In this part of Virginia, when we discuss local history we are discussing American History — some of it good and progressive, some of it bad and regressive — but all of it important because Virginia is one of the major areas in the United States which has served as the cradle of our nation, and in some ways, still does.

You and I live on the scenes of the beginnings of our country’s recorded history — from Captain John Smith; Chief Powhatan, the last great Indian leader; Peter Jefferson and Jonathan Frye, early map makers; Thomas Jefferson, the framer of our Declaration of Independence; James Madison, Father of the Constitution; George Washington who breathed life into the Constitution; Lafayette and deRochambeau who helped make it possible for the Constitution to take effect; Francis Lightfoot Lee and Richard Henry Lee, labourers in the Constitutional vineyard; and later, Robert Edward Lee, a giant among generals, who led the only significant military rebellion against the American Constitution; Senator Harry Byrd, the last American politician to openly defy the Constitution with his massive resistance movement; on to Douglas Wilder, the first elected black governor of any state in the union... in a sense one of the men who is insuring that the Constitution applies to all of our people, not to a chosen few.

This is an amazing outline of historical progression which these Tidewater farms and towns have witnessed and to which they have contributed.

Most of us here today take an active interest in our American history. We support professional historians at our colleges and universities. Individually we work at keeping the records accurate and up to date. Members of the Essex County Historical Society, the Northern Neck Historical Society, Mary Ball Washington Museum, Historic Christ Church, Washington’s Birthplace Memorial Association, Stratford Hall — hundreds of us work unceasingly to discover, preserve, and disseminate complete and valid information.

Some years ago, when I lived in Iran, every politician or general giving a speech would open with the phrase, “During our 2500 years of glorious history” — Well, our American history is short compared to theirs but by New World standards we do go back to the earliest Spanish and French explorers of our coasts and rivers, including the Rappahannock here. The very volume of local historical data makes the job of keeping the record straight difficult.

Now most of us history buffs are getting old and too few members of the present generation share our interest and enthusiasm.

I’d like to mention some notable exceptions among young people whom I know: Rusty Brown who traveled to Europe to find his roots; Chip Delano, who researched the activities of free black families in the pre-Civil War period; Jimmy Slaughter who wrote an outstanding paper on School Integration in the Northern Neck and later edited your Essex County history, Settlers, Southerners, Americans; Beth Pardoe, who wrote excellent biographical sketches of a pre-Revolutionary War black female slave and of an early Lee family feminist.

There is, what I consider, an unhealthy apathy in regard to history on the part of most younger Americans, not only in Virginia but nationwide. Here, in the homeland of Washington, Jefferson, Marshall, and Lee
there are high school students who do not know of what it is that George Washington is Father, which army in which war was commanded by Robert E. Lee, which political party was led by Grant, Nixon, and Reagan and which by Jefferson, F.D.R., and John Kennedy. They may know that Woodrow Wilson was born in Virginia but not more than 1 in 100 would know that he lived in half a dozen other states and that his residence in New Jersey was the longest.

If you hold personal priorities along the lines of mine you may agree with me that the two greatest Virginians were both Marshalls—completely unrelated as far as I know—Chief Justice John Marshall whose work ensured the success of the United States under the Constitution and General George Catlett Marshall whose work ensured that President Franklin Roosevelt could lead us to victory in World War II and that President Truman could stand tall in the post-war years. Again, I would win any wager that not more than one in one hundred high school students could correctly identify both of these truly great Virginians.

Another World War II Virginian of note was General George Patton, certainly one of our greatest field commanders. Many students may know that he sported pearl handled revolvers and swore a lot but I’ve yet to meet one who knows of General Patton’s love for the classics, poetry, established literary art forms, and thoroughbred horses. They are also a bit hazy as to whether he was notable in World War I, World War II, or Viet Nam.

