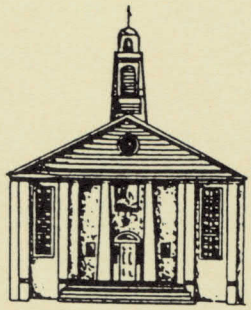
Essex County Historical Society



ESSEX COUNTY 1692

BULLETIN

VOLUME 44 TAPPAHANNOCK, VIRGINIA APRIL 2000

"The Mills of Essex County"

Water-powered grist mills have become nostalgic symbols of a not too-distant past, which is gone forever. The characteristic wheel, turned by water channeled into a trough or canal, makes a picturesque setting for artists. The older generation still recalls pleasant times fishing, ice-skating, strolling, and picnicking "Down By The Old Mill Stream." Some of you probably recall the smells and flour dust of an old mill, or the distinctive taste and texture of stone-ground corn meal or flour.

When our British and European ancestors came here, milling was a familiar trade. (Recall "The Miller's Tale" from Chaucer?) To them "corn" was the familiar grain - wheat, rye, barley. They learned about Indian corn, or maize, and saw how the Indians ground it into meal on simple stone mortars, and they adopted it into their diet and the feed for their stock. There was a time when virtually every household of any size, every farm and plantation, had the ability to grind grain. But over time some came to concentrate on the miller's trade. Their product received favorable comment; their ability to take care of that aspect of life freed the yeoman farmer or plantation owner to do other things with his time. Mergers and consolidations took place, until, in the ante-bellum days, there were perhaps as many as twenty or more mills operating throughout Essex County.

The last of these ceased operation over twenty years ago, in 1976. It was fittingly named "Essex Mill," and it stood a short distance west of Rte 17 south, on State Road 609, just over the bridge at Piscataway. A few years ago Mr. Frank Hundley, of the last operating owners of that mill, spoke to our Society and his account was published in our bulletin. In his talk, Mr. Hundley remarked that a mill is not simply a large building. It is also a large machine, the result of centuries of evolution. And like a machine, it must be run and maintained, or else it becomes a useless mass. Today, Essex Mill is an empty shell of its once proud self. But it still is standing, whereas others have been permitted to collapse or be destroyed. Our past president, Carroll Garnett, who grew up in the shadow of Essex Mill, has long dreamed of an "angel" who would come in and restore the mill as

perhaps the core of an art colony or a tourist attraction. That's happening, in fact, over in Lancaster county, where their last large mill is being restored. Otherwise, if you want to see or show the children what a water-powered grist mill was like, you'd have to go over to Stratford Hall in Westmoreland county.

Perhaps some of you saw the exhibit on grist mills in the spring of 1998 at the Essex County Museum. It was based in part on information from our records and partly on courthouse records and photography by Suzanne Derieux of Tappahannock. We've continued to refine the research that was incorporated into that exhibit, but we have a way to go. Some named mills are not pinpointed to location; some may have been known under different names at different times, as ownership changed, and what we think are unlocated may be the same as those that are known. It is gratifying that some of those mills have been recently memorialized by road names under the Emergency 911 telephone system that required road names and house numbers county-wide. Prior to that, the names of a few were recalled on the official county road map by their associated millponds.

The Society's attention has been turned to this subject several times. In addition to Mr. Hundley's talk, the late Jeffrey O'Dell, who compiled the field reports on old structures in Essex County now available for reference in the Society files and at the Public Library, delivered a summary of his findings in 1974. He stated that at that fairly recent time (to most of us) "only five grist mills still stand in the county," out of 10 "that were still operating in this century." Now one remains of those five he mentioned. Perhaps drawing on some of the same information, Vay Garnett Newbill, in her 1984 "History of Industries in Essex County," noted 15 mills. By including them, Mrs. Newbill clearly showed her appreciation of the role they played in the industrial history of the county. (Both of these accounts were published in our Bulletin.)

Some twenty or so mills were identified in the Museum exhibit, although several were not pinpointed as to location. For example, in James Slaughter's history of Essex County (which, by the way, is again available in its third printing) is an example of the difficulty we encounter in locating some of them. In 1829 a dispute arose between two parties in upper Essex. It concerned the flooding of Richard Kay's pastureland by water from a "mill canal" running from William Blackburn's mill—Kay solved his problem by blocking the canal. Both men petitioned the General Assembly. In his argument, Kay claimed that Blackburn's mill wasn't vital, because two other mills, Spindle's and Rennolds', "lay within three miles of Blackburn's," and that four miles from Blackburn's stood Robert Payne Waring's mill, which had the capacity to grind for customers of all of the mills mentioned. Knowing the locations of the others, we know approximately where Blackburn's was, but not precisely—unless some of you know!

