

*Historical Society of Western Virginia*

**2008**

# **JOURNAL**



**Vol. XVII**

**No. 2**



# Historical Society of Western Virginia

*Amor montium nos movet*

(For the love of mountains inspires us)

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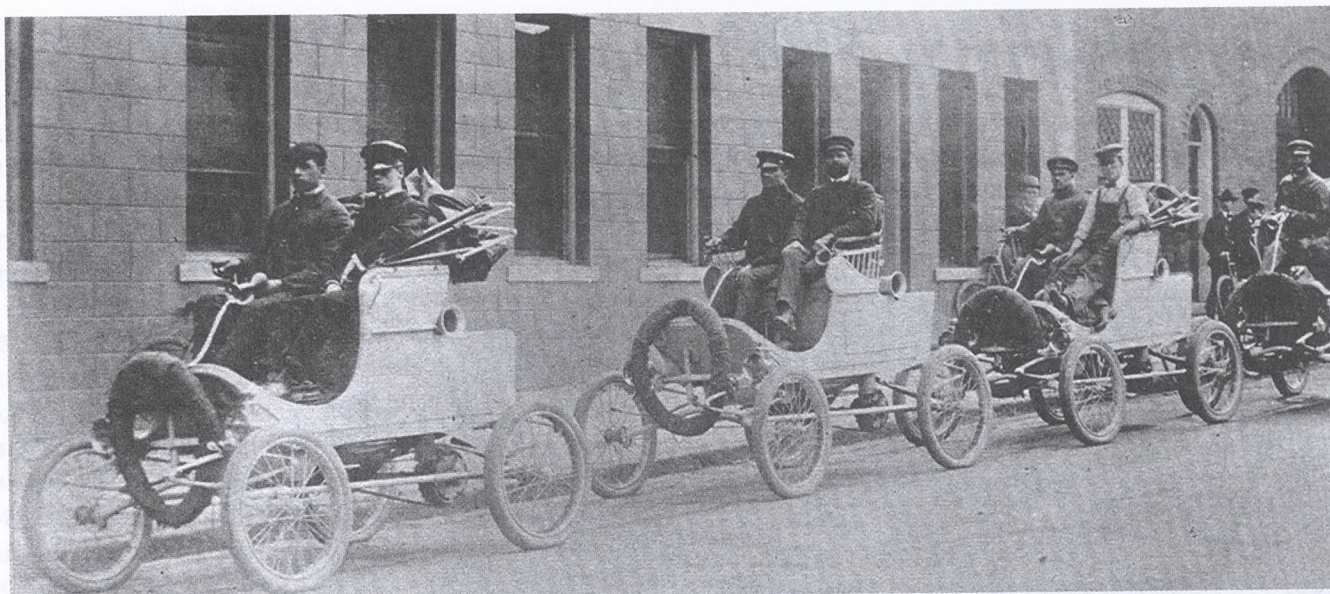
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# *Note From the Executive Director*

The 2008-2009 year has been an important transitional year for the Society. There has been a large-scale change in leadership and operations, as well as change in the look of the History Museum.

I arrived in Roanoke in October of 2008 to accept the position of Executive Director for the Society and my mission is to shepherd the Society through this transition period to arrive on the other side with a stronger brand and broader influence throughout the Roanoke Valley. As a regional organization, my goal is to develop stronger partnerships with other cultural groups in the region and become a resource for those partners. I'm very happy to be working with the Society and look forward to the many challenges that lie ahead.

Anniversaries are often the catalyst for change within an organization and the Society is no exception. Our 50th anniversary set in motion a capital campaign to completely renovate the History Museum and thus far we have refurbished the administrative offices, created the Barbara Watts Education Gallery for on-site educational programming, and completed the library, now the Watts Library.



*Jeanne Bollendorf*

Although bearing the same surname, these museum spaces are actually named for two different families. Dr. E. Wilson Watts is one of our hardest working volunteers and cares deeply about education. This space is named as a memorial to his late wife. The education gallery provides a separate space within the museum for school groups to learn about our region's history by participating in several different programs – from Native American culture to frontier life to immigration. The library is named for Katherine Watts and her sisters in memory of their father, William Watts, whose support of the Society and our community is legendary. Katherine has been working tirelessly to promote our Virtual Collections project.

The library is a fresh space that combines traditional and modern styles and serves as a research and media center. It is the headquarters for our Virtual Collections project. This project involves the digitization of the Society's collections at both the History Museum and the Link Museum. Volunteers and interns are currently digitizing the Society archives, which include all two-

dimensional collection items – maps, photographs, letters, and other documents. Ultimately, the Virtual Collections project will encompass some 6,000 additional three-dimensional objects. Along with the digitization project, we are performing a collections inventory this spring, which will help us establish best practices for caring for our collections by determining our storage and conservation needs.

The History Museum regularly presents a diverse offering of educational programs and fundraising events. Last fall, the Museum sponsored an overnight trip to Fredericksburg, and spring saw two more trips: an overnight to Abingdon and a day trip to tour the Rock Churches. In September, we premiered a large-scale exhibition on loan from the Blue Ridge Institute, titled "White Liquor, Blue Ridge Style." More exhibitions of this caliber are being planned to provide a fresher take on history.

Back by popular demand in December was Fantasyland, showcasing the nostalgic Christmas characters displayed at department stores from the 1940s to the 1970s. These characters are being refurbished and will look better than ever for the 2009 holiday season. In February, we hosted the third annual "History Is Served" brunch and silent auction at the Hotel Roanoke. This year's speaker, Dr. James I. Robertson Jr., gave us new insights into the Civil War in Virginia.

Not all of the Society's activities take place on-site. I've already mentioned our bus tours, but we also host a monthly Speaker Series featuring regional historians and authors who present a vast array of topics. This year we



have learned about the Wilderness Migration route, former Mayor Noel C. Taylor, and the history of firefighting – just to name a few. Kegley Publications accepts several book proposals each year and this year we have debuted publications about WDBJ Radio and Charles Johnston's Indian Capture Narrative of 1823. We are very pleased that the WDBJ book has been nominated for a Library of Virginia award. Charles Johnston's narrative is a collaborative project with the Salem Historical Society and Historic Sandusky Foundation. The third publication of this fiscal year will be George S. Bernard's *Civil War Recollections*, based upon a collection of letters in our archives. This publication, a partnership with U.Va. Press, will introduce new information about the Civil War that has not been previously published.

Between the History Museum and the Link Museum, the Society has served many residents and visitors to our community. Total attendance at both museums through January 2009 is 42,000; that number includes an astounding 4,500 students served through outreach.

