Essex County Historical Society

ESSEX COUNTY 1692

VOLUME 26 TAPPAHANNOCK, VIRGINIA MAY, 1985

Virginia Governors from Essex County

by E. Lee Shepard*

Essex County was home to at least three men who served as governor of Virginia in the early years of the Old Dominion. In common they shared one very interesting characteristic—each served his native land as chief executive for a surprisingly brief period. Yet, if their terms were shortlived, their lives as a whole demonstrated that capacity for leadership, so vital in the formative years of the Commonwealth, was not lacking.

John Robinson (1683-1749)

The most controversial aspect of the administration of John Robinson as deputy governor of Virginia revolves around the question of its very occurrence. Conflicting evidence and an unfortunate heritage of superficial analysis has nurtured one of those intriguing puzzles of Virginia's colonial history.

John Robinson was born at "Hewick" in Middlesex county, the residence of his father, Christopher (1645-1693)and his wife Agatha Obert. Upon his death, Christopher Robinson bequeathed £50 to maintain his son at school in England, no doubt under the care of the boy's uncle, Dr. John Robinson, bishop of Bristol and London. When young John Robinson returned to Virginia, he apparently settled on a plantation in Middlesex County left to him by his father. Under the watchful care of his older brother Christopher (1681-1727), burgess and naval officer of the Rappahannock River, John commenced life as a Virginia planter and began to move in the polite circles of rural Virginia society. In 1706 he was elected to the vestry of Christ Church Parish, the same year of his appointment to the Middlesex commission of the peace. He, Christopher Robinson and Harry Beverley secured appointment later as trustees of the new town of Urbanna from the General Assembly. All these activities typified the young gentleman planter of Virginia and augured well for Robinson's own political future.

The freeholders of Middlesex County sent Robinson to the House of Burgesses in 1710, where he joined his brother Christopher and rapidly came to the notice of Governor Alexander Spotswood. The governor liked what he saw. Within a few years he wrote to the Lords of Trade to recommend Robinson for a seat on the Council, the governor's powerful advisory body that functioned in executive, legislative and judicial capacities as a part of the colony's General Assembly. As Spotswood told the Bishop of London in the spring of 1713: Robinson's "qualifications for that trust, (I am perswaded,) are not inferior to any other in this Country. I should have been loath to loose [*sic*] him out of our House of Burgesses (where he has done remarkable service,) were it not to give him an opportunity of serving her Maj'tie in a more hon'ble Station . . ." Yet Spotswood's interest in the Middlesex planter went beyond the younger man's innate abilities. Most important in light of the governor's ongoing power struggle with the Blair-Burwell-Ludwell-Harrison clique, was Robinson's lack of familial connections with Spotswood's enemies. Whether Virginians truthfully "felt and dreaded" the "inconveniencys of too many Relations" in the Council, as Spotswood asserted, unquestionably men like Robinson saw in the conflict a unique opportunity for advancement under the governor's patronage. Though Robinson failed to secure appointment in 1713, Spotswood patiently bided his time and in the interlude granted Robinson the post of tobacco agent at Urbanna, a lucrative and influential office. Turmoil over the development of Urbanna reportedly led to the defeat of the Robinson brothers in the burgess elections of 1715.

About 1701 John Robinson married Catherine Beverley, daughter of Major Robert Beverley of Middlesex County. The couple had seven children, including John (1704-1766), speaker of the House of Burgesses and treasurer of the colony. In the summer of 1726 Catherine Robinson died and shortly thereafter her husband seems to have left Middlesex. A marriage settlement with his second wife in 1731 places Robinson at the time in Spotsylvania County. His new wife was Lady Mary Bathurst of Essex County, daughter of Lancelot Bathurst of New Kent County and widow of both Francis Meriwether and Reuben Welch. Tradition holds that after their marriage the Robinsons lived at "Bathurst," Mrs. Robinson's estate on Piscataway Creek, until her death in 1738. (Interestingly, this was also the home of a later governor from Essex, George William Smith.) Robinson purchased his own estate on the Piscataway, called "Piscataqua,"

*Mr. Shepard joined the staff of the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond in 1974, after completing graduate studies at the University of Virginia. He currently heads the Department of Archives and Manuscript Acquisitions. He has published articles and reviews in the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, *Journal of Southern History*, and *American Journal of Legal History*.

where his daughter Katherine married lawyer Peter Wagener in 1739.

