Essex County Tricentennial Observance

In 1990 the County Board of Supervisors appointed a Tricentennial Commission to plan and produce a suitable program for the celebration of the 300th Anniversary of Essex’s formation out of old Rappahannock County in 1692: Carroll M. Garnett, Chairman; Linda E. Lumpkin, Executive Secretary Treasurer; Cathy H. Cleaton, Catherine P. DeShazo, Alexander F. Dillard, Jr., Donald P. Moore.

During 1991 the Commission organized committees of community citizens to design public events to take place throughout the months of April to October, 1992.

An Education Committee, Mary Ball Montsinger, Bess Haile, Ruth Little and Ann Beverly Eubank, presented to all county schools a plan for giving all students an opportunity to focus on learning as much as possible about Essex County, past and present. During April, 1992, reports on these studies were evaluated by the committee and prizes awarded for relevance and excellence at each grade level which participated. Presentation ceremonies were held at P.T.A. meetings in Tappahannock Elementary School, Essex Intermediate School, and Aylett Country Day School. Money for awards was furnished by the Rotary Club, Kiwanis Club, members of the Essex Club, a member in the name of the Essex County Historical Society, the Essex NAACP, and a patron of Essex Intermediate School. The Woman’s Club of Essex and the Junior Woman’s Club contributed funding to publish some of the students’ reports, to be used as reference material in all the schools. The projects were displayed at all schools, in public places, and at all Tricentennial events throughout the summer.

The Education Committee also offered all students the opportunity to volunteer to serve as Official Pages, representing their grades at Tricentennial events. From volunteers 10 boys and 10 girls from grades 5-12 were chosen by drawing. They were costumed in typical every day wear for school pupils in the early years of the county, using their school colors for their outfits. The Pages were:

5th Grade, EIS - Candice Acree, Paula Ashlock, Blake Hite, Nathan Burrell, Davis Rennolds. ACDS - Chris Ball, Nate Parker. 
6th Grade, EIS - Tamica Allen, Christina Beaucamp, Kayli Peaks, Ben Gathercole, Mark Smith, Rusty Swann. 
8th Grade ACDS - Mary Stuart Haile. 
9th Grade EHS - Michael Blagmon, Zack Rippeon. 
10th Grade EHS - Kimberly Holmes, John Haile. 
12th Grade EHS - Beth Allen.

On May 2nd the Opening Ceremony was held on the East Lawn of the County Court House, Carroll Garnett the Master of Ceremonies. Special guests were the Honorable Mr. Thomas Downing, Grand Marshal; the Honorable Mr. Paul White, Chairman of the Essex County Council, Chelmsford, England; Virginia State Senator Robert Scott; State Delegate Tayloe Murphy; Essex County Administrator, Mr. Gary Allen; Members of the County Board of Supervisors: Mr. Robert Handly, Chairman; Mr. James Moore, Vice Chairman; Mr. Fred Garrett, III, Mr. Angelo S. Stevens; Commonwealth Attorney, Mr. MacDowell Garrett; Clerk of the Circuit Court, Miss Augusta Wilkerson; County Treasurer, Mrs. Frances H. Ellis; Commissioner of Revenue, Mrs. Mabel D. Franklin; Sheriff Damon Davis; Tappahannock Mayor, Mr. Edmond L. Hammond.

Town Council Members: Mr. L. Barnes Allen, Mr. Conway Jenkins, Mr. Oliver D. Washington, Mr. Charles E. Durham, Mr. W. Felix Brooks; and Tricentennial Commission Members.

County Supervisor Angelo Stevens was in charge of physical arrangements for the audience and participants.

The dignitaries arrived in a Motorcade of antique vehicles and new convertible autos, each person accompanied by a page who escorted the guest to a reserved seat. Mr. V.M. Montsinger organized this feature.

A color guard of four veterans from the Warsaw VFW Chapter led the procession, presented the colors, and stood at attention during the moving rendition of The
Star Spangled Banner by the Community Chorus, Emerson Hughes conducting.

Each dignitary was introduced. Then the top award winner from each school was recognized:
Jay Brenovich, 11th Grade EHS, Katie Wadsworth, 8th Grade ACDS, Jack Saville, 6th Grade EIS, Jenny Tressler, 3rd Grade TES. Mr. White spoke about Essex County, England and the interest which citizens there have in their American counterparts. They "are very keen to build up friendships and partnerships with the people of this and the other four Essexes in America." The Essex town of Colchester is the oldest recorded town in Great Britain. The town of Maldon recently celebrated its 1,000th Anniversary. Today the county has the largest population of any in England—1½ million people. "Essex" means "East Saxons", the area which was dominated by the Saxons who came from central Europe in the Fifth Century. Presently the county's largest employer is the Ford Motor Company. Marconi is also a major factor in the Essex economy. The first wireless broadcast was from Chelmsford, Essex County, England. Mr. White was an attractive, knowledgeable, appreciative, and inspiring ambassador from his county to ours.