We are especially proud of the History Museum's Founders Day and the Link Museum's photography workshops. Founders Day, unveiled for the first time this year, includes students from Hurt Park Elementary School and James Breckinridge Middle School. Students at these schools are taking part in a series of cross-curriculum projects that will end with a competition and award ceremony this spring. The purpose of Founders Day is to enable students to understand the history of their campus and foster school pride.

After-school photography workshops offered by the Link Museum focus on under-served students, such as those attending Lucy Addison Middle School. These students are exposed to the art of photography, which allows them to express themselves independently and study their environment. Each semester-long program culminates in a student exhibition.

This year, the Link Museum has also produced high quality programs and fundraisers for the community. Each quarter brings a new photography exhibit featuring local and national artists. Photographers this year include Kevin Scanlon, Ted Rose, Eric Curry and George Warren. In the fall, the Link Museum started a new event called the Sustainability Dinner Series. The museum hosted three dinners serving local and organic food with guest speakers discussing green practices in the rail industry. In December, Santa again visited the Link Museum by rail and in May, the annual Celebration at the Station provided another day of family fun. Most significantly, the Link Museum celebrated its fifth anniversary in January.

We're looking forward to the next year. Do drop in and see us!

Jeanne M. Bollendorf  
Executive Director



*Volunteer Lowell Blankeship at work in the expanded Historical Society library.*



# A Personal History of the Hotel Roanoke

by Doreen Hamilton Fishwick

One of my favorite subjects is the history of the Hotel Roanoke. Therefore, I'd like to ask you to join me in a walk back through time to the year 1881, to a small hamlet called Big Lick – a terrible name but so called because the deer used to come down from the hills to lick the salt bogs, which were prevalent in this area. This hamlet was comprised of 669 people (fairly evenly divided between black and white) and 100 houses. Not houses as we think of today – for these had no running water and were built along dirt roads.

In those days, there were many small railroads, some no more than 36 miles long and most in financial difficulty. Remember this was shortly after the Civil War. On February 10, an auction was held in Richmond to sell the Atlantic, Mississippi and Ohio Railroad. A well-known Philadelphia private banking house, which incidentally owned the Shenandoah Valley Railroad, won the bid by offering \$8,605,000 and immediately renamed it the Norfolk and Western Railroad. The citizens of Norfolk were apprehensive of this bid for they felt the railroad had fallen into hostile hands. When the new owners heard this, they sent a message to Norfolk that they need have no fear from a company whose name was Norfolk.

In the spring of 1881, Big Lick began to hear rumors that the Shenandoah Valley Railroad was due to meet the new N&W somewhere between Lynchburg and Salem. As engineering parties began moving through the country, surveying lines, this little hamlet of less than 700 people collected \$5,000, plus an acre of land, and offered it to the two railroads if they would join at Big Lick. How much this offer influenced the railroad's Board of Directors is unclear. But Frederick Kimball, president of the Shenandoah Valley and a member of the Clark family bank in Philadelphia, remarked that the people of Big Lick were alive and at Big Lick they'd have friends. And so we arrive at the year 1882.

The little hamlet began to burst at the seams. By June of 1882, the N&W, which would soon absorb the Shenandoah, had purchased large tracts of land and had erected 78 frame and 60 brick houses. Individuals on lots bought from the company erected two office buildings, 15 stores and seven houses – with plans for 62 more brick houses.

By this time, 3,000 people, mostly men, were already in Big Lick; they were mainly builders and laborers. The population was expected to reach 5,000 within the year and an additional 10,000 shortly thereafter. Could this hamlet-turned-town continue to be called Big Lick? The citizens wanted to name the town after Mr. Kimball, who was soon to become the president of N&W, but he declined the honor. So after much discussion, Big Lick became known as Roanoke (the Indian name for money). A town that now consisted of seven blacksmiths, eight and soon to become nine hotels, 12 saloons, 10 doctors and eight lawyers. She boasted of six churches, 268 dwellings and one jail!

In those days, railroads always seemed to build grand hotels to house their passengers – N&W was no different and so Mr. Kimball selected a site in a wheat field on a hill north of the town and above the railroad tracks. The citizens were disappointed in the site and appointed Mayor Henry Trout to go and see Mr. Kimball and ask him not to put the Hotel and Depot on this site. The citizens were afraid it would draw trade off Franklin Road! We

*Doreen Hamilton Fishwick was general manager of Hotel Roanoke from 1986 until it closed in 1989 when Norfolk Southern Corp. gave the hotel to Virginia Tech. After a conference center was added and renovation completed, Virginia Tech reopened the hotel in 1995. Mrs. Fishwick presented this history in a talk at a brunch of the Historical Society of Western Virginia on Feb. 4, 2006, at the hotel.*





*Hotel Roanoke, sitting on a barren hill in 1886 (Images courtesy of History Museum of Western Virginia).*



all know Mr. Kimball's reply, for the hotel stands on the hill overlooking the railroad tracks.

We have wonderful records of the building of this hotel. The design was to be in the Queen Anne style. It was to be 177 feet long by 73 feet wide. It wasn't even completed before an annex 132 feet long by 43 feet wide was attached. The original building was to cost \$45,000; however, when you added the annex of \$12,000, the cost totaled \$57,000.

Although the prospectus said there would be 20 rooms, there were actually 34 guest rooms, plus 35 in the annex, for a total of 69 rooms. The specifications were elaborate. The work was to be performed in a "true, perfect and thoroughly workmanlike manner." Even down to the hardwood being furnished with Berry's Hand Oil Finish. There were brass bolts for the inside doors and iron for all entrance doors.

Speaking tubes – which you may or may not remember – were to run from the office to the kitchen and the servants' rooms. The butler's pantry was also equipped with speaking tube connections.

The kitchen called for a seven-foot French oven with two fires, two additional ovens and a 36-inch wrought iron furnace. It had all the latest appliances and it took 12 floor-to-ceiling closets to not only store the china but they were also fitted with an apparatus to warm the plates.

Even the privies – indoor bathrooms that were new to the citizenry – had specs including that the seats were to be 1 1/2 inches thick. These bathrooms were to connect to the first sewer line built in Roanoke, which ran from the hotel east to empty into Lick Run.

As work was progressing, one million bricks were ordered, to be delivered at a rate of 40,000 per week at a cost of \$8.50 per thousand. This seems like a tremendous number of bricks for what was essentially a frame building; however, history records that many were later used to build the additional company residences! The building was to be heated by hot air and supported by three large coal rooms. Sharing the basement was a barbershop, and a large bar room with fireplaces of pressed brick after the Queen Anne style. There was also a steam laundry and a bakery which boasted an 8-foot by 6-foot oven. Can you imagine the heat?

