The Lady From Tappahannock

ANNE SCOTT TAYLOR WRIGHT
November 6, 1917 - June 1, 1996

Tappahannock has lost a treasure that marked a bygone era – Anne Scott Wright died Saturday, June 1, 1996 after a short illness. Her commitment to her community will not soon be matched and those of us who knew her will sorely miss her dry wit and genteel charm.

Born and reared in Big Stone Gap, Virginia to George Lilburn and Margaret Taylor, both Anne Scott and her brother learned at an early age that a good education was one of the most important aspects of life. They were both good students and were involved in many clubs and organizations throughout their high school and college years. Mr. Taylor served as a county circuit judge as well as juvenile judge in district court and perhaps these facts sparked the political awareness that Anne Scott maintained throughout her life. Growing up in a very civic minded family, she was always involved in her community; even at a very young age, she and her mother helped to organize the Lovelady Chapter of DAR in Big Stone Gap.

Continuing her education, she attended Sullins College and later, Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg where she graduated with a degree in Business Administration. While teaching business classes at John Marshall High School in Richmond (1939) and King & Queen High School (in the 1940s), she inspired many young students in the business courses she taught and encouraged excellence in all their academic endeavors. In later years, Anne Scott continued her teaching career at St. Margaret's School and at Rappahannock Community College/Glens Campus.

It was while serving as a secretary in the Virginia State Senate that she met her husband, William Alfred Wright, a fine gentleman from Tappahannock. The couple wed on Saturday, the twenty-sixth of January, 1952 at Grace & Holy Trinity Church in Richmond, Virginia. Many state officials and politicians attended the grand reception at the Commonwealth Club. The Wrights made their home in Tappahannock in a cozy Cape Cod overlooking the Rappahannock River. Together, they planned and built the house, furnished and decorated it, and immediately after the wedding, moved into a ready-made home. Never had a lady been so involved! One friend related, “Billy told Anne Scott he wanted her to join every organization in town—he wanted her to be his eyes and ears...and, she certainly was!”

William A. Wright was the son of a Confederate veteran, Judge T. R. B. Wright; he grew up in the house that now houses Administration Offices of St. Margaret’s School. After graduating from Washington & Lee law school just as World War I was breaking out, he
went to the front line of France and served in the Army Infantry. Years later, on my first visit to the house they had shared, Anne Scott showed me a grayed photo of her soldier and her pride and affection were obvious. Mr. Wright practiced law here in Tappahannock. For eight years (1924 - 1932), he served in Virginia House of Delegates, followed by ten years (1932 - 1942) as a State Senator. In 1950, as he made an unsuccessful run for the United States Senate, Anne Scott was his tireless supporter and campaigned far and wide on his behalf. He was a gentleman of considerable influence in state politics and held many positions throughout the Commonwealth. In the mid-1940's, Senator Wright was President and Chairman of the Board of the Jamestown Corporation and was responsible for producing "The Common Glory", the famous outdoor drama about the life of Thomas Jefferson that was his "brainchild". Perhaps Anne Scott's fondest memories of their mutual civic activities were of the 350th Anniversary Celebration in Jamestown (1957) and the local version held at a riverside amphitheater here in Tappahannock. Together, they toiled indefatigably at making the celebrations impressive events that gained national acclaim. Anne Scott was the perfect "political wife", ever supportive and willing to assist her husband in his professional and political aspirations.

It was only seven short years after their marriage that Billy died, leaving behind his partner who continued alone to serve the community that had become her home. The Richmond Times Dispatch newspaper eulogized him as "The Gentleman from Tappahannock". Mrs. Wright filled her life with club work, church activities, teaching, and myriad responsibilities throughout the county. A devoted member of the Woman's Club of Essex County, she headed the group as President from 1956 to 1958. It was as a member of this esteemed organization that Anne Scott (with others) updated a file of historic homes, churches, and sites in Essex County; the "green" book as it is known in town, has become an historical record of our architectural heritage. One of her last responsibilities was to revise and expand the book; her untimely loss saw this task only partially completed. St. John's Episcopal Church, where she and William are buried, was privileged to hold her membership and she was an active participant in the activities of the parish. As chairman of the Essex County Electoral Board, elections were a very busy time for Anne Scott; Billy had really inspired her political interests and she enjoyed the politics of her town, county and state. Her dear niece, Nancy Lineberry of Texas, while visiting locally, shared an anecdote about her usually politically correct Aunt Scottie; it seems the Governor of Virginia, The Honorable Lynwood Holton, was well acquainted with Anne Scott due to the fact they were both from Big Stone Gap; as Governor Holton was passing through Tappahannock, he called unannounced on his friend to find her in a housedress and with untidy hair; but, always the lady, Anne Scott invited the Governor inside and was gracious as ever.