In addition to a short musical program at the Opening Ceremony, Rosemary Whittington planned three concerts by the Community Chorus which were presented for public enjoyment during May. On the evening of June 6th a handsome tent was set up on the spacious lawn of the historic Linden House near Champlain. Round tables decorated with red, white and blue flowers and balloons accommodated a large gathering who enjoyed a sumptuous buffet and bar and four hours of dancing to swinging "Big Band" music. Mrs. W.A. Cleaton was in charge of arrangements for this Grand Ball.

Mr. Jake Derby, Chairman, Mrs. John Haile and Mrs. Evelyn Kimsey were the committee which organized the June 7th tour of five historic Essex homes. Headquarters was the Woman's Club building where tour tickets were available. Club members served lemonade and cookies throughout the afternoon from 12:00 to 5:00. Mrs. Rush Gardner arranged for exhibits of colonial artifacts by the Colonial Dames and the Daughters of the American Revolution. The students' projects which related to old buildings in Essex were on display there also.

The homes which were open were "The Linden House" recently renovated by Mr. and Mrs. Ken Pounsberry, "The Old Customs House", Tappahannock, restored by Mr. and Mrs. Jake Derby, "Cherrywalk", Millers Tavern, restored by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Osburn, "Hill and Dale", Dunnsville, beautifully maintained by Mr. and Mrs. Carroll Garnett, and "Ben Lomond", Dunnsville, recently refurbished by Colonial and Mrs. John Kloke.

Mr. Donald P. Moore was in charge of events for the following week-end. He arranged to have the Jamestown replica of the sailing vessel "Godspeed" with her volunteer crew make the 3 day voyage from the James River via the Chesapeake Bay and up the Rappahannock to dock at the Perdue Co. landing on Hoskins Creek. June 12th, 13th and 14th the public was invited aboard to see and have the sailors describe life on the high seas for those Englishmen who first came to develop a new home in Virginia.

At the same time, on the grounds of the Tappahannock Elementary School, descendants of people who already lived in the area which would become Virginia and Essex set up a living site typical of those of the early years. Members of families of Rappahannock Indians now living in the county built arched long-houses of bent saplings and woven reeds and furnished them with animal furs, tools and utensils hand-made from nature's materials—wood, stone, feathers, bones, shells, claws, skins, clay and grasses. The Indians' clothing was made by themselves, fashioned as that which their ancestors would have worn: slippers and boots, dresses, shirts and trousers of soft, supple skins, beautifully decorated, as well as "camp dresses" of flowing fabric.

Accompanied by rhythms from an enormous drum, some chanted, danced and sang while others helped fascinated children form vessels from clay or weave mats from corn husks.

In the nearby Essex County Library, Mr. Hill Wellford showed hundreds of ancient and prehistoric tools and ceremonial pieces which he finds on his property up-river. He has researched the origins and ages as well as the uses of these artifacts for many years. He held the rapt attention of each of the many children and adults who came to view these treasures as he shared his knowledge, identifying and pointing out significant details of various pieces. Projects from the schools' Essex History Study which related to the early Indian population of the county and archeological items found along the river shore were also on display.

In July the churches in Essex emphasized the historical importance of religion in the development of the county. On July 19th several choirs presented a concert of sacred music in Beale Memorial Baptist Church, Tappahannock. August will feature a Jousting Tournament and Crafts exhibits on the Essex High School grounds.

For 2 weeks in September there will be a display of historical material focusing on the black experiences and influences in Essex. This will be in the foyer of the School Board Building on Cross Street, Tappahannock, arranged by a committee headed by Mr. James Cary, retired Superintendent of Essex County Schools.

Closing ceremonies of the Essex County Tricentennial in October will be directed by Mrs. Carrington Taylor and Mr. Jeff Smith.

