the power of the message that first gripped the colonists over two centuries ago.

NOTES

3. Essex County Order Book #4, 1708-1714 Part 2, pp. 615-616. On microfilm, Virginia State Library (VSL), Richmond; manuscript volumes available at the Circuit Court Clerk's Office, Tappahannock, Virginia.
6. George Whitefield, ...Journal... (London: James Hutton, 1740), IV, p. 63.
16. UBECC, p. 9.
17. Isaac, pp. 528-532.
18. Isaac, pp. 556-566.
20. Semple, p. 36.
27. 10/22/1779, Essex Petitions, VSL Archives Dept.
28. 5/5/1783, Essex Petitions.
29. 11/1785, 10/30/1790, Essex Petitions.
30. Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., Quebec to Carolina in 1785-1786: Being the Travel Diary ...of Robert Hunter, Jr... (San Marino, Calif.: The Huntington Library, 1943), pp. 213-214.
31. 10/1791, Essex Petitions.

Minutes of the Society

The Essex County Historical Society held its regular quarterly meeting, January 16, 1985, at the Court House at 5:00 p.m. with our president, Dr. Calvin Warfield, presiding. The minutes of the previous meeting were dispensed with as they appeared in the fall bulletin which all members have received. Mr. Smither, treasurer, gave his report, stating the organization had received $1248.00 in 1982. This figure included the amount donated to the Col. Meriwether Smith portrait, which is now hanging in the Court House. Mr. Warner spoke about this portrait and reminded us that Col. Meriwether Smith was one of Essex's most illustrious sons, holding many very important posts in his day. Mr. Warner also announced that the spring bulletin would be written by Mr. James Slaughter, who is our speaker today. Mr. Slaughter made a motion and it was seconded by Mr. Carlton that a resolution be prepared in appreciation of the part the Historical Society and the Essex County Board of Supervisors took in getting this portrait painted and hung in the Court House.

Dr. Warfield then asked for committee reports, calling on the Nominating Committee; Mr. Robert Temple Ryland gave their report. Dr. Calvin N. Warfield, President, Mr. Eldon Christopher, Vice President, Mrs. William A. Wright, Secretary, Mr. Ludwell Smither, Treasurer. These nominations were accepted and there being no nominations from the floor, the above listed officers were elected unanimously to take office immediately.

Mrs. Robert Ellis, Chairman of the Membership Committee, announced new members since last meeting, Miss Nesmith and Mrs. Helene Garnett. Mrs. Margaret Ferry spoke for the Committee planning a House Tour as a money making project and stated that this project was too big and they needed more help from the Society as a whole. This was also reiterated by Mrs. Lib Smither, another member of the committee.

Dr. Warfield then spoke of the By-Laws and that they required an Executive Committee, the membership of which must consist of all elected officers plus two non-elected members. Dr. Warfield stated that he and Mr. Warner, outgoing president, had called a meeting immediately following the October meeting and set a time for the next Executive Committee to meet in November. The minutes of this meeting were published in the bulletin. The next meeting was Dec. 7, 1982, at the home of Mrs. Wright. Mrs. Wright gave a summary of these minutes after which Dr. Warfield announced the next Executive Committee meeting would be February 1, 1983, the meeting place to be announced.

Mr. Eldon W. Christopher, Vice President and Program Chairman, presented Mr. James Slaughter, today's speaker. Mr. Christopher said Jimmy attended Essex County Schools and graduated at Essex High School as Valedictorian and finished at Yale University with a 3.36
average, Jimmy has been and is a Lay Reader at St. John’s Episcopal Church and has recently been appointed by the Board of Supervisors to write a history of Essex County which will be published in 1984.

Mr. Slaughter talked about the Colonial History of Essex starting with the early exploration of the area in 1608 by Captain John Smith. He developed this history until the formation of old Rappahannock County in 1656. I hope this very interesting talk will be written in the spring bulletin so that all of us may read it at our leisure. He gave such interesting details about Essex’s history during the 17th and 18th centuries up until the Revolution and the part many prominent Essex citizens had taken in the development and progress of Virginia as a colony. He is really doing a magnificent job of reaserch on this history of Essex County and I am sure we will all be tremendously in his debt when this project is completed and published.

Following this splendid talk, Mr. Slaughter answered many interesting questions.

Dr. Warfield then asked our treasurer, Mr. Smither, to read the names of new members who had joined today and asked them to stand up. Mr. and Mrs. Harold Little, (Mr. Little was not present) Mrs. Arthur Lyon-Vaiden, and Mr. and Mrs. Louis Myers. We are indeed fortunate to have these new members and hope they will take an active part in our Society which we would like to see grow a great deal more and to appeal to more young people. Dr. Warfield then thanked the Hospitality Committee for today’s reception immediately following in the Club House. Mrs. W. Haile Parker, Mrs. Ludwell Smither, Mrs. Emory L. Carlton, Mrs. Robert L. Ware, Mrs. Preston Ferry and Mrs. William A. Wright, Chairman. The meeting adjourned for the social hour.

MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee of the Essex County Historical Society met in the Library at 11:00 a.m., February 3, 1983, with Dr. Calvin Warfield, president, presiding. Several committee chairmen and members were invited to attend this meeting.

To facilitate the length of meeting, the president asked that the reading of the minutes be dispensed with.

After the reading of a letter from Mr. Edward Haile enclosing a gift of $25 to the Society, Mr. Warfield moved and it was seconded that this gift be allotted to the fund for the Meriwether Smith portrait which has already been paid for with some funds from the general fund of the Society.

Mrs. Smither gave the treasurer’s report in Mr. Smither’s absence. She reported our new balance to be $915.77.

Mrs. Jeanette Ellis, Chairman of the Membership Committee reported that Mrs. Gordon Lewis, Mrs. Hill Wellford, Mrs. Lawrence Andrews and Mrs. John DeShazo had agreed to serve on this committee to represent all the areas of the county.

Several homes were suggested and it was agreed they should be old homes if possible and in the same area: Woodland, the Barton home, Hill and Dale, Garnett home on U.S. 17, Hundley Hall, Dunleville, Johnville, Trible home, Fair View, Waring home, and Clydeside. Little home. It was also suggested and agreed we would have the Tour on Sunday afternoon, October 16, 1983, in lieu of our regular October meeting. It was also suggested we might end the Tour at “Bathurst”, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Macon Ware, which was built on the site of the original “Bathurst”, the home of Meriwether Smith. This would be particularly interesting because of the portrait we have just hung in the Court House. Also, if Mrs. Ware agrees, we might serve refreshments at her home. Two homes in Tappahannock were suggested also if we cannot get four or five of the others listed.

A discussion followed about a meeting place for our April meeting, home or church—Mrs. Ellis said we had never met at the Upper Essex Baptist Church and it is one of the oldest in the county and she was sure we would be welcome to meet there sometime. This information will be passed on to the Program Chairman who was not present.

Mr. Warner said that bulletins should always be sent to the Virginia State Library, that complete sets should also be made up and sent to the Virginia Historical Society Headquarters in Richmond, Rappahannock Community College Library in Warsaw and also in our files in Essex County Clerk’s Office.

Mrs. Anne Wright agreed to act as Chairman of the House Tour Committee, with Mrs. Jeanette Ellis, Mrs. Lib Smither, Mrs. Margaret Ferry, Mrs. Anne Warner and Mrs. Mary Evans as members.

DR. EDWARD D.C. CAMPBELL, JR.
ADDRESSES HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Essex County Historical Society met at Upper Essex Baptist Church, Sunday afternoon, April 17, 1983 at 3:00 p.m. with our president, Dr. Calvin N. Warfield, presiding. He welcomed members and guests and thanked Mrs. Robert Ellis for arranging today’s meeting and asked her to introduce our host, the Reverend Stephen Renalds, pastor of Upper Essex Baptist Church, who gave us an interesting talk on the building and growth of this old, historic church. Mr. Renalds was fortunate to have a history of the church to turn to for the early references since the Church History was written in 1972 to celebrate its 200th Anniversary. Mr. Renalds spoke of the founding of a new church on the 25th day of October, 1772, with forty members who met in a small log house called Diamond Meeting House, with a famous Virginia Baptist preacher, Lewis Craig. The time was ripe for the forming of new churches because of the revolutionary spirit of the people, the many unpopular tax laws, the unpopularity of the state church, and the right of their religious freedom, which caused much discontent among the colonists.

The original membership of 40 had increased to 210 by 1810, but they were still meeting in the Diamond Meeting House until after 1822; much of the history of the Baptist Association in Virginia took place here. The Dover Baptist Association was organized here in 1783 which included representatives from all Baptist churches between the James and Potomac Rivers.

It wasn’t until March, 1825, that the brick church was dedicated and was called Essex Meeting House with Elder Andrew Broadus and Robert Semple preaching. Alexander Campbell preached here many times. From Campbell and his supporters Rappahannock Christian Church in Dunsville developed. Before the new church was built there were four pastors, Joseph Bledsoe, Theodore Noel, William Hatchett, and Thomas Henley, who was minister during the building of the present church. In 1840 there were 720 members, two-thirds of these were slaves. The ministers served at least two or more churches in the area at the same time and had alternate services. After the War the slaves withdrew and had thier own church, Antioch, which is still a very strong Baptist church in Essex County.

The first parsonage was built in 1887 and a cemetery was acquired near the church in 1904. In 1927 the church

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gave their pastor a Ford automobile and also put in electricity in the church. In 1937 an educational building was added. As all can see this beautiful old church has continued to thrive and has built a lovely parsonage and several additions to the educational building.