The dining room was very handsome, seating 200 people under six chandeliers of eight lights each. This room, like the office and public areas, was finished in hand-rubbed and polished English walnut, carved oak, cherry and ash.

All guest rooms had cold and hot running water and most had zinc or porcelain bathtubs – the first in Roanoke – where it was said that "one could bathe in a warm and private place." A complicated system of bells



was in each guest room, thereby permitting the guests to have direct contact with the bellboy, chambermaid and to request ice water. The guest room furniture was of Honduras mahogany. The elevator was a system of ropes and pulleys that ran from the basement to the third floor. And, last but not least, was the grand staircase with beautifully carved, polished oak and lighted by a handsome stained glass window. This, then, was the first Hotel Roanoke.

The townspeople were told that 500 trees would grace the hill and the grounds would be lighted by two dozen gas lamps. This never happened and the grounds of this 10-acre site remained a fairly barren landscape. However, it was the view of the mountains from the wrap-around porches and the guest rooms that delighted the guests.

The grand opening was held on Christmas Day 1882. It was an exciting day. For a new hotel in a community whose rough edges had not yet been smoothed out, it must have been quite an experience!

Christmas dinner on that opening day consisted of nine courses, including English plum pudding with brandy sauce. Sadly, the only thing missing from the menu was the price and history did not record it. From my experience, I know that no hotel makes money on its opening, so perhaps recording the price was not important. The opening did, however, identify this new hotel as a center of elegance and hospitality. It was the first link in a chain that bound the hotel and Roanokers together.

The newcomers in town with the railroad and its associated activities needed a social life and so they looked to the hotel, where they organized the German Club and its first dance. As there were few young women in Roanoke at the time, young ladies from nearby counties were invited. History tells us that these ladies were accom-



*Fire burned much of the hotel on July 1, 1898.*

panied by chaperones, came by rail on reduced rail tickets and were installed at the Hotel Roanoke, at the expense of the local bachelors! The music for the evening was provided by the Roanoke Machine Shops Orchestra. The account of that first dance is rather amusing – particularly for those of us living in today's world, as number 12 of the German's bylaws, dated 1883, states, "Members shall not be allowed to go upon the 2nd floor of the hotel during the evening of the German, but must leave their partners at the 1st landing of the stairs, where they will be met by a maid especially appointed for that purpose." I'm sure many hotel general managers would appreciate a similar rule today. That club, as we all know, is still in existence – I wonder if they've rewritten the 1883 bylaws?

The next years were busy and profitable, with many local organizations utilizing the hotel, as well as railroad passengers. In those days, people didn't stay for one or two nights, but for much longer periods. It was said they stayed longer to enjoy the mountain air and get away from the summer heat – where on earth could they have come from to think Roanoke was cool in the summer!

These travelers would be met by porters who would transport their luggage up the hill to the hotel. Once ensconced on the property, the guests could sit in rocking chairs on the wide wrap-around porch covered with Virginia Creeper and take in the view of the surrounding mountains.

Things were going so well that in 1891, an expansion began to remodel the arm of the hotel facing west and to add new guest rooms. The book value in 1891 went from the original \$45,000 to \$125,000, which at the time was a significant investment.

All went well until on July 1, 1898, a little after noon, a fire in the kitchen quickly spread through the frame construction. The Roanoke Times recalled the event in the 50th anniversary edition on November 30, 1936. It read as follows: "As the blaze soared and it was evident that the fire department was unable to control it, hundreds of men rushed in from the Roanoke Machine Works and assisted in saving much of the furniture and carpets and



destroying thousands of dollars worth of hotel equipment in their effort to save something from the flames. Beds, dressers, mattresses and other furniture, including china bowls and pitchers, with which many of the rooms were equipped, were hurled from the second and third floor windows, white carpets were wrenched from the floors and piled outside in the greatest confusion. Willing hands on the outside were ready to drag the furnishings to vantage points on the lawn to the south and west of the blazing building, all of which was practically destroyed, with the exception of the east wing. The roof of the west wing was burned and the interior gutted. The lobby and office were disfigured by flames but the construction held intact."

A wonderful account of that day but – can you imagine the confusion – I'm sure the helpers in their misguided zeal had no idea that

when you throw furniture and china out of second and third floor windows it's going to break! However, there was a bright side – there were no recorded injuries and although at first it was thought the entire hotel would have to be rebuilt, that was not the case. She did have to close for a few months, but by October, it was business as usual.

During the next 83 years, the hotel was renovated and rebuilt a half-dozen times. Probably the most important was in 1937 when the hotel was closed and rebuilt from the ground up at a cost of \$1,050,000, excluding furnishings. This major construction

turned the hotel into what most of us remember prior to 1995. The porches were swept away, the entrance, in Tudor style, was moved to its present location. The designers created six floors and a penthouse, a new lobby and reception area, a 60-car garage, a large number of outdoor parking spaces, a new dining room, Pine Room, Palm Court, Oval Room and Ballroom. The guest rooms now totaled 310 and were equipped with movable telephones, which could be plugged in at four convenient locations, electric fans, closets which lighted automatically when one opened the door, and

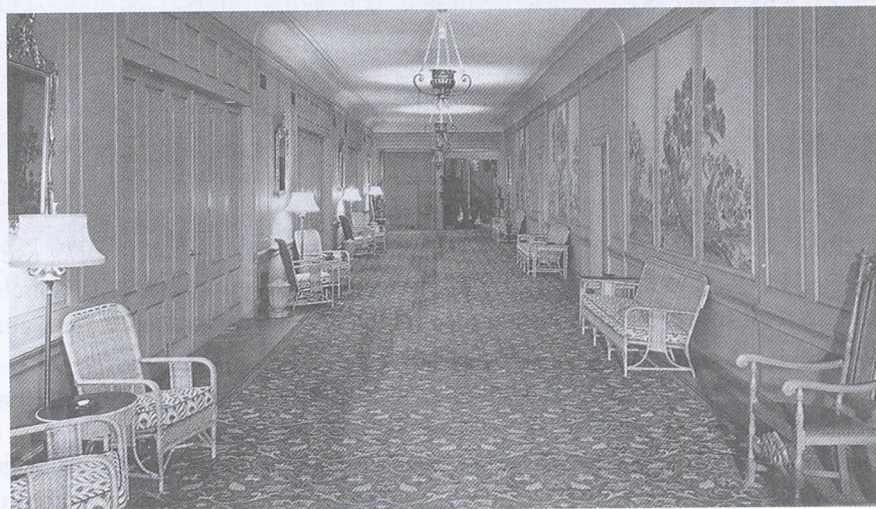
full-length mirrors. A combination shower and bathtub, running ice water and even a receptacle for discarding razor blades in the bathroom (remember this was 1937). There were also flower beds outside the dining room and a reflecting pool in front of the entrance.