Because of name changes when a mill changed ownership, there seems to be no easy way of listing them. What follows in alphabetical order are the names of more than 30 mills of which note has been taken, representing some 20 specific mills. These date from at least 1750.

Baylor's—on Cockrell Shell Creek in the Occupacia area. Three-story brick, with two pairs of millstones, one for beans, one for meal, located in a complex of other large brick buildings—granary, dwelling, blacksmith, wheelwright.

Beeby's-possibly an earlier name for Essex Mill.

Beverley's—on Mt. Landing Creek, northeast of Battery on Highway 629. At one time baptisms from Upper Essex Baptist Church were held in the pond. Also known as Bowman's and Jones'. Jones Millpond is

identified on modern maps.

Blackburn's—unlocated, in Upper Essex, as noted earlier.

Bohannon's—also known as Wright's, Smoot's, and Kline's. Located on the property of "Shelby," north of Rte 360 near Millers Tavern. At one time this mill also had a bake oven for bread.

Bowman's—near Lloyds, in the vicinity of Champlain. Associated with the Jones and Beverley families. Perhaps known under another name.

Bush's-possibly an earlier name for Essex Mill. (But cf. Gordon's Mill.)

Cauthorne's—A Cauthorne is said to have built Covington's, Phillip's, Smith and Wright's, and possibly Ware's—mills known under a number of different names.

Cheatwood's—on Hoskins Creek near Rexburg. Also known as Roane's, Motley's, Hutchinson's, and Hoskin's. Cheatwood Millpond appears on modem maps. This mill is said to have been built by William Roane in 1750.

Covington's—The lowest of three mills on Mill Creek west of Dunnsville on Highway 609 off Rte 17, this is the mill also known as Trible's, Hundley-Hoskins's, and finally Essex. It dates from at least 1803, with an even earlier mill possibly on the same site. A bake oven here produced ship's bread or hardtack for the port of Hobb's Hole, or Tappahannock. Had an undershot, as opposed to the more common overshot wheel, turned left, rather than right. Also had a cotton gin at one time. Operation of the mill ceased in 1976 due to competition from commercial and trucking interests and increasingly stringent government regulations.

Croxton's—on Hoskins Creek at the crossing of road T-659, just beyond the airport. This was once Dobyns family property, a family associated with Mt. Clements, now the site of Riverside Tappahannock Hospital. A water-powered sawmill was also located here.

Dunn's—unlocated, unless under another name.

Durham's—also known as Farinholt's, this mill was located on Cedar Creek, northwest of Butylo, near Laytons Landing and Jones Point not far from the Middlesex county line in lower Essex.

Essex Mill-last operating mill in the county, located on Mill Creek just above the Piscataway and west of Route 17 on Essex Mill Road at the Piscataway bridge. The trade name "Home Pride" marked its commercial flour and meal in latter years. In 1910, miller Francis Howard became the miller and worked in that capacity for sixty years. He died in 1973 at the age of 74.

Farinholt's - see Durham's.

Goldman's—on Mt. Landing Creek, also known as Jones' and as Waring's.

Gordon's—the name, Gordon's Mill Road, has been placed on a "911" road crossing Rte 360 near Pauls Cross Roads, but the location of a mill of this name - unless under another name - is not known. (Cf. Bush's.)

Hunter's Mill—on Occupacia Creek, just west of Rte 17 on highway 637. Site well marked. At one time the mill housed the Occupacia post office.

Jones'-also known as Goldman's and as Waring's, on Mt. Landing Creek.

Latane's—carrying a name associated with one of the 18th Century Anglican priests of this area, the mill was located on Piscataway Creek near Meade, on highway 622 above Millers Tavern. At the time of Mr. O'Dell's mid-1970s talk, it was still in good condition, but has since collapsed on its wheel. The pond and dam can still be seen.

Phillips'-See Ware's.

Piscataway, or Old Piscataway-same as Covington's.