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THE ESSEX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY met Sunday afternoon October 20, 1991 at St. John's Episcopal Church with the Reverend James E. Petersen, as our speaker. Mr. Wilson Ware presided. The Secretary, Mrs. Wright reported the program of the July meeting. Mrs. Rowanetta Allen gave her a check for $100, becoming a life member. Mrs. Louise Shepherd gave a $20 donation as did Mr. and Mrs. Aaron. Mrs. John B. Canada gave a $10 donation. All of these were gratefully received and we appreciate them so much. Mr. Wilson Ware made a large donation in memory of Spottwood Taliferro, and Mrs. Wright donated postage and other items totalling more than $100.

The Reverend James E. Petersen was introduced by our Vice President Colonel Stockdon. Mr. Petersen gave a
delightful history of the Episcopal Church in England before the Revolutionary War. Then he told about the church’s decline in the years before and after the American Revolution. Then he spoke of the Bishops who had decided to rebuild their church without aid of the British. He spoke of John Peyton McGuire who is buried in St. John’s Churchyard and the enormous influence he had as the “Apostle of the Rappahannock.” It was during his pastoral duties here that St. Paul’s and St. John’s were built. His first wife was Maria Garnett of “Elmwood” and his second wife was Judith Brockenbrough. She inherited Brockenbrough House and started a school there. Following this interesting address, the President, Mr. Ware, announced that the Nominating Committee to bring in a slate of officers for January meeting were Mrs. Jeannette Ellis, Mrs. Lib Smithers, and Mr. Witt Garrett. Refreshments were served in the Parish Hall by Mrs. Nancy Ball, Chairman, Mrs. Mae S. Andrews, Mrs. Ashby Parker, Mrs. Patricia Haile, and Mrs. Anne Wright.

Anne T. Wright, Secretary

Refreshments were served in the Woman’s Club by Mrs. Eldon Christopher and her committee.

Anne T. Wright, Secretary

ESSEX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY met in the County School Board Room on Sunday, April 26, 1992 at 3:00 p.m., Mrs. Douglas Lindsey, presiding. Reading of the minutes was waived.

Mrs. Wright reported that some of the missing issues of the Bulletin had been located. The County Clerk’s offices generously provided enough copies so that there is now a complete set in each of the 3 county schools, Aylett Country Day School, Tappahannock Junior Academy, Essex Public Library, Essex County Historical Society Archives, Rappahannock Community College and for the Society’s President. Mrs. Wright can also assemble other sets if they are needed.

The Treasurer’s report of a balance of $1,692.91 in the account reflects an extra amount which will be needed to publish the next Bulletin.

Mrs. Lindsey reported the concern voiced by members of the Executive Board about growth and development of Essex and what part the Society might take in promoting wise decisions and actions in the changing community.

Mr. H. Van Arsdale told of the recent formation of a Tappahannock Beautification Committee. This group of citizens has already obtained funds for and arranged the planting of trees on the Court House lawn and on school grounds. They have organized “clean up” drives in the town. The next project is the landscaping of the plot on which the Confederate Monument stands. Mr. Van Arsdale asked for cooperation as well as contributions from individuals and other groups who are interested in improving the appearance of the County seat.

Students and their families and teachers who participated in the Tricentennial Essex County History Study were invited to be guests of the Society at this meeting. Winners of the top award in each school were introduced. (See account of the May Opening Ceremony for their names as well as those of the Pages.) The boys and girls who volunteered to be official Tricentennial Pages were present, wearing their colonial costumes. Several of the other prize winners read their essays; Sara Pirtle from Aylett Country Day School, Christina Beauchamp and Jack Saville from Essex Intermediate School.

Approximately 30 of the students’ projects were displayed in the corridor outside the Board Room. The audience expressed great interest as they examined the exhibits and enjoyed refreshments served by Mrs. Jeanette Ellis, Mrs. Lib Smithers and their committee.

There will be no July meeting. Members of record for 1992 are invited to meet with the Ralph Wormley Chapter APVA for a tour of “Blandfield” on August 9th at 3:00 p.m. Essex County Historical Society will entertain the visitors at a reception in the Woman’s Club after the meeting.

Anne T. Wright, Secretary
The Essex County Courthouse  
"My" History  
By Jenny Tressler, Third Grade  
Tappahannock Elementary School  
Tricentennial History Study, 1st Place Winner  

Rappahannock County was formed in 1656. It existed for thirty-six years. Rappahannock means "rise and fall of water". In 1680 Virginia passed a law that every county had to build a courthouse. On March 25, 1682, Rappahannock County bought fifty acres of land to build Tappahannock. Back then the area was called "Hob's His Hole". In 1705 the town was named Tappahannock which is the Indian word for "on the rise and fall of water".