Can’t we do better at stimulating our youth’s interest in historical affairs? Can’t we encourage our grade school and high school authorities to give meaningful, realistic instruction in historical subjects? Unless such scholarship is expected, inspired, and encouraged, America’s next generation will be as historically illiterate as the present one is generally so in math and lab sciences. This lack of knowledge has developed in the past decade. In the same period the United States has fallen from the position of first in economic and political power. To reverse this decline we must require and furnish the means of thorough learning for students to become scientists, engineers, statesmen, scholars, informed citizens and leaders.

Each of us here can do something about our young people’s ignorance. Find out how school board decisions are made and implemented. Find out what the curriculum at each level covers. Make sure that good teachers are recognized and rewarded. Make sure that inadequate teachers are recognized and retrained or replaced. Make sure that our elected representatives and appointed administrators know that strong teachers and thorough educational systems are priority requirements. Protest the fact that teachers in training often receive more instruction in such subjects as “How to Write on a Blackboard” than in imparting the understanding and use of Math and Science or History.

Americans underemphasize training in diligence, self discipline, and learning. They neglect essential knowledge for superficial, time consuming, non-enriching activities.

The United States is the oldest democratic nation in the world. We have one of the longest lasting, legitimate, non-challenged governments in the world. Our children need to know what that means, how it has come about, the value of that and how to maintain and improve it. We cannot let indolence and ignorance destroy what has been accomplished here. We must work to strengthen our country by upholding standards of excellence and insisting that education for all be of the highest quality.

Fall Meeting of ECHS

THE ESSEX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY met at 3:00 p.m., Sunday October 21, 1990 in the Essex County Court House, Tappahannock, Virginia. Mr. Wilson Ware presiding. The secretary, Mrs. William Wright, asked that reading of the minutes of the July meeting be dispensed with since they appeared in the bulletin we have just received. She then asked for donations toward the purchase of the volume of County Abstracts which the membership present at that meeting voted to buy. We are trying to get by without raising dues. Most of our current fees are required for the production and mailing of the bulletin which keeps the total membership informed. In order to afford other projects we need additional funds.

Mr. Ludwell Smither, treasurer, gave a brief report in order not to delay the program.

Mr. Ware asked that new members and guests be introduced. Vice President Stockdon, as program chairman introduced the guest speaker, Captain Gene Bracken, U.S. Navy (ret.) now serving as docent at the Mariners Museum in Newport News, Virginia.

At the conclusion of the presentation Mr. Ware expressed appreciation to Captain Bracken for his splendid address. He also thanked the Chairman, Mrs. Nancy Tuck Ball and the other hostesses: Mrs. Haile Parker, Mrs. Lawrence Andrews, and Mrs. Patricia Haile for providing and serving the refreshments for the reception in the Woman’s Club following the meeting.

Anne T. Wright, Secretary

The Mariner’s Museum

Address by
CAPTAIN GENE BRACKEN, U.S.N. (RET.)
ECHS meeting October 21, 1990

The Mariner’s Museum in Newport News, Virginia is supported by private funds and receives no financial assistance from the state or national governments.

The Huntington family established the well-known Newport News Ship Yard, the largest ship building company in the United States. They also brought the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad to the city. In addition to many other contributions to the economic and cultural welfare of the area they bequeathed a lovely wooded area for a museum. From one tin building, facilities to house, protect, and display items and information relative to Maritime activities and industries are now encompassed in fourteen magnificent galleries. Graphic models and demonstration of the development of water craft from the simple dug-out through every phase to awesome modern technology make the entire history come alive. There are priceless collections such as the hand made Crabtree miniature ships.

There is a year-round calendar of special events, activities, programs, and exhibits for the public.

Captain Bracken illustrated his description of the museum with beautiful colored slides showing the
treasures which instruct and thrill visitors from all over the world. He distributed brochures which explain some of the many facets of the Museum's operation and surely serve as an inducement to go have a look for ourselves.

Winter Meeting of ECHS

THE ESSEX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY met at Vauter's Church at 3:00 p.m. Sunday January 20, 1991, Mr. Wilson Ware presiding. Reading of the minutes was waived.