Robinson's—near Bowler's, perhaps on Mill Swamp. Associated with one Henry Robinson. Perhaps the mill also known as Stiff's.

Scott's—on Hoskins Creek between Mt.

Landing and Desha. Modern maps show the millpond.

Smith and Wright's—the first, or southernmost, of the three mills on Mill Creek, west northwest of Ozeanna, between highways 607 and 610. Once owned and operated by William F. Smith and Mrs. Mary Ann Wright, widow of Dr. Edward Lawrence Wright.

Spindle's—located southwest of Hustle in Pilkerton Swamp in upper Essex. This mill featured two sets of millstones, so that, for example, corn and wheat could be ground without changes of stones or settings. Hurricane Hazel destroyed the remaining mill.

Stiff's—located on Mill Swamp near Bowler's.

Taliaferro's—the appearance of Taliaferro pond on modern maps suggests that a mill of this name may have existed below Hustle. Perhaps this is one known under another name.

Trible's—see Covington's.

Ware's—located on Mill Creek at highway 611 southwest of Dunnsville. Associated with Bob Ware and Bob Hutchinson, also known as Webb's, possibly Cauthorne's, and Phillip's, at various times. This was the second, or middle, mill on the same creek. Water breaching the dams upstream cascaded on down and piled up on Essex, the bottom one of the three before Piscataway Creek, adding to the other headaches of mill operation.

Waring's—located in upper Essex County, and memorialized by a new road name off Rte 17. Also known as Jones' and as Goldman's.

Webb's—see Ware's.

Research by Suzanne Derieux of Tappahannock in the Essex County court records has revealed other, earlier records of mills and mill owners that should be included here: Luke Covington - petition for a mill on Dragon Swamp (1778); Garnett's mill on Blackburn's Creek (1778); [Sarah] Campbell's mill on Beaver[sic] Creek (1777); John Evans, Jr. - mill on Adcock Creek (1777); Archibald Ritchie - mill on Ticknor Creek (1782); Thomas Wood's mill on the Piscataway at Old Mill Bridge; Mill & Dunn - unlocated (1799); Merriday Brown on Mosses Run - Occupacia (1803). In 1807 the Commonwealth brought suit against Robert Beverley of Blandfield for not keeping the mill bridge in repair.

As it is clear from this listing, compiled from a variety of sources, there is much yet to be learned about Essex county mills. Like churches, mills are often used as reference points in old documents—knowing their locations helps from that standpoint. Having a better knowledge of the number of mills and the extent of milling aids us in understanding the role this industry played in the history of Essex. Toward those ends, we will maintain records in our Society files as additional material is gathered. Let's begin that process now: what can you add to the meager information just presented? Can you help settle some of the questions or unscramble the confusion? Do you have knowledge of mills not mentioned or the location of missing ones?

(The foregoing article, being for the most part a presentation by Society President David W. Gaddy at our April, 1999, meeting, is dedicated to the memory of the late Frank Hundley.)

Some Essex County Revolutionary War Soldiers

The 1999 General Assembly enacted legislation aimed at locating the graves of Virginia's Revolutionary War soldiers and Patriots, with a view to marking these sites and possibly assisting in upkeep. The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission in Richmond was given the task, and, in July 1999, as part of a statewide search, contacted the Essex County Historical Society for assistance, enclosing a list of twenty names they had located through pension applications, land

bounty records, and the like. The Society files lacked readily available information, nor did our extensive courthouse records yield a roster, let alone information on burial sites. As a result, an appeal was published in the *Rappahannock Times* (2 Sep 1999). It brought two responses, one from our former president and dedicated Essex historian, Carroll Garnett, the other from reader Walter Rowland in Delaware.

Efforts had been made by the Society during the Revolutionary War Bicentennial to compile a listing, but the project was not completed. (Virginia State papers show 550 members of the Essex county militia alone.) In reviewing the ECHS bulletins of the past, additional names were found, and these were provided to the Commission in October 1999, along with burial site information on four men. The result of this rather superficial research is that we now hold the names of some forty men and have uncovered a fertile field for more extensive research. The names are printed below and will be found in Society files (File reference number 11.03.)