In 1720 Governor Spotswood renewed his appeal for the appointment of Robinson to the Virginia Council, this time successfully. The new councillor joined that body in May of 1721 and remained active until his death nearly two decades later. During that lengthy period of service, he took part in a number of important and controversial matters. In 1731 Robinson was selected by his fellow councillors to direct the preparation of a map of the colony "from the Sea to the utmost Extent thereof now inhabited," and was granted funds to accomplish the mission. From 1735 to 1746 he acted as one of the commissioners of the king in the sensitive negotiations to settle the boundaries of the Northern Neck Proprietary. Governor Sir William Gooch appointed him in 1744 to succeed John Carter in the powerful post of secretary of the colony until the king could designate a new officer. Meanwhile Robinson rose in seniority on the Council until he assumed the presidency of that body.

Gooch, after a long and successful career as deputy governor, determined to return to England in 1749, announcing his intention in July of that year. While early nineteenth-century historians recognized that the governor did not leave the colony until a month later, some scholars have dated President Robinson's caretaker administration from mid-June 1749. Actually, Gooch and his family embarked in mid-August.

The governor and his party went to Yorktown and were there seen off by a number of councillors, including John Robinson. "Contrary winds" detained the governor's vessel, keeping the ship within sight of land. In the meantime, Robinson took sick and died on August 24 at the house of Councillor William Nelson in Yorktown. No evidence exists to suggest that he ever took the oaths as deputy governor or ever exercised the duties of the office, as Gooch had never really been beyond reach. The governor landed, convened the council and proceeded to select another councillor to act as deputy governor. The elderly and enfeebled John Custis declined service and the post fell to Thomas Lee.

Interestingly, the *Maryland Gazette* of 30 August 1749, in reporting the death of Robinson, identifies him as the councillor "upon whom devolved the Government during the absence of the Governor," phrasing its report in such manner as to assume that Robinson had indeed functioned as chief executive. Two months later the *Gentlemen's Magazine* of London, no doubt sharing with its readers a report received from Gooch himself, noticed the passing of "Hon. *John Robinson,* Esq.; president of the Council and deputy governor of *Virginia.*"

David Jameson (-1793)

A student of Virginia's colonial mercantile community once portrayed David Jameson as a man who "seems to have inherited a gift for abundant life." Merchant, scientist and statesman, Jameson pursued a remarkable career during the turbulent Revolutionary era in Virginia.

David Jameson was born to James and Margaret Jameson of St. Anne's Parish, Essex County, probably early in the 1720s. His brother Thomas qualified as guardian of the young man in 1739. He must have reached his majority within the next few years, however, for he makes his first official appearance in the records in a 1746 issue of the *Virginia Gazette,* as one of the proprietors of the Raleigh Tavern in the colonial capital. By 1751 he had definitely left Essex and become established in Yorktown as a merchant. There he associated with the prestigious London firm of John Norton and Sons, speculated in the importation of slaves, operated a warehouse, managed lotteries and dabbled in real estate. He married Mildred Smith (1732-1778) by 1751 and they lived in the house built by her father, Edmund Smith, in the center of Yorktown. By 1773, a contemporary merchant described Jameson to a correspondent as "a Man of fortune and one whom you may depend on as he imports pretty largely. . ."

But David Jameson lived not by bread alone. He engaged in numerous civic activities and took pride in his post as treasurer of the "Society for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge." That organization he helped to establish in Williamsburg in 1773 with botanist John Clayton and John Page of "Rosewell." He and Page reportedly took the first moisture measurements in America with a device of their own design.

Jameson early advocated American rights in the struggle with Great Britain. He signed the 1770 Nonimportation Association and two years later sat on the Virginia Merchants Committee of Trade. When the Revolutionary crisis erupted, he was too old to fight, but he sought and won election to the General Assembly, representing the York district in the newly created Virginia Senate of 1776. His fellow legislators soon elevated him to Governor Patrick Henry's advisory council, where he served throughout the war, associated with such patriots as James Madison, John Blair, Dudley Digges and Thomas Jefferson. The long years of service took their toll. As Jameson told James Madison in 1780: "no Man has a right to withdraw himself altogether from the service of his Country at this critical time, but you will allow he may make room for a better Man to fill his place. . . . A sacrifice ought to be made, but of time, (a risk) of health, and of fortune too, is too much."