Mrs. Wright explained that the Society has a savings account, built from the proceeds of Life Membership fees. Our cash flow from annual membership fees is barely adequate for speakers' gratuities and the production and distribution of two issues of the Bulletin and two other notices of meetings. Therefore, in order to pay for the Abstracts which we want to acquire we will either have to use savings, increase our membership dues and our membership and Life Memberships, or encourage some special donations for special projects. Mr. Ludwell Smither, Treasurer, presented his report to be filed for audit.

The President acknowledged the Hostesses for the day's Social Hour: Mrs. Eldon Christopher, Chairman, and Mrs. Hill Wellford, Mrs. Emory Carlton, Mrs. Vincent Montsinger, Mrs. Ludwell Smither, Mrs. Gordon Lewis, Mrs. John Foley, Mrs. Ruth Bland, Mrs. Jeanette Ellis, and Mrs. Anne T. Wright, and thanked them for their contributions.

Mr. Ware asked Mr. Hill Wellford to present some facts about Vauter's Church.

Colonel Stockdon displayed a quilt which his mother had made from his collection of badges and insignia of the different uniformed services of the U.S.

He then introduced Mr. C. Holson Goddin, lawyer and historian, from Richmond. Mr. Goddin was well known to many of our members, having attended Hampden-Sydney College and Washington and Lee University Law School. He is a member of the Virginia Historical Society. He has been a student of the Civil War for many years, participated in the Civil War Round Table, and was chairman of the Civil War Centennial Celebration Commission. His topic was the famous Dahlgren's Raid, of special interest to me as I used to pass an historical marker on Route 14 on my way to teach at Central High School, King and Queen court House. It marks the spot where Dahlgren died.

Anne T. Wright, Secretary

Dahlgren's Raid

Address by
MR. C. HOBSON GODDIN
ECHS meeting January 21, 1991

Young Colonel Boric Dahlgren was the son of Admiral Dahlgren for whom Dahlgren Proving Grounds in King George County was named. He was an enthusiastic and energetic officer in the Union Army and a staunch supporter of the northern cause. He had been in the forefront of many battles and had suffered the loss of a leg. He could still ride his horse and was determined to participate in the struggle.

He and another cavalryman, Kilpatrick, planned a raid to release Union prisoners held in Confederate Libbie Prison in Richmond. They divided their forces and each led a group to approach their target from different directions. However, lack of adequate knowledge of the terrain they had to cover, absence of efficient communication to coordinate movements, unanticipated obstacles and resistance thwarted their efforts. They had depended too much on the element of surprise to get them unchallenged to their goal but they were often surprised themselves. Finally an encounter with southern sympathizers in King and Queen County resulted in the death of Colonel Dahlgren and the ambitious raid was over, far from its mark.

Vauter's Church

Remarks by
HILL WELLFORD

Mr. Wellford stated that Vauter's, in the present era of rapid change, stands as reassuring evidence of continuity of service and purpose, a visible reminder of the force and permanence of the Church. According to authorities, it seems certain that the original portion of Vauter's was standing in 1719 and enlarged in 1731 by the addition of the South wing. Its brick walls, two feet thick throughout, are laid in Flemish bond with glazed headers, and its two doorways are in the classic, pedimented style. It appears to have retained its original doors, sash windows, and shutters, with most of the handwrought hardware. It also retains among its congregation today, representatives of a number of the families it has served since first it became established in this Tidewater section in Essex County and in St. Anne's Parish. The church has played a part in the history of upper Essex in the Revolution, before and after, in the War of 1812 even while the church was closed or in disuse, the churchyard was the scene of a duel. Revival of the churches after separation from England took a number of years, and the church was remodeled and repaired in 1827 under the rectorship of the Reverend John Peyton McGuire. The high box pews were reduced in height and the chancel moved from the East to the North wall. A new two-story pulpit replaced the colonial, three-story one. Mr. Wellford told a number of other interesting facts about the people who were members of Vauter's through the years, including the fact that Mrs. Minnie Garnett Mitchell of Elmwood was instrumental in restoring parts of the Queen Anne Communion Service silver which was made in London in 1724 and in use at Vauter's since its very early days, and which is attributed by tradition to have disappeared from the church during the War between the States. In 1909, two of the missing pieces were recognized in a collection of antique silver in the North, and they are in use in Vauter's today, due to Mrs. Mitchell. The flagon has not yet been found.
Essex County Tricentennial