Atkinson, Reuben (still living in 1832)
Ball, Aaron (b. 1759; living 1818)
Ball Stephen (b. 1749; living 1834)
Beazly, Ephraim (1762-1833; South Farnham Parish)
Bland, James (d. 1803)
Bohannon, Joseph (militia officer)
Booker, Lewis (b. 1754, Kingston Parish, Gloucester; d. 1814, bur. at "Locust Grove")
Brizendine, Bartlett (1762-1836)
Bussey, Cornelius (5th Va. Regt, under Capt. Woodson, c. 1781)
Canaday, Leroy (conscripted Jun or Jul 1778 for 3 months of service)
Cauthorn, Richard
Coghill, Thomas (1763-1851)
Croxton, Carter (1761-1845, bur. "Cherry Walk;" wife, Frances)
Dunn, Joshua (b. 1755; living 1818)
Elliott, William (1753-1830; wife, Elizabeth)
Fisher, Benjamin
Fisher, William
Garnett, Henry (living 1811)
Gouldman, Francis (b. 1738; living 1821)
Hardy, Williamson
Johnson, Richard
Johnson, Samuel (living 1820; wife, Patsey)
Loyde, George (living 1813; wife, Elizabeth)
Merritt, Archelaus
Merrett, William
Miller, William (Capt.-Lt., 1st Regt. Continental Arty; reburied Vauter's)
Montague, Richard (living 1789; seaman; South Farnham Parish; wife, Charlotte)
Munday, Benjamin H. (b. 1763; living 1837; substitute for Robert Beverley)
Rennolds, Streshley (Captain)
Roane, William (Colonel)
Rose, George (d. 1809; second wife, Dicey)
Shackelford, Richard (b. 1757; living 1831; daughter Lucy Gordon)
Smith, Meriwether (1730-1794; Colonel; bur. "Bathurst")
Stallard, Randolph (b. 1757; living 1832)
Streshley, Thomas (Major)
Upshur, James (living 1807; Captain)
Webb, John (Captain)

(Sources: ECHS bulletins 7, 11, 16, 21; Joint Commission letter enclosure, Jul 1999.)

A Brief History of the Essex County Historical Society

Next year will mark the fiftieth anniversary of our Society. In anticipation of that event, and to benefit the newcomers in our ranks, perhaps it would be appropriate to recall our origins and the names of some of the individuals responsible for having launched and shaped

our organization, as we approach our mid-century mark.

The Essex County Historical Society was established in 1951 in Tappahannock, Virginia, the county seat. Its founder and first president was Miss Edith Latané (1873-1960), former head-mistress (1927-1943) of St. Margaret's School in Tappahannock, prior to which she had headed the history department at Mary Baldwin College. At a meeting in her home on 20 June 1951, a nominating committee was appointed, comprising William G. Rennolds of Center Cross, chairman; attorney William A. Wright of Tappahannock; and Vay Garnett (Mrs. S. S.) Newbill of Dunnsville. The first regular meeting was held at the court house on 11 July, at which time the nominees—Miss Edith Latané president; Katherine H. (Mrs. W.L.L.) Smoot of Millers Tavern, vice-president; and J.L. Arnold Motley of Tappahannock, clerk of the circuit court, secretary-treasurer were elected by acclamation, a constitution and by-laws adopted, and 72 charter members enrolled. For that first meeting, Mr. Motley displayed some of the oldest and most interesting court records held in the county.

Meetings were held quarterly on Wednesday evenings in the court house. Members interested in historical research and genealogy reported on their findings and participated in general discussion. Eventually, invited speakers became the norm, and meetings frequently took place in historic homes in the county. During its early years, the Society took the lead in planning and promoting local observance of the Jamestown Festival (1957) and the American Civil War Centennial (1961-1965). As part of the latter commemoration, a resolution was adopted calling for a local history museum, "not to be limited to the Civil War period," and an attempt was made to pursue such a project. (Over three decades later, the idea came to fruition with the establishment in 1996 of the Essex County Museum, separately launched by Society members, with the first "seed money" donations from the Society.). It commenced its own repository of papers, books, photographs, maps, audio tapes, and related materials and demonstrated much interest in the archeology of the area. It also supported the "Famous Men of Essex" project in the court house (portraits and plaques, established by Judge T.R.B. Wright, a Confederate veteran and father of William A. Wright.) Mr. Motley's role at the court house proved mutually beneficial: the Society spearheaded the effort to preserve county records and to fireproof the records room as a vault (even to the extent of replacing wooden chairs and tables with metal ones) and was rewarded by receiving a "home" there for its own records and archives. Mr. Motley was also responsible for the heavy, impressive record book which contained minutes, treasurer's reports and comments about the meetings including, in some cases, verbatim copy of the presentations—covering a period of two decades.