Rappahannock County's Court was switched back and forth from one side of the Rappahannock River to the other. People got tired of it. In 1692 the county was divided in two. The East side of the river was Richmond County and the West side of the river was Essex County. Essex was named after Essex County in England. The records of Rappahannock County were placed in me, the Essex County Courthouse.

In the 1700's and 1710's I was located in Lloids, 9 miles North of Tappahannock. In 1720 I moved back. I burned that year. For several years I met in homes and taverns around the county.

Essex County was over eighty miles long. People only had horses, and there were uncrossable marshes and poor roads. It was hard for people to travel down the county to get to me for court day. So in 1721 the very top of Essex split off and became Spotsylvania County. Spotsylvania was named after Governor Alexander Spotswood. Then in 1728 the top of Essex split off again along with the top part of King and Queen and King William Counties to form Caroline County. At the same time the new Governor of Virginia created Caroline County, he ordered that I be returned to and remain in Tappahannock.

The people of Essex built a new 26 by 40 foot brick Courthouse building to put me in. It was in the public square bounded by Prince, Queen and Cross Streets and Church Lane. That building is now the main part of Beale Memorial Church.

Because I was permanently located in Tappahannock, the town grew. Merchants and planters began investing in taverns, warehouses, and other businesses. I was an important meeting place. Every year speeches were made inside me and on the courthouse green. People came to me for elections. From around 1670 to around 1770 people who wanted to be elected would sit at a table on the green around me. Voters would come up to them and out loud would tell them that they voted for them. I was an important community center.

In 1774, just before the Revolutionary War, on July 9th everyone met on my green. There were big Politicians and men in homemade clothes. Slaves, free blacks, a few Indians, and peddlers watched the excitement. They were there to decide what Essex wanted to do about English rule and English taxes. Essex was angry at the English King and English government and wanted to protect American rights.

In the 1790's the top of Essex County wanted to split off again. They and the top of King and Queen County and lower Caroline County wanted to make their own county. The Government of Virginia said "No". Upper Essex tried to split off three more times, in 1801, 1835, and 1846.

In 1812 America was at war with England. In 1814 the British came up the river and took over Tappahannock. When they left they had burned my Home and the people had to fix me up again.

In 1848 the people of Essex built me a new home. I was still on the courthouse green, but they moved me to Prince Street in the middle of the block. I was bigger and fancier. My building was Greek Revival with some Federal style.

In 1862, during the Civil War after the first Union Raid I was moved to Miller's Tavern. In March of 1863 I was moved to Hollywood, the Lewis family home near Dunbrook for awhile.

After the War I moved back to Tappahannock and everything was normal for a long time. In 1926 my building was renovated and a bell and clock tower was added. The dome of it was covered with 14 carat gold. I heard you could see it shining from Bray's Fork when the sun was shining on it.

In 1965 my insides burned again. The largest collection of portraits in the county were in me. Many years lost in the fires but some were saved. I still have one of the largest collections of portraits hanging in me. They renovated me and when they rebuilt the clock tower, the dome was covered with copper instead of gold. Some marble plaques were saved and put back in me too.

Today there are two courts in me, the Circuit Court and the Traffic Court. The Clerk's office is in me too. All the deeds and public records are there and some of them are very old. In a drawer in the Clerk's office there is a stone called the "Mad Stone". It belonged to a Dr. Taliaverro and it was supposed to cure poisonous bites from snakes, spiders and mad dogs.

I am still a very important part of Tappahannock. People still come to my courts. All kinds of important County business is done in me. I am still an important community center.

Where I got my information:
SETTLERS, SOUTHERNERS, AMERICANS  
The History of Essex County, By James Slaughter  

Once Upon a River  
By The Tappahannock United Methodist Church  

Information from Mr. June Parker  

Information from the Lowery's Place mat  

Information from Mr. William Lewis and Miss Augusta Wilkerson at the Tappahannock Courthouse

Officers of the Society  

President: Mrs. Douglas G. Lindsey  
Vice President: Mrs. V.M. Montsinger, Jr.  
Secretary: Anne S. Wright  
Treasurer: Ludwell F. Smither

PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE  

Mrs. Mary Ball Montsinger, Chairman  
Mrs. William A. Wright, Mr. Charles H. Warner

Meetings are held quarterly in the Essex Court House, or in an historic home or church of the County. Dues are $7.50 per year. For copies of publications send $2.00 to Mr. Charles H. Warner, Tappahannock, Virginia 22560

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