At this same time, the hotel became the first in the country to be air conditioned. A full-time air conditioning engineer was assigned to care for it. Incidentally, his credentials stated that he had taken a correspondence course in this new science. This new luxury was advertised, not as we know air conditioning today, but, and I quote, "so that visitors with allergies may find relief."

The new hotel reopened on September 15, 1938. As I mentioned earlier, it consisted of six floors, plus a



*Hotel bedroom around the late teens, early '20s.*



*Peacock Alley in 1943.*





penthouse. Now, who was going to be the first occupant of the penthouse? The story goes this way: Mr. W.J. Jenks, the then N&W President, and E.R. Johnson, a member of the board of directors and a community leader, both wanted the penthouse as their home. However, along came Mr. H.W. Shields, Vice President & General Manager of Pocahontas Coal – a subsidiary of N&W – who very diplomatically pointed out to these two gentlemen that both their wives loved to garden and the penthouse had no garden. He then mentioned that his wife had no interest in gardening, so by default, Mr. H.W. Shields and his family became the first occupants of the penthouse.

A number of grand parties took place, which it is said matched the first German dance of a half-century before. We must remember that all of these improvements took place during the Great Depression. What must people have thought? My late brother-in-law, Marshall Fishwick, remembered the hotel of that period this way: "In a time of scarcity, it meant abundance. In a time of drabness, it meant beauty. Hotel Roanoke, on a high hill, smacked of another world."

In 1945, the railroad announced another million-dollar face-lift, which involved enlarging the guest room inventory to 361 rooms. These new rooms were equipped with wall radios, offering four radio stations.

In 1948, the big news concerned the installation of an entirely automatic tube ice machine that could produce in excess of five tons of shaved, cracked and cylindered ice every 24 hours – the lowly ice cube was no more at Hotel Roanoke. You might like to know that this machine was still in use in 1989!

In 1955, to the tune of \$1.2 million, a new wing was added. This included 56 additional guest rooms, bringing the total to 417. This addition also included the Shenandoah Room, and a coffee shop replaced the Fountain Room.

An effort to keep up with the times meant in 1962 a swimming pool of junior Olympic size was opened and in 1967 was enclosed with a retractable roof for year-round use.

Beginning in 1963, roadside motels were beginning to crop up, which drew business away from what, up to this point, had been the only place to stay in the valley. So, once again, to keep up with the present-day trends, a new entrance was created on the northeast side, facing the Roanoke shops. The new canopy said, "Motor Inn." And this new entrance was just steps away from where the guests could park their cars. It was very expensive to operate, for it needed its own reception desk, with three shifts each day. It turned out to be a failure and in a very short time went out of business. The entrance was closed and once again the property became one operation.

During the 1970s, even though red ink was the color of the month, the Pickwick Club closed and the Windsor Room opened. The Whistle Stop Bar opened and the Terrace Lounge was created off the Regency Room.

Keeping the hotel alive and vital was not only due to N&W and the various management teams, but to the dedicated employees, most of whom, from the earliest days spent their working lives serving the hotel and her visitors with pride and courtesy.

There were people like Chef Brown, who in 1940 created the hotel's Peanut Soup; Billie and Alex, without whom no wedding or convention could have been successful; and Mike, who for over 45 years opened the door



for guests and supervised the bellmen.

In the early days, employees were mostly black and how difficult it must have been for them to know that even black entertainers could not enter through the front door. Following their performance for the hotel guests, they would leave through the employee entrance to spend the night at the Hotel Dumas. Indeed, a sad blight on the history of our hotel.

It was not until after the Civil Rights Act that in 1964 then-general manager Janet Jenkins welcomed Mahalia Jackson, the distinguished gospel singer, as the hotel's first black guest. Incidentally, Mrs. Jenkins was one of only two female General Managers in the hotel's long history – I'll let you guess who the other one was!

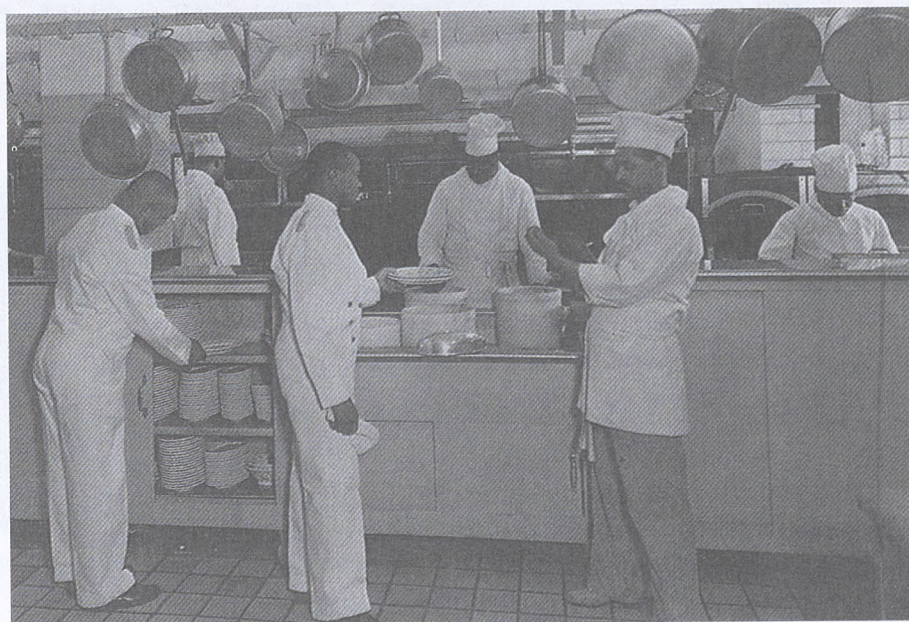
The hotel listed many VIPs who visited through the years. To name just a few, there was John D. Rockefeller, Amelia Earhart, Joe DiMaggio, and Lawrence Tibbett, the great Metropolitan Opera baritone, who stayed while performing at the Roanoke Academy of Music. Some years later, Van Cliburn, who was practicing in his suite prior to a performance, left his bathtub running and water leaked through to the Regency Room – needless to say, he was long remembered. Jack Dempsey spent the night and upon departing is recorded to have said, "That sure is a fine hotel, one of the best in this part of the country." Governors of Virginia have all stayed from time to time and even Senator John Warner brought his then wife, Elizabeth Taylor, to attend the Symphony Ball.