The crisis of 1781 proved the greatest test for Jameson. With the invasion of Virginia by British forces under Generals Phillips and Arnold, followed later by the arrival of Cornwallis's troops, the Old dominion remained in turmoil nearly the entire year. Now senior member of the Council, Jameson worked closely with Thomas Nelson, who was elected governor in June. During the latter stages of the Yorktown Campaign, Nelson took personal command of the state's militia and left Jameson, already exiled to Richmond, to gather together as many of the Council as he could to administer the government. Jameson wrote letters and deployed agents to seek meal and flour to feed American and French forces; directed the mustering of troops and naval forces; and generally urged his fellow citizens to persist in this last great struggle for independence. Following the surrender of Cornwallis, Thomas Nelson resigned as governor. Jameson then officially stepped in for about a week until the legislature elected his successor, Benjamin Harrison, on December 1, 1781. Freed from his arduous duties, Jameson wearily travelled back to Yorktown, "endeavouring to collect the scattered remains of the effects which are left him. . ."

David Jameson returned to the Virginia Senate for the York district in 1782 and served for six sessions (to 1783). Then he gradually retired from public life. He died childless in Yorktown on 10 July 1793, "after a tedious and distressing illness," as the *Virginia Gazette* of Richmond reported. His substantial estate, recouped from the devastation of war, was divided amoung his nephews John Jameson of Yorktown, David Jameson of Caroline County (1757-1833) and David Jameson of Culpeper County (1752-1839).

George William Smith (1762-1811)

The third Virginia governor from Essex County was born in 1762. Son of Meriwether Smith (1730-1794), Revolutionary leader and Continental Congressman, and his first wife, Alice Lee of Maryland, Smith grew to maturity at "Bathurst," the famous Essex County plantation. Built by his great-grandparents Francis Meriwether and Lady Mary (Bathurst) Meriwether, the home lay two miles below Tappahannock on Piscataway Creek. It descended through Meriwether's daughter Lucy, wife of Francis Smith, to her son Congressman Smith, and finally became the residence of George William Smith.

Smith trained as a lawyer, travelling the Essex circuit with the likes of Alexander Campbell, Francis T. Brooke and John Warden. Like so many young attorneys of the day, he aspired to a seat in the legislature, winning election to the House of Delegates from Essex in 1790. He served four sessions, 1790-1794, but apparently decided as early as 1793 to seek his fortune in the Commonwealth's capital. Certainly influential in that move was his marriage in the same year to Sarah Adams (1766-1806), daughter of prominent Richmonder Richard Adams. He sold "Bathurst" to Thomas Jones in 1795 and removed to the banks of the James River.

Commencing his practice in the local courts of Richmond and the surrounding counties, Smith gradually moved upward in the legal hierarchy. He qualified to practice before the state's highest court in April 1797. Contemporaries claimed he took "a leading position at the bar." Certainly he rose rapidly to prominence, for by 1801 he returned to the legislature, this time a delegate from Richmond City. He lost a contested election to John H. Foushee in 1807, but in the same year was elected to the Council of State, the governor's advisory body.

Smith was one of the first to build a home on the prominent bluff of Libby Hill in Richmond. His home at Twenty-seventh and Franklin streets after his death became the residence of Scottish merchant and entrepreneur David Ross. He joined a company of light infantry, the Richmond Republican Blues, as captain in 1805. By 1809 he had risen to the rank of colonel of the 19th Infantry Regiment of Virginia Militia. In 1808, following the death of his first wife, Smith married Lucy Franklin Read, daughter of Dr. John Koyall Read (1746-1805) of Hanover Town and Norfolk and widow of *Richmond Examiner* editor Meriwether Jones. As lawyer, militia officer and councillor, George W. Smith occupied a prestigious niche in the life of the capital city.

1811 proved to be the most eventful, though ill-fated year of Smith's life. In mid-January the councillor acted for several days as governor following the resignation of John Tyler, Sr. Tyler had accepted appointment as judge of the U.S. District Court at Richmond. Smith then stood for election to the governor's office, but opponent James Monroe defeated him handily. Three months later he suddenly found himself in the chief executive's chair again by virtue of his status as president of the Council of State. Monroe resigned to accept the post of secretary of state in President Madison's cabinet. The move precipitated a mild constitutional crisis, as the Council debated whether to call the Assembly back into session or to interpret the state constitution as allowing the council president to assume the powers of the chief executive until the legislature would normally reconvene and elect a successor. The Council opted for this latter approach, and Smith took great pains to justify this action to the Assembly in December 1811. That body certified its approval by voting Smith into the governor's office, albeit by only a three-vote margin over candidate James Barbour.