All of this came to an abrupt end with the court house fire of 1965. Many of the rare portraits were destroyed. The Society lost its meeting place. Enthusiasm waned, and a five-year hiatus followed after 1966, with no activities taking place.

In 1971, Mr. Motley proposed that the dormant Society be rejuvenated. The catalyst was the uncertain future of the historic Ritchie house on Prince Street. (Although the "Save the Ritchie House" campaign failed to achieve its goal, twenty years later Society member A. F. Dillard, Jr. Esq., made it a reality, restoring its Seventeenth Century appearance to a remarkable degree, while housing a modern law firm.) On 1 March 1971 a meeting was called, agreement was reached, and regular operation resumed. The prospect of a Society publication, taken on just prior to the hiatus by Catherine P. (Mrs. Charles N.) DeShazo, was realized by Mr. Charles W.H. Warner, who volunteered at the March meeting and received full endorsement in July. The first bulletin was published that winter, printed on

antique paper by Barbour Printing Company in Tappahannock. It was an immediate success, receiving kudos from the Virginia Historical Society, among others. (When Mr. Warner relinquished editorship, it was assumed by a Publications Committee, headed for a number of years by Mrs. Mary Ball Montsinger prior to her move from the area in the early 1990s, then briefly by Anne Scott Taylor (Mrs. William A.) Wright. Upon the death of Mrs. Wright in 1996, Dawn S. (Mrs. Herbert, III) White edited an issue in memory of Mrs. Wright.) The bulletin has been the pride of the Society, setting and maintaining a standard of excellence begun by Mr. Warner, and projecting the image of the Society well beyond the walls of its meetings. With its appearance, the original record book lost its role, and was discontinued after July 1971. Whereas the goal has been to have a quarterly, or at least an annual, product, publication has been more along the lines of a hand-printed newspaper produced by Confederate prisoners of war that said that it was published "semi- occasionally."

Like most such local history organizations, the Essex County Historical Society has always depended upon the interest, enthusiasm and involvement of volunteers to realize its objectives. It has had its peaks and troughs over the past 49 years, as older proponents departed the scene and newcomers appeared. Many have involved themselves through a sense of family pride (or curiosity), others from an interest in the history of a most fascinating old county, or the fossil remains still to emerge from its soil and water. Some, such as the late Rev. Mr. Joseph Ewing, rector of St. John's, Tappahannock, found a lure in the rich church history of the area. Mr. Charles W.H. Warner found his forte in the colonial period; Mr. Carroll Garnett, in the War Between the States. Lillian (Mrs. Charles E.) McGuire has specialized in study of the role of Essex citizens of African origin in the history of the county. Many others have shared their research in ancient homes, homes of their families or homes they have come to love through "adoption." Member Sue Wright, living in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, maintains an Essex County "Web" page on the Internet, and acts as a clearing house for genealogical researchers, bringing us into the "cyber" age as we "turn fifty." But, with the passing of older members, we realize how much has been lost through lack of documentation or recording, and how much remains to be done. The greatest tribute we could pay to our founders is to advance their dreams through research and publication, and through sharing our knowledge and resources with others, especially the young people of the county. There is a role for virtually every person and every range of interest in the work of the Society. Fifty is not "middle age" in a county that reflects on its three-plus centuries of history.

New Book on Smith and Related Families

The Society is the recipient of a new book, *A Smith Family Odyssey* (Franklin, NC: Genealogical Publishing Service, 1999), from its author, Arthur R. Seder, Jr. In 1997 Mr. Seder published a book, *The Granthams*, tracing seven generations of his mother's paternal lineage. Now he turns to her maternal ancestors - Benning, Evans, Foster, Garnett, Shackleford, Thompson, Vickers, Wedderburn - including some with Essex (Vauter's Church, Mount Pleasant) associations, and traces six generations. The book is quite readable, indexed and illustrated. We are grateful to Mr. Smith for the donation, and will add this to our modest library for the use of members and researchers. ■

OLD TOWN OF TAPPAHANNOCK ON THE RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER

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