Of course, we can't forget the Miss Virginia Pageant. Beginning in 1955, through the efforts of Margaret Baker, Elizabeth Bowles and the late Jack Smith, the pageant has always been a welcome piece of business during an otherwise slow summer period. I used to chuckle, watching the girls in bathing suits gathered around the pool outside the entrance for a photo shoot. I'd look up at the N&W General Office Building and in every window the male employees were hanging out of the windows watching!

By the 1970s, downtown hotels really began to suffer, especially in small cities. The passenger trains were no more – the motels were convenient for road travel and in many cities these lovely old properties were closing their doors. Although the Hotel Roanoke saw her occupancy drifting off to these motels, she still clung to a devoted nucleus of patrons and dedicated business, but it wasn't easy.

Among those devoted patrons was a lady named Ava, who spent her summers and most Christmases at the hotel while visiting family. It was her "second home." She loved it, as well as the dedicated and caring staff. When she died, she requested that her ashes be scattered in the hotel's lovely flower beds. So her family gave a luncheon at the hotel for her many friends, after which, as one guest told me, her friends stood on the hotel porch as her family walked down to the flower beds and scattered her ashes. It's a lovely story for this grand old lady's history. Many guests have felt her charm and never wanted to leave.

Then, perhaps the darkest cloud in her history fell on October 1, 1983. The employees went out on strike. The issue was wages and working conditions. Many Roanokers were annoyed that the hotel would let this happen – what these people didn't know was that the declining occupancy coupled with more and more red ink, had caused management to reduce its full-time employees and to keep wage increases at a bare minimum. The hotel refused to budge and so did the union. Replacements were hired and the strike lasted for six months, ending after further



*Chefs at work in the Hotel kitchen.*



negotiations in April 1984.

The employees went through a hard winter but they loved the hotel. As an example of their respect for the railroad: my husband's mother died during the strike and when he was leaving the hotel to attend her funeral, the strikers put down their placards, moved away from the entrance and stood silently as he rode out of the property. While they loved the hotel, they felt a strike was the only way to save their jobs. With both the employees and the hotel suffering from losses, it was not an easy situation.

Finally, the employees returned to work and business seemed to go along as usual; however, more and more convention business began to look for state-of-the-art convention centers which the City of Roanoke did not provide and the hotel continued to lose revenue.

When I assumed management of the hotel in January 1986, I was certainly aware of the challenges that lay ahead. The work force was still shaken from the six-month strike. The hotel owed huge sums to Norfolk Southern Corp. that were loaned to her during the previous decade and business was at an all-time low.

Was I crazy, you might ask? Well, I have always been a woman who liked a challenge. With an understand-

ing that past debts to Norfolk Southern would be forgiven, the staff and I began the process of healing old wounds, increasing business, going after smaller meetings and collecting outstanding bills left unpaid for meals, parties, meetings and so on.

When speaking to one client regarding his unpaid tab, he said, "What's the hurry, the railroad has plenty of dough." My reply was, "You may be right, but your bill is with the Hotel Roanoke and we are not one and the same." He did pay up!

The guest rooms were in need of redecorating, and so we began to work on many levels. Business began to pick up and the employees' old enthusiasm returned when we were able to successfully negotiate a new union contract. Capital expenditures of more than \$1 million in 1987 and 1988 were fund-

ed totally from the hotel's internally generated cash flow. These expenditures involved not only redecorating the guest rooms but also the Regency Dining Room, and installing a Lobby Bar – which turned out to be quite successful. We had turned a corner – but, for how long?

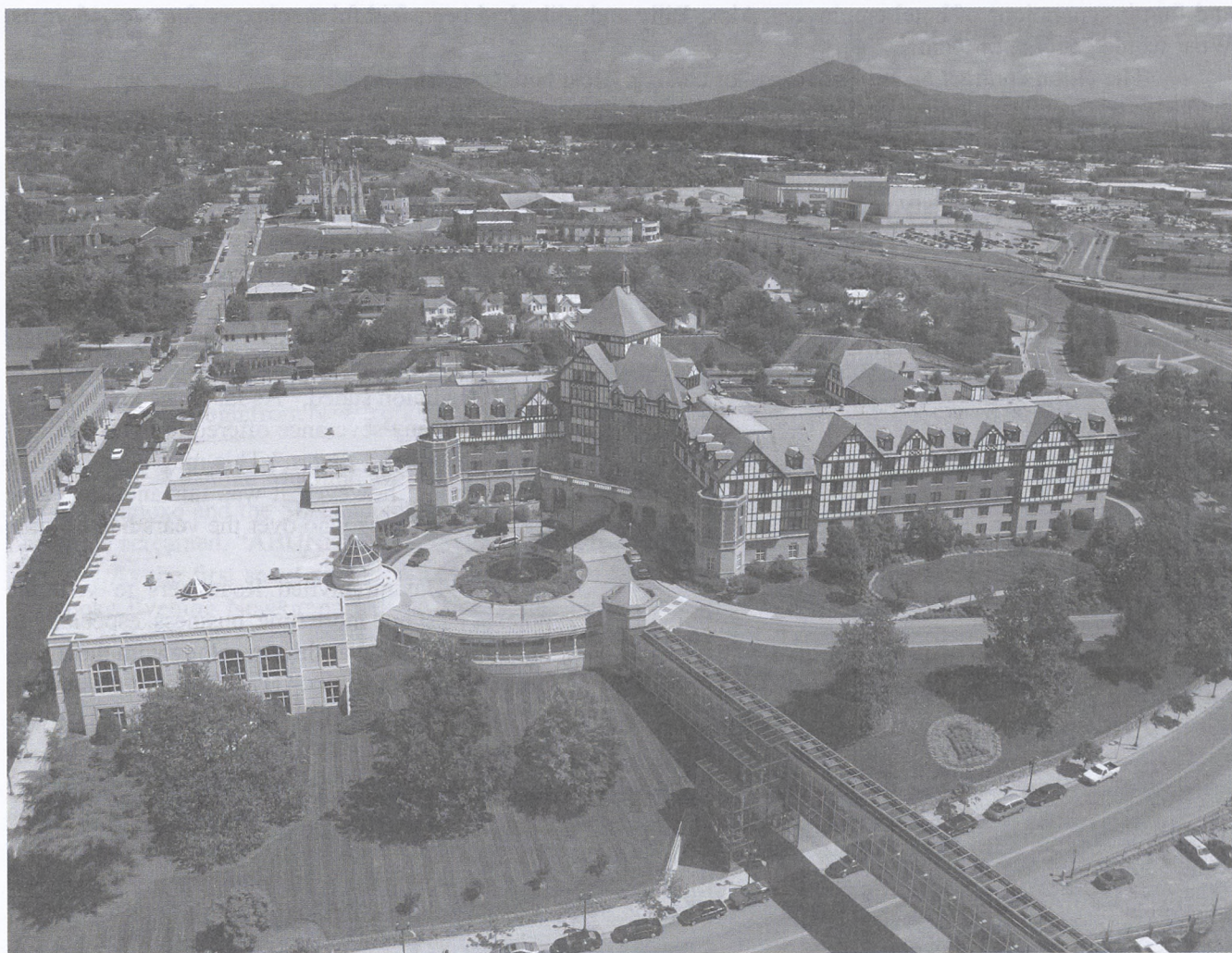
During this time, I addressed the Civic Center Commission regarding the critical situation developing with the convention business. These meetings were growing, which prompted the interest of many more exhibitors with no place for their exhibits. During 1987 and '88, I met with a number of meeting planners who stated that as much as they enjoyed the hotel, the city and the Civic Center, they would be unable to return without adequate convention and exhibit space. This meant the Hotel Roanoke would be limited as to the size of conventions we could go after and ultimately we would lose revenue. Although we made a concerted effort to hold on to these larger conventions, we knew they would eventually have to find other cities.