During Smith's brief tenure, Virginia faced a number of crucial issues. Foremost among these was the heightening tensions with Great Britain, which would soon lead to war. Internal defense and the political stance of the federal congress occupied the attention of the Assembly. So, too, did domestic matters. The newly reorganized Supreme Court of Appeals had begun to function and several vacancies had to be filled. Questions continued to be raised in regard to bounty lands set aside for veterans of the Revolutionary War. Smith himself, in his capacity as governor, made reports on the operation of the newly inaugurated literary fund, established to provide for "the education of the poor" in Virginia. It was a busy time, but destined for George William Smith to end quite suddenly and tragically.

On Decemer 26, a large crowd attended a performance at the Richmond Theatre. A chandelier accidently ignited scenery and led to a disastrous fire. Governor Smith, one of the audience that evening, sought vainly to rescue his young son in the ensuing confusion. The child, however, had already fled the building and Governor Smith perished in the flames unaware of his son's escape. The following morning the death toll stood at 72. Resolutions of sorrow poured into Richmond from across the nation. Richmonders themselves paid lasting tribute to the victims by raising funds to build Monumental Church on the Theatre site. After several days of mourning, the legislature elected consensus candidate James Barbour to succeed as governor the much lamented George William Smith.

Select Bibliography:

Robinson: *Genealogies of Virginia Families from the Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (1981), V; R. A. Brock, ed., *The Official Letters of Alexander Spotswood* (1882-1885); *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia* (1925-1945), II-V; *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg); D. Alan Williams, "The Phantom Governorship of John Robinson, Sr., 1749," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography,* LXVIII (1960), 104-106.

Jameson: James M. Bourne, "The Jameson Family," *William and Mary Quarterly,* series 1, V, 90-92; Clyde F. Trudell, *Colonial Yorktown* (2nd ed., 1971), 111-114; Frances Norton Mason, ed., *John Norton and Sons: Merchants of London and Virginia* (1937); John W. Raimo, *Biographical Directory of American Colonial and Revolutionary Governors, 1607-1789* (1980), 506; H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Official Letters of the Governors of the State of Virginia,* III (1929); William T. Hutchinson et al., eds., *The Papers of James Madison* (1962-), II-III; *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg).

Smith: C. W. Coleman, comp., "Genealogy of the Smith Family of Essex County, Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly,* series 1, VI (1897-1898), 41-52; W. Asbury Christian, *Richmond: Her Past and Present* (1912); Charles D. Lowery, *James Barbour: A Jeffersonian Republican* (1984); *Journal of the House of Delegates of Virginia* (1812); W. P. Palmer et al., eds., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers* (1875-1893), IX-X.

MINUTES OF THE SOCIETY

The Essex County Historical Society met at 3:00 p.m. at the Court House, Sunday January 27, 1985, with our president, Mr. Hill B. Wellford presiding. Mr. Wellford enthusiastically welcomed the large number of members present and Mr. and Mrs. John W. Foley and Mr. Gwen Tayloe, guests, who became new members. He also stressed that our membership goal is 200 members. We have at present 149 active members. He stated our April meeting would be at Poplar Forest, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Ellis, Jr., near Champlain.

Mr. Ludwell Smither, Treasurer, gave his report stating he had two new members, Mrs. Joyce Browning, Tappahannock, and Mr. M. K. Gilbert, Louisville, Kentucky. Mr. Smither stated he had purchased a $600 4-year certificate of deposit with interest at 11.35% with the money paid by six life members. Mr. Wilson Ware and Mrs. Roberta Piper became life members today. Mrs. Lawrence Dortch of Nashville, Tennessee (the former Margaret Anderton of Tappahannock) is also a new life member. This money will go in a Savings Account until we have enough for another C.D. After paying all outstanding bills as of January 27, there was a balance of $290.59. Dues are due in January so this balance will increase considerably.

Mr. Wellford then asked Mrs. Wright, Secretary, to read the minutes of the October meeting. Mrs. Wright asked that the reading of the minutes be dispensed with since they had been printed in the fall bulletin which all members had already received.