Dr. Warfield thanked the Reverend Renalds for his talk and hospitality and stated it was a privilege for our organization to meet here.

Following this interesting talk and welcome by Mr. Renalds, the minutes of the January meeting were read and approved. The treasurer’s report was given by Mr. Smither, who reported a balance of $980.77. There were no reports from the Membership and Publicity Committees. Mrs. Wright reported that one home had been secured for the House Tour and several others have been contacted or were in the process of being contacted or awaiting owner’s decisions about opening their homes. A full report is promised at the next meeting.

Mr. Slaughter and Mr. Warner reported on Historical Materials and the Publications Committees respectively. Mr. Warner stated the binding of the bulletins was much too expensive for our organization to attempt at this time. There being no further business, Dr. Warfield turned the meeting over to Mr. Eldon Christopher, Vice President and Program Chairman, to introduce our speaker, Dr. Edward D.C. Campbell, Jr., who is at present Director of Development for the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond and who had previously held the same position with the Museum of the Confederacy. He has done extensive research and writing in American History, literature and films, in Afro-American slavery and its aftermath and the Old and New South. Dr. Campbell received his B.A. from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and his Ph.D. from the University of South Carolina. Dr. Campbell held many Fellowships in History in graduate programs. Dr. Campbell is eminently able to discuss History from any point and we are very fortunate to have him for our speaker.

Dr. Campbell said when he was asked to speak to the Essex Historical Society, he went in search of material and found a whole drawer on Essex County — a really incredible amount of information involving every aspect of the history of Essex. Maps, homes, land grants, letters, pictures, newspapers, books, court case records, etc. It was difficult with so much material to make selections to talk about. There were papers on Bathurst, Bellevue, Ben Lomond, Elmwood, Kinloch, Blandfield, Linden, Loretto, Center Cross, Paradise, Prospect Hill, Walnut Chase, Millers Tavern, and many others not mentioned here. There were Taylor family papers referring to Paradise, dating from 1650 to 1790. There was a letter about Paradise from John Taylor to Robert Beverley. There were 5800 letters referring to Essex Agricultural Activities.

Dr. Campbell spoke of the wonderful map by Harry Beverley in 1706 of Tappahannock Towne, which was of the original 50 acres forming the town known before as Hobb’s His Hole. He mentioned letters of Edmund Ruffin, the great agriculturist, Dr. Richard Ludwell, a William Campbell (no relation to him), and David Pitt, about a bill. He had a copy of a Lottery Circular dated 1732 to be held in Essex County to raise 300 pounds for the purpose of repairing churches in St. Anne’s Parish; there were 3332 tickets to be sold and $1000 was to be first prize, and many more ranging down to $5.00. The drawing was to take place the first Monday in August, 1732. If all winners did not claim their prizes in six months, they were to be donated to the Parish.

There were tax records, county financial statements of the early 1900’s showing the Sheriff’s salary as $300 a year, also the Commonwealth’s Attorney was paid $300, the Court Clerk received $400, and the members of the Board of Supervisors received $69.90 every six months. Dr. Campbell mentioned "Virginia Sketches", a book by Virginia Showell which described in detail a delightful trip from Upper Essex to Tappahannock, the view of the river, the many errands requested by persons along the way, etc. He mentioned Monument Hotel or Miss Jenny Gresham’s Hotel, which was located across from the Court House. He also made some very interesting comments and particularly humorous on the advertisements appearing in the 1940 edition of "Old Homes of Essex".

Dr. Campbell concluded his interesting account of the materials available at Virginia Historical Society headquarters, with quotations from Mr. Henry W. Garnett’s address on July 4, 1876, in Mr. William C. Garnett’s book, Tidewater Tales. He gave a summary of W. C. Garnett’s philosophy on education. Mr. Garnett was a noted teacher and author who lived at “Hill and Dale” near Dumsville. (This will be one of the homes open for the House Tour in October.)

Mr. Christopher and Dr. Warfield thanked Dr. Campbell for his very interesting and humorous address and invited all to attend the reception following. Dr. Warfield also thanked the hostesses, Mrs. Spottwood Taliaferro, Chairman, Mrs. Robert L. Ellis, Jr., Miss Elva Powers, Mrs. Wythe Bowe, Mrs. Norman McElroy, Mrs. Hill Wellford, Mrs. Robert Gouldin, and Mrs. Ludwell Smither, who provided delicious refreshments for our social hour.

Anne T. Wright, Secretary

Officers of the Society

President .................. Mr. Calvin N. Warfield
Vice President ............... Mr. Eldon W. Christopher
Treasurer ...................... Mr. Ludwell Smith
Secretary ...................... Mrs. William A. Wright

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