Meanwhile, back at the hotel, we knew we would soon have to face the need for a new heating and cooling system. The steam for the hotel heating came through underground pipes from the railroad and even though we were paying for the steam, it was not adequate for our needs.



*Snowy entrance, 1958.*





*Aerial view of hotel and conference center (Photo courtesy of Hotel Roanoke)*

In the winter, I was always calling for more steam, I'm sure to the annoyance of whoever was on duty. We had estimated the cost of our own in-house system at between \$32 million and \$35 million and there was simply no way the hotel could generate such earnings and the railroad's capital resources were needed elsewhere.

Knowing that our long-range plans looked dim, John Fishwick, who loved the hotel, began to ponder a way to settle our dilemma and still save the old girl. Would Virginia Tech be interested in bringing some portion of its meetings or perhaps even an educational program to Roanoke? Would they entertain the idea of accepting the hotel as a gift? A new president was about to take over Virginia Tech – could he be interested?

Thinking this might be the best solution, not only for the hotel but also for Roanoke, Mr. Fishwick approached Dave Caudill and asked him to find out if Virginia Tech would have an interest in the hotel. Of course, we all know the answer. Once my husband received the approval of Norfolk Southern, the wheels were set in motion.

On July 26, 1989, in the hotel's Pine Room, Norfolk Southern's then President Arnold McKinnon announced that the Hotel Roanoke would close November 30, 1989, and the hotel would be gifted to Virginia Tech.

It was a day of mixed emotions – sorrow and uncertainty among the staff, and determination on the part of management to continue operating the hotel for the next four months with grace and dignity.

There were countless to-do lists! Canceling all reservations and meetings scheduled after the closing, making arrangements to dispose of the furnishings, assuring all guests over the next four months that business would continue as usual until November 30, and most importantly, conducting meetings with the staff. Many were third



and fourth generations of hotel employees. Alex, Billy and Mike had been faithful employees for over 45 years. What would become of them?

The union contract had no provision for closing. Most hotels, when closing, had paid the employees up to the last work-day, vacation pay and any sick days owed. In good faith, I felt this was not enough, but I could not offer money without negotiating with the union, or it would be considered an unfair labor practice. Another dilemma!

Arriving at a monetary package I felt was fair, and with the approval of Norfolk Southern as to the dollars involved, I met with the union, headed by Mr. Christian and Mr. Wade. With the assurances that the employees intended to see that the services offered at the hotel would continue to be of the highest quality right up until the last dinner was served and the last drink order was taken on November 30, the severance package was agreed to.

### *Hotel Roanoke General Managers*

George Jacoby	Carl Thursdon
Fred Foster	Fred Walker
S.K. Campbell	Ken Wilkey
W.A. Dameron	Janet Jenkins
F.M. Thomas	J.D. Shaiffer
Kenneth Hyde	Peter Kipp
George Denison	Doreen Hamilton Fishwick

On August 31, in a joint press conference, we announced a severance agreement in which the union stated, "As far as we know, this is better than any severance offered to hotel employees in the United States." This may have been an exaggeration; however, it was fair and honorable for the employees who over the years had become family.

Having invited Roanokers to visit the hotel at least one more time, business, especially in the dining room, was thriving along with the disappearance of "souvenirs." By October, it was necessary to order more china and silverware to continue for the next 60 days!

How best to celebrate the closing of a hotel with 107 years of existence? Of course, with a black-tie closing banquet in the ballroom. We envisioned an event conducted with dignity and steeped in traditional Hotel Roanoke graciousness that the community would long remember.

The banquet, held on November 28 and limited by space to 600 invitees, suddenly became the hottest ticket in town! In addition to the "movers and shakers" in the community, there were railroad executives, judges, former Governor Linwood Holton (a most delightful guest over the years) and 30 invitations to the general public. People were invited to place their names in a fish bowl in the Regency Room and the winning names were drawn a week prior to the banquet.

While these plans were being made, there was also the closing ceremony on November 30 to think about – including locking the door. I had no key! In 107 years, the hotel had never locked her doors, so a locksmith was contacted and in two days he handed me the key. Of the 14 general managers over 107 years, I was the only one to receive the key to the hotel – a bittersweet moment.

Things sped along at such a pace that the employees had very little time to think about the future. Finally, after all the tears and hugs, the final hours had arrived. The flags were lowered and presented to the Roanoke Valley History Museum – Mayor Noel Taylor accepting the City Flag, Senator Granger Macfarlane the flag of the Commonwealth of Virginia and Congressman Jim Olin the flag of the United States of America. All those who had braved the cold weather were then invited inside for cider and cookies.

At midnight, the door was locked for the first time in 107 years and the hill overlooking the railroad tracks was hushed and dark.

At the closing banquet, I offered a toast and said, "To her glorious past, may she sleep well and may she awaken with all her charm of today, to face a bright and prosperous 21st century."

Today, I believe that toast and our hopes for her future have come true, for in 1995, the Hotel Roanoke reopened with a state-of-the-art convention center. She's a lovely young lady and I hope that, perhaps, 107 years from now she will be able to record as illustrious a history of her life as the Grand Old Lady she replaced.





# 'Dust-clad motorcars' arrive in Roanoke in 1909!

by George Kegley

The year 1909 – a century ago – was a very big year for new motor cars traveling through Roanoke. In July, scout cars came from New York seeking a route for a national highway to Atlanta and in October a caravan drove through from New York to Atlanta on a “memorable run for endurance merits.” A referee checked their points.