Mr. Wellford turned the meeting over to our Vice-President, Mr. Carroll Garnett, who introduced our speaker, Mr. Minor T. Weisiger, a native of Richmond. Mr. Weisiger received his B.A. and M.A. from the University of Virginia and was Director of Research for the State Republican Party for a few years and for the past year has been Assistant Curator of the Valentine Museum. He has been particularly interested in studying the Governors of Virginia and wrote a chapter in a book of this title published in 1982. This chapter was written about Gov. Charles T. McFarrell. Today, Mr. Weisiger will talk about another governor, George William Smith, a native of Essex County.

Mr. Weisiger thanked Mr. Garnett and his friend, Mr. Wilson C. Ware, for their splendid hospitality entertaining him for luncheon at Lowery's and his short tour of historic Tappahannock. Mr. Weisiger said he had been particularly interested in Governor George William Smith who lost his life in the great Richmond Theatre fire, and who like other governors, seemed to be forgotten. Mr. Weisiger stated it was difficult to find a great deal about Governor Smith from Essex, even though Essex had many prominent sons in other political fields such as Thomas Ritchie and Spencer Roane, close freinds and associates of Thomas Jefferson. Spencer Roane would have been appointed Supreme Court Justice if Adams had not made the midnight appointment of John Marshall, so history is changed.

Mr. Weisiger said it was impossible to find much about Governor Smith's youth. His father, Meriwether Smith, was perhaps Essex's most important citizen during the Revolutionary period, serving Virginia and our new nation in many ways. Mr. Weisiger recounted many of his accomplishments. Governor Smith was born at "Bathurst;" his mother was Alice Lee, who died in his early youth. Meriwether Smith's second wife, Lucy Daingerfield, seems to have been a very exceptional stepmother. We have to assume George William spent his youth in Essex, probably educated by Mr. Mathews and others in the area, and that he knew and loved fishing and hunting and probably helped in his father's store in Tappahannock. In 1789 he ran for the House of Delegates and was defeated. In 1789 he wrote a long letter to George Washington in which he stated he would like to be appointed to some position serving his state as he felt particularly inclined in this field. He was elected to the House of Delegates in 1790. In 1792 he was licensed to practice law, his license being signed by Spencer Roane. In 1798 he was chosen Deputy Attorney of Richmond and he served as prosecuting attorney in 1800 when there was the Gabriel Slave Revolt Plot which was the largest of its kind ever uncovered; thousands of slaves were involved—a very important incident in Virginia History.

In 1801, and again in 1807, he was elected to the House of Delegates from the city of Richmond. He served in the Militia as Colonel of the 19th Regiment. He was sworn into office on the Privy Council in 1808. This oath was very interesting. The oath he took was "to the best of my skill and judgement without favor, affection, partiality, ill will, or malice." In 1809 he became Lieutenant Governor of Virginia, and he was acting Governor most of the time until January 1811 when James Monroe was elected Governor. Monroe resigned to become Secretary of State, at which time George William Smith again became Acting Governor until elected in December 1811 over James Barbour. He had resigned as Colonel of the 19th Regiment and at the banquet 19 toasts were drunk. One of his last acts was to subscribe to a Memorial to a Revolutionary hero who had not received recognition as he felt many, including his father, had not received proper recognition. December 26th, the last day of his life, he dealt with many duties and attended the theatre in the evening, and one of the greatest tragedies in history took place when the theatre caught fire with 600 people attending and over 100 people were killed. His ashes are interned under Monumental Church which was built as a memorial. The U.S. Congress wore mourning for 30 days. Peyton Randolph said "this unhappy event has deprived society of a most useful citizen, the state a faithful officer, and his amiable family their only support." Mr. Weisiger stated that this is a good example of why Virginia was so important in the nation because so many Virginians like Madison and Monroe and like George William Smith a very fine public servant, so well prepared to take the reigns of government, so willingly served our state and nation. After a few observations and questions by Mr. Charles Warner, Mr. Garnett and Mr. Wellford thanked our speaker, and the meeting adjourned to attend a social hour in the Woman's Club House.

We would like to thank our Hospitality Committee, Mrs. Nancy Ball, Chairman, Mrs. Haile Parker, Mrs. Lawrence Andrews, Mrs. John Raines, and Mrs. Robert Mann for the delicious refreshments and a delightful social hour.