The part of Rappahannock County which lay along the south shore of the Rappahannock River, by an "Act of their Majesties [William and Mary], Lieutenant Governor, Councell, and Burgess of Virginia, in 1692 became Essex County.

The commemoration of this event is being planned by the Essex County Tricentennial Commission; Carroll Garnett, Chairman. From April through October, 1992 the 300 year history of Essex County will be presented for the education, enlightenment, and entertainment of the public. Committees are being formed to design and produce each month's celebration.

Citizens are encouraged to offer suggestions and resources which may be adapted to enhancing the interest and effectiveness of the programs appropriately. Such items may be submitted to the attention of Mr. Garnett in care of the County Supervisor's office, Tappahannock, for consideration.

The Oldest House in Essex County?

There's a tiny brick house in a valley just southwest of Route 17 near Dunsville which many have believed to be the oldest surviving building in Essex county. The Virginia State Highway Department has acquired it and the land surrounding it. Already the area is being cleared to allow widening of the road.

Is this a genuine element of our past? Would it be a tragedy to have it endure so long only to be reduced to rubble by the bulldozers or be spirited away to some remote location? Do we know facts to authenticate its value? Could it have another useful life?

Mr. Frederick H. Ecker of Tidewater Restorations has furnished answers to most of this dilemma. He is an expert in historical restorations, having worked on many of the most valuable old buildings in Virginia. His bid for this house was accepted by the highway department. His plan is to remove, renovate, and preserve it on his property in Essex County.

followed by peaches, apples, green corn, and tomatoes in rapid succession. This gives "a little change" for paying hands and church subscriptions. Great old country, this Eastern Virginia. Nature has done her part to help man along from the earliest wild strawberries to the last wild grape. Tickle the soil...sprinkle some barn yard fertilizer, add good seed and good judgement, then peace and plenty follow as the day the night.

July 1st, 1904

Mr. J. W. Hunt of Bowler's Wharf is building a steam launch and soon the little craft will be given to her adapted element. Mr. Plumer Derieux of Tappahannock is also building a boat. His model is good...and will reflect credit upon the skill of her builder. We are glad to note these things. Any effort along the line of development should be encouraged. Why send away for everything? We have lumber, deep water along the shore, and as evidence by these two enterprising young men, we have the talent.

July 21, 1904

The bank building in Tappahannock is nearly completed and will be an ornament to the town.

July 28, 1904

Professor Goldurn Smith, of Toronto, has concluded that our republic is rapidly approaching a breakdown. He thinks that partyism is the chief factor in sapping the life out of our body politic. Why, each party tells us that it will save the country. Of course each party is honest. Are we to believe Professor Smith as he views us from Canadian atmosphere, or believe one of the parties? If the latter, which one?

George Washington abhorred political parties and did endeavor to break down sectionalism. But how can it be prevented? We cannot legislate citizens of a republic into one political belief. They must think for themselves and so, parties will be formed as a natural sequence. Let us devoutly hope that the result will always be "a survival of the fittest" and that to the end of making us the greatest nation the sun ever shone upon.

Officers of the Society

President ....................... Wilson Ware
Vice President .............. Colonel Wallace B. Stockton
Secretary .................... Anne S. Wright
Treasurer ..................... Ludwell F. Smither

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Mrs. Mary Ball Montsinger, Chairman
Mrs. William A. Wright, Mrs. J. M. Evans

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

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