Most recently, her "chargé du temps" was The Essex County Historical Society and its fledgling Essex County Museum. Having served as faithful secretary of the Historical Society since 1972, she was responsible for the publication of the Society's Bulletin. It was due to her consistent and dedicated efforts to gather historical information and record prominent events, that a great deal of area history was preserved. She was an active board member of both organizations at the time of her death.

Despite the fact that Anne Scott and William never had children of their own, their riverside home was host to niece and nephew, and then later, to grand-nieces and nephews. Once, while we were lunching at Ferebee's restaurant, she recounted in her slow, unruffled way a story about her nephew who, while visiting Tappahannock one summer, dove into shallow water after she had admonished him NOT to, and he broke his neck. She said the most difficult phone call she ever made was to his mother! The nephew healed beautifully, and returned to dive into the Rappahannock many times. Several years after their marriage, the Wrights were entertaining Anne's family in Tappahannock when Mr. Taylor died suddenly at the water's edge after swimming in the Rappahannock, but not before instilling in his daughter a fine sense of responsibility and duty. After William died, Mrs. Taylor came to live with Anne Scott and the devoted daughter cared for her mother until her death. Anne Scott also enjoyed traveling, particularly to England, and twice a year to Atlantic City where she frequented the casinos and shows. Many of her life long friends enjoyed visiting Anne over the years and she was also often on the go attending parties, weddings, or assisting a sick friend.
Anne Scott was indeed a lady of Virginia who bestowed upon her adopted community a great deal of talent, time, and love. Albert Schweitzer once said, “The only ones of you who will be truly happy, are those of you who serve...” In that regard, Anne Scott Wright, the Lady from Tappahannock, must have been “truly happy”. We shall all miss her.

Dawn S. White
February 1997

Minutes of the Essex County Historical Society

October 15, 1995
Our Fall meeting was held at Sander’s Wharf on the Rappahannock River. Both of the guest speakers, Mr. Fielding Dickinson and Mr. Witt Garrett, are natives of this area and included their first hand knowledge of the wharf’s history in their talks.

January 21, 1996
The first meeting of the new year was held in the Essex County Court House in Tappahannock. Ms. Dorothy Fortune was the guest speaker and her topic was the history and traditions of the Rappahannock Indians. Since she is a Rappahannock Indian, her talk was especially interesting. While beginnings of the tribe are lost in antiquity, the modern tribe has split into two groups and they live mostly in Essex, King and Queen, and Caroline counties.

April 21, 1996
This quarterly meeting was held at “Aspen Grove”, which was built around 1732. Mrs. Derek Lee, the owner, spoke about the restoration of their historic home.

July 28, 1996
The July meeting was held at Beale Memorial Baptist Church with Reverend Robert McKinley, the pastor, as the speaker. He told about the history of the church from the beginnings as an Essex County Court House to its present position as one of the leading churches in the area.

October 20, 1996
The Reverend William M. Krulak recounted the history of St. John’s Episcopal Church as we met in the parish chapel. The church building was built in 1849 under the leadership of a young Episcopal priest, John Peyton McGuire. In addition, Rev. Krulak instructed us on a bit of Anglican Church history that shed light on the colonial churches in Virginia. Attendance was very good.

January 19, 1997
The January meeting was held in the new Essex County Districts Courts building. Our meeting was the first civic group to meet here. The speaker for the afternoon was Mr. Carroll Garnett who related the history of Fort Lowery. He covered the building of the only Confederate satellite camp on the Upper Rappahannock.

Blake-Brockenbrough Cemetery

The small family cemetery located on Water Lane, between Prince and Queen streets in Tappahannock (behind the present J. T. Harris store and corporate headquarters) offers an excellent example of the value of cemeteries to historians as well as memorials to family members. In recent years, steps have been taken to improve the appearance of the burying ground. Now we need to appreciate the story it tells. Perhaps then it can take its rightful place on a renewed and updated historical tour of the town.