The Essex County Historical Society met on a beautiful Sunday afternoon, April 21, 1985 at 3:00 p.m. at Poplar Forest, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Ellis, Jr. Mr. Hill B. Wellford, president, opened the meeting, thanking Mr. and Mrs. Ellis for having us and asked Mrs. Ellis to say a few words. Mrs. Ellis welcomed us warmly and asked her granddaughter, Jenna, to read a short, very interesting history of Poplar Forest and the Ellis family.

Mr. Wellford then asked Mrs. Wright, Secretary, to read the minutes of our January meeting, which were

read. Mr. Ludwell Smither, Treasurer, gave his report stating the improved financial condition of the Society. He announced two more life members, Mr. Thomas E. Evans, Jr., and his mother, Mrs. Hannah Hundley Evans of Wilmington, Delaware, and two new members from Gwynnfield, Mrs. Lawrence Payseure and her son, Rodney. Mr. Wellford reiterated our drive for more members and asked each member to try to get at least one new member this year. Mr. Wellford also stated that several persons had brought to his attention the state of the Brockenbrough family cemetery which is on Water Lane next to Aycock's and asked a show of hands of those members who will give help in cleaning it up.

Mr. Wellford then asked Mr. Carroll Garnett, Vice-President in charge of programs, to present our guest speaker, Professor Robert A. Hodges. Mr. Hodges is a native of Kansas and in 1953 he moved to Virginia and taught in the schools of Augusta and Fredericksburg until 1970 when he joined the faculty of Germanna Community College. He is an archeologist and has devoted many summers excavating early artifacts and participating in Earth Watch Expeditions both here (U.S.) and in Africa. In addition to his teaching, archeology, he has a hobby researching early newspapers. He has taken a special interest in the history of mad stones, the topic of his talk today.

Mr. Hodges said that he became interested in "Mad Stones" when he was researching old newspapers and found so much documented evidence of their existence and how they had saved so many lives from mad dog bites, snake and spider bites which were deadly poisonous. He talked extensively about the "Mad Stone" which resides in the Clerk's Office of Essex County, which he and many of us have seen. He told about a John Tabb of North River, Mathews County, who had been paid for board, room and medical treatment by a Frenchman, Francis Torres, with what he called a Chinese snake-stone, which will extract the poison of the bite of snakes, spiders, and of a mad dog, and will cure cancers, which are sold at half a Guinea for the small and a Guinea for the large ones. This was quoted on the paper in which the stone was wrapped and was dated Charleston, S.C., 1740.

As late as 1803, Tabb's wife was applying the stone, but in that year it was sold by Christopher Gayle (believed to be a son-in-law) to James H. Roy. By 1805 James R. Micou owned the stone, reportedly paying thirty acres of land for it, then he advertised the stone for sale, his price being $2,000. Within a year, 200 shares at $10 each were taken by subscribers in Essex, King & Queen, King William, Lancaster, Middlesex, Northumberland, Richmond and Westmoreland counties. The stone was placed with Dr. Austin Brockenbrough of Tappahannock. Shareholders and their families were to be treated free of charge, others were to pay $8 for the first and $2 for each additional application. In 1781 Argile W. White was treated by John Tabb for eleven spider bites on the waist. About 1788 Col. Lewis Willis of Fredericksburg sent a young Negro wheelwright for treatment of a mad dog bite. Another Negro bitten by the same dog, but not treated by the mad stone, died less than eight weeks later of hydrophobia. In 1792 John Daingerfield of Tappahannock sent two dog-bitten Negroes to Mrs. Tabb for treatment. Another man and several dogs, bitten but not treated died, mad. In 1799, Mordecai Gregory sent two Negroes for successful treatment. On November 10, 1803 William Pollard of Hanover sought treatment from Mrs. Tabb. The stone remained in place twelve hours and when cleansed in water, the poison could be seen streaming in hair-like strands from the stone. The stone would only remain in place as long as the wound had poison in it, when it would fall away and the poison had to be cleansed from the stone in either milk or water. If the wound was not poisonous the stone would not adhere. This same year, three members of the family of W. Gatewood sought treatment from James R. Micou, one of the members already exhibiting signs of hydrophobia. All recovered. In 1874, Thomas E. Taft of Essex County sought the stone as did Cecil Knapp, 13-year-old son of Joseph Knapp of Red House, King & Queen County. The stone was applied to Selden R. Warner, 12-year-old son of C. C. Warner in 1897. Since Selden Warner was a great-grandson of E. M. Ware, an original shareholder, no charge was made for this treatment. The same year, Walter W. Lee was treated for a mad dog bite and observed the green color of the cleansing fluid. In 1953 Mr. Lee gave an affidavit of the above to Arnold Motley, Clerk of the Court in Tappahannock. Between 1874 and 1905, two doctors, W. G. Jeffries and William Taliaferro applied the stone. Ownership was assumed about 1905 by James Roy Micou, Jr., who took the stone to Chestertown, Maryland where he was a professor at Washington College. Sometime prior to 1934, it was returned to the custody of Allen Douglas Latane, County Clerk of Essex. At his death in 1948, Latane willed the stone to the Woman's Club of Essex with the proviso that the stone be kept at the courthouse.