The Roanoke Machine Works band played for the “endurance” travelers and receptions were staged at Hotel Roanoke and the Shenandoah and Elks clubs. When scout cars found an acceptable route, a big newspaper headline screamed, “ABUNDANT ASSURANCE OF A GREAT HIGHWAY.”

As the first scout cars, a White Steamer and an Oldsmobile, drove through the Shenandoah Valley, the Roanoke Evening News reported: “All along the line, every man, woman and child showed an interest. Horses

shied at the cars, cows dropped their cuds and some of the oldest residents said, ‘Well, here comes one of them airships,’ for at times the cars really did appear to be flying.”

This exciting traffic came only six years after the first car in Roanoke was reportedly driven by T.T. Fishburn, president of National Exchange Bank and uncle of J.B. Fishburn, banking and newspaper executive.

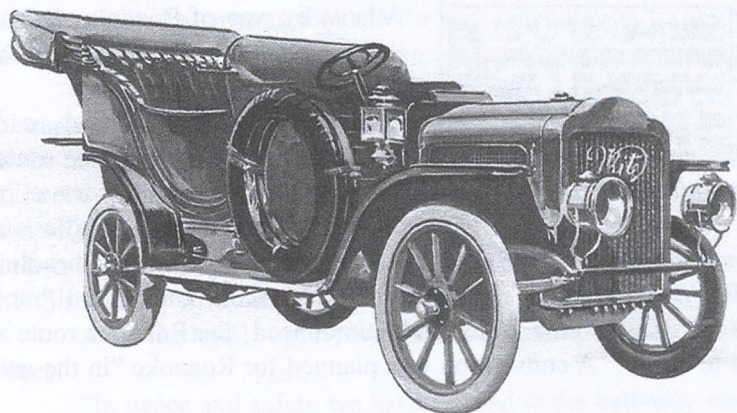
A Roanoke party of eight automobiles drove to Buchanan to meet the scout cars and escort them to Hotel Roanoke where they were guests of Fred Foster. They were sponsored by the New York Herald and the Atlanta Journal. The Evening News told of the assignment in selecting a north-south highway route:

*A 1908 White Steamer, 30 horsepower, like the model which visited Roanoke the next year.*

“Several routes have been prospected but not one of them seems thus far to have been satisfactory. That the road through the Valley of Virginia will form a link in the proposed highway is taken as a foregone conclusion, and the only point to be determined now is as to where the road will go after it leaves the city of Staunton. The chances are largely in favor of the route coming to Roanoke and the principal problem is where shall the road be established from Roanoke South.”

After the “best adapted route” is selected, the Roanoke Times said, “mileposts, at five-mile intervals, will be erected, indicating the course that is the best for all travelers to pursue, whether on horseback or in automobiles, or even afoot – inasmuch as all good roads lead to Roanoke, Roanoke will be one of the important points on the line, that is, if some of the road officials in different counties get busy and fix up the highways so that they will at

WHITE 30 H.P.



*George Kegley has edited the Journal since 1968.*



least reflect a little credit on their respective counties.”

The first proposal was a route from Roanoke west to Tennessee. The local newspaper said if the route is selected from Roanoke west “through the beautiful Southwest – automobiles of the future will have, beginning with the Potomac River and extending to Bristol, as fair and lovely a country as could well be found in all the wide, wide world.”

The scouts spent the night in Radford and apparently had easy going through Southwest Virginia but they found the highway “beyond Bristol in a desperate condition.” A Herald-Tribune representative said:

“After 12 hours of the roughest plodding in their experience, the good roads scouts of the Herald and the Atlanta Journal arrived in Rogersville (Tenn.) this afternoon, tired, mud-stained and disgusted.” The powerful cars succeeded in traveling only 55 miles in one day through “quagmires – Many times all hands had to leap out in the mud up to their knees and help the White Steamer and the Oldsmobile through and at several places, the party practically had to rebuild the road before they could advance.” The cars used chains all day.

Reporting on the “frightful condition” of the Tennessee roads, the scouts declared that the highways in that section “are as bad as any in the country.” The Evening News announced that “it seems to be an accepted fact that the proposed automobile highway from New York to Atlanta by way of Roanoke, Bristol and Knoxville will have to be abandoned.”

A week later, the good roads people began to scout other routes from Roanoke south, traveling through Bedford to Danville and through Rocky Mount and Martinsville. The best news came on July 26 when the Evening News, under a headline stating: “ABUNDANT ASSURANCE OF A GREAT HIGHWAY,” said the Roanoke scout cars found “most encouraging conditions” by way of Rocky Mount and Martinsville. The Herald announced “the Roanoke route as the one chosen for the National Road from North to South.” A convention was planned for Roanoke “in the near future.”

But the North-South route did not come quickly. As roads gradually improved, construction of national highways began in 1925.

Another highway event came three months later, in October 1909, when a caravan of motor cars came to town, half-way on a long trip from New York to Atlanta. The Evening News gave this description under the headline MOTOR CARS LEAVE FOR WINSTON-SALEM:

“Resume their journey into the Southland after a delightful sojourn in Roanoke – dust-clad vehicles began whirling through Jefferson Street at 7 o’clock this morning. By 8 o’clock all the cars except the one used by the referee had left Roanoke far in the rear – will take dinner at Martinsville and reach the North Carolina city late this evening. After traveling 125.8 miles – Tourists express themselves as most appreciative of the cordiality and hospitality of their entertainment in this city.”

The Roanoke Times said the visit came on a “Memorable day”: “Splendid entertainment provided for the big aggregation of tourists, after a long run from Staunton; Everyone made welcome and provided with splendid cheer all over city – Reception and other committees do good work and show visitors royal time – Ball player makes speech at Hotel Roanoke.

“Principal among the visiting attractions was the indomitable Tyrus Cobb, the sturdy, but more or less bashful outfielder of the Detroit Tigers, about whom men, women and children swarmed for an hour or more after his arrival.”