When it was noticed at all, this cemetery seems to have been known in recent times as the Brockenbrough cemetery, which was not unreasonable, given the larger number of graves and prominent vault associated with that name. However, as courthouse records readily divulge, this was the Blake family cemetery. A daughter became the second wife of Austin Brockenbrough, M.D., bore him a second family, and brought their burials to her parents’ cemetery.
In use for roughly a century – 1826 or so to 1926 – the earliest burial appears to have been that of Jane Blake Minor, a daughter, who married Dr. Hubbard T. Minor on 7 December 1817 and who died in late February of 1821 or ‘24. (The broken headstone, recently restored and replaced, is obscure: the day is either 28 or 29 February; it appears to allude to two brothers, and a footstone, “WBM,” makes one wonder if there are multiple burials there, perhaps of her sons) Alongside is the grave of Martha W. Hoomes, daughter of John and Dorothy Hoomes, who died 27 September 1827 at the age of five. (This is a Caroline County name; perhaps further research would reveal her tie with the Blakes and how she came to be buried here.) The Blakes lived in what is now known as the Derieux house (“Scots Arms Tavern”) on Prince Street. Mrs. Blake (Elizabeth Aldridge, 8 September 1783 - 16 November 1830) is buried beside her daughter, Jane Minor, and alongside her husband, Benjamin Blake (12 June 1775 - 6 September 1831), who joined her a year later. Contrary to his will (“I desire that my body shall be decently interred [sic] in my burying ground by the side of my beloved wife, and I wish ... to be purchased in the city of Philadelphia two marble head and foot pieces to be placed at the graves of my wife and myself in memory of our births, deaths, and ages and also to consecrate the grave yard as hallowed ground; which I desire shall never be sold out of my family.” Essex Will Book 22, pp. 323-325.), both Benjamin and Elizabeth lie under ledgers (flat, horizontal slabs).

A daughter of the Blakes, Frances (9 June 1809 - 22 June 1867), became the second wife of Dr. Austin Brockembrough (9 October 1782 - 31 December 1858). They made their town home in the house still known under their name, now incorporated into St. Margaret’s school for girls. The doctor, son of Dr. John Brockembrough (1741 - 1801), Patriot and naval surgeon during the American Revolution, was an eminent physician of his day, and represented Essex in the House of Delegates, 1820 - 1824. He was buried in the above ground vault which is the center-piece of the cemetery, she, beside him under an obelisk. The Brockembrough graves are set apart from those of the Blakes and read from the west side, whereas those of the Blakes read from the east.

Dr. Austin Brockembrough had first married Lettice (“Lucy”) Lee Ball Fauntleroy of Richmond County, by whom he had had several children. His second wife, Frances Blake, was 27 years his junior (she was born the same year as his first child of his first marriage). She bore him eight children, six of whom lie in the cemetery. These are 15-year old Sally Roane Brockembrough (23 January 1831 - 25 February 1845); Betty (Elizabeth) Brockembrough Harwood (18 January 1828 - 1 June 1876) and her husband, Samuel Fauntleroy Harwood, of Newington, King and Queen County (26 February 1817 - 23 May 1906); Austine (23 November 1837 - 1 November 1874), wife of Confederate Colonel John Mercer Brockembrough of The Island, Richmond County; Gabriella (18 December 1839 - 2 February 1874), wife of Joseph William Chinn, Jr., of Richmond County, and their daughter, 4-year old Marianna Spotswood Chinn (3 June 1861 - 26 May 1865, almost an exact spanning of the Civil War); Captain Austin Brockembrough, Company D, 55th Virginia Infantry (18 January 1842 - killed at Gettysburg 2 July 1863); and Benjamin Blake Brockembrough (1844 - 1921; Co. K, 9th Virginia Cavalry), and his wife Ann Mason (1841 - 1926) from North Carolina, the most recent burial. (Frances had two additional children, not buried here: Louisa Clemens, who married Dr. Logan H. Richardson of Norfolk, and Frances “Fanny”, who married a neighbor, Dr. William W. Gordon of Tappahannock, contrary to parental wishes, as noted in her mother’s will – Essex WB 28, 698.)

Now gone from the area, the Blake and Brockembrough names were prominent in the history of Essex and Richmond counties. With modest effort, much can be learned about them and their times. But by dedicating a parcel of “hallowed ground” in the back of his property in Tappahannock, Benjamin Blake set in motion an enduring monument to his family and that of daughter, Frances. Respected, properly maintained, and appreciated, the Blake-Brockembrough cemetery is a “living” record of a century of local history.

David Winfred Gaddy

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