Today, the 230-year-old stone lies in a locked box in the record room of the Essex courthouse where, upon request, the Clerk will permit it to be examined. The Mad Stone is about two inches long, one inch wide, one-half inch thick, and because it is cracked across the width, is bound together by a silver colored band. The stone has the appearance of petrified wood, being various shades of rusty-brown and tan with some darker spots. It shows grain and porosity and is somewhat polished. In December 1971, Mrs. W. Brooke Carter recounted to Mr. Hodges how as a mere child, she had helped her father, Dr. William Taliaferro, apply the stone to Mrs. Sorrell of Sparta. Mrs. Sorrell had been scratched and bitten by a rabid cat.

Mr. Hodges said that this detailed history of the Essex County mad stone is typical of at least three other Virginia mad stones whose source was also "the Native of France" but whose present whereabouts are unkown. Mr. Hodges told of several applications of these stones described in stories appearing in the Alexandria Gazette. The belief in the mad stone was not limited to Virginia, for during the late 1700s and all through the 1800s, there are records of their existence or use in at least 22 states.

While one writer described them as "more wonderful than any tale that lightened the house of the Arabia Nights," there were doubters as evidenced by another who wrote they were "the most translucent humbug." Mr. Hodges said like any superstition, there is an air of the mystical involved; no rational explanation for the behavior of the stones for the many cases of apparently successful applications. Yet, if one analyzes the cases carefully, he will find one unifying theme—the emotional grasping of straws called "faith." It would seem to be that, and that alone, that really does the job!

There was much applause and thanks given to Professor Hodges for one of the most interesting and entertaining talks we have had at our society. He generously brought along a pamphlet which contained an article by him from which he took the majority of his talk and he gave them out after the meeting. There will be one on file in the Historical Society Files in the Clerk's Office.

Mr. Wellford thanked the hostesses for today, Mrs. Robert L. Ellis, Jr., Chairman, Mrs. Hill Wellford, Mrs. Wythe Bowe, Mrs. Spottswood Taliaferro, Mrs. Daisy Gouldin, Ms. Rob Piper, Ms. Elva Powers and Mrs. Ludwell Smither. He then adjourned the meeting and invited everyone to the house for these delicious refreshments. Mrs. Ellis greeted everyone and cordially invited them to tour their lovely home.

Mr. Carroll Garnett, Vice-President, announced that for the July 21, 1985 meeting at the Court House, Mr. John Careatti will be our guest speaker. He will talk about "Horse Shoes and Metal Work Design."

Anne T. Wright, *Secretary*

Officers of the Society

President . . . . . Hill B. Wellford
Vice President . . . . . Carroll Garnett
Treasurer . . . . . Ludwell Smither
Secretary . . . . . Anne T. Wright

PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE

Charles W. H. Warner, *Chairman*
Mrs. William A. Wright, Mrs. J.M. Evans, James Slaughter

HISTORICAL MATERIALS COMMITTEE

James Slaughter, *Chairman*

Meetings are held quarterly in the Essex Court House, or in an historic home or church of the County. Dues are $5.00 per year. For copies of publications send $2.00 to Mrs. J. M. Evans, Box 8, Tappahannock, Virginia 22560.

IN MEMORIAM

Sidney J. Hilton, Sr.

President of the Essex County Historical Society

1974-1975; 1977-1978

BARBOUR PRINTING SERVICES, INC., TAPPAHANNOCK, VIRGINIA