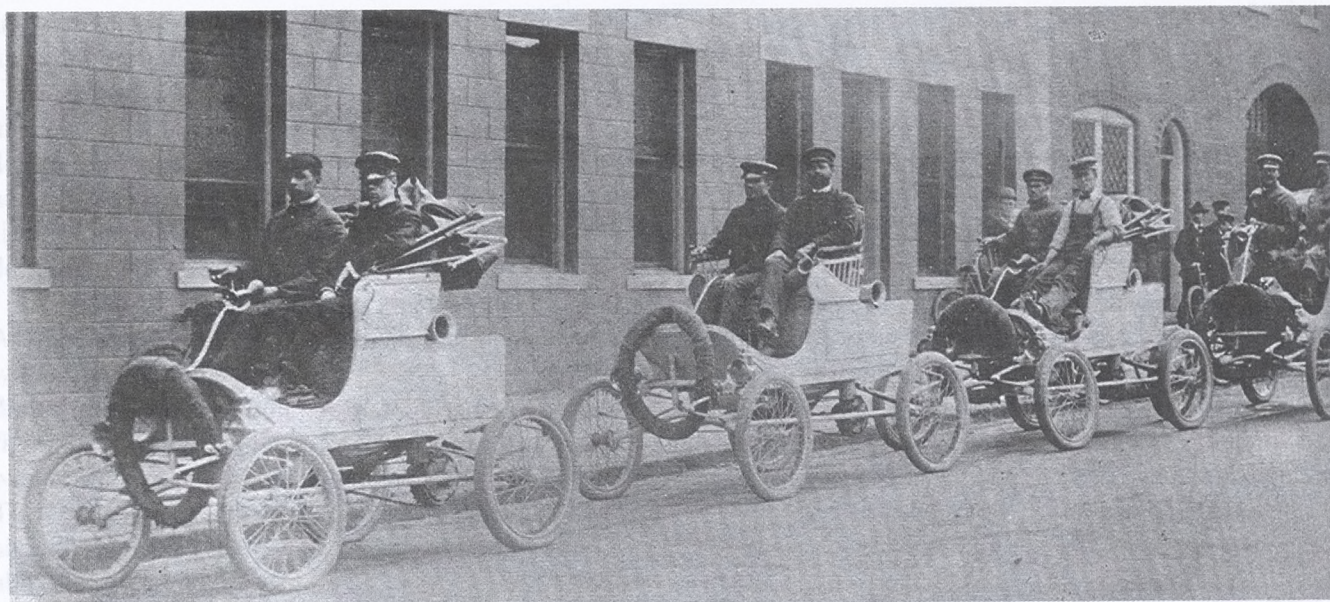
considered best adapted to the route proposed. The only real bad place on the road was at Ford near what was formerly on the postoffice registers as “Villa,” but it was learned there that a bridge is to be constructed at that point by the Virginia Bridge and Iron Company of this city. That will complete the road so far as that sort of improvement is concerned; but the counties traversed will be required

Circuit Court Judge Burdette of West Virginia, has restrained Attor-

Scout Cars From Roanoke Find Conditions Most Encouraging—Convention to Be Held in Roanoke in

Headline in the Roanoke Evening News, July 26, 1909





*Four White Steamers drove from New York to Buffalo in 1902. Similar models came to Roanoke in 1909. (Photo from Those Wonderful Old Automobiles, Bonanza Books, 1953)*

The party of 175 "automobile tourists" began arriving in the Magic City at about half past four o'clock on what was called a "memorable run for endurance merits." They were met by the Machine Works Band and entertained with an "ample supper" at Hotel Roanoke and receptions at the Shenandoah and Elks clubs.

Mayor Joel Cutchin greeted the visitors. J.H. Marsteller, head of the arrangements committee, said he was so much pleased with the "splendid manner in which everything has turned out, that he feels like patting everyone on the back and saying that Roanoke is the best city on earth and the autoists about the best people on the globe." Marsteller, head of the Marsteller Monument Works, then rode to Atlanta in a Roanoke car. C.E. Michael, president of Virginia Bridge and Iron Co., said the travelers were "the most appreciative people I ever saw to be in such great number." Other members of the arrangements committee were J.W. Hancock, T.W. Goodwin, O.A. Kerns, D.P. Sirra and E.M. Funkhouser.

After the hotel supper, Winthrop E. Starritt, a leader of the travelers, made this statement, according to the Times:

"In peace and safety we have arrived at the half-way stage in the New York-Atlanta tour. Again, we have traveled under smiling skies as fair a land as the sun sees in all his journey around the globe. For almost two days we have journeyed through Virginia, the 'Mother of Presidents,' rich in historic associations, prolific in soldiers, scholars and statesmen. We have felt at home ever since we passed on yesterday morning that banner spanning the highway bearing the greeting, 'Welcome to Old Virginia.'

"As the good roads cavalcade has progressed southward, our welcome has grown in warmth and enthusiasm. Crowds have thronged to the village street and country lane to view the novel procession. Schools have been dismissed and children in glad acclaim shouted, 'go faster, go faster'; above the little country school houses, poor and meager as they seemed, floated the Stars and Stripes, emblem of a reunited country.

"At Lexington, Mayor Walker and other prominent citizens extended the hospitality of the town. Colonel Pendleton of the famous Virginia Military Institute honored us by a special battalion drill which was a delight to witness. Thence we were conducted to the tomb of Robert E. Lee, one of the greatest soldiers of all time and whose name is inscribed high on the imperishable scroll of immortals.

"I wish to compliment all contestants and to thank them for a strict and cheerful compliance with the rules of the road. Throughout the day there has been no inconsideration and repassing of competing cars." Among the "dust-clad machines" were three White Steamers.





# Lincoln's Virginia roots

by Dr. Philip C. Stone

About 30 years ago, during a conversation over coffee, Judge John Paul and I expressed regret that the Harrisonburg-Rockingham County community did not have any established activities to honor the significant local connections with Abraham Lincoln's family.

As avid history students and admirers of Lincoln, we were particularly interested in those connections. I had an additional reason for being interested: my wife and I owned the farm on which Lincoln's ancestors first settled when they came to the Shenandoah Valley. As a result of that chat, we agreed that the two of us and a couple of friends would meet at the Lincoln Family Cemetery on his birthday, Feb. 12, 1976. We gave no thought to the possibility of continuing this activity for three decades plus.

In all these years at the cemetery ceremony, there has never been a good Lincoln day, as far as the weather. In fact, the weather has been truly "Lincolnesque!" Conditions have included deep snows, ice, rain, bitter cold and heavy winds. The Lincoln Day weather appears to be so jinxed that even when the day starts out beautifully, by the 2 p.m. starting time nasty conditions always seem to take control.

Notwithstanding the challenging winter weather, we often have substantial crowds, sometimes exceeding 100 people. Of course, there also was the year of the deep snow when Judge Paul and I were there alone. Having missed only one or two of the ceremonies, Judge Paul gets the award for the most faithful attendance.

People who have attended through the years include members of the extended Lincoln family from across the country, Lincoln and Civil War scholars and relatives of distinguished Civil War personalities. Dozens of other Lincoln relatives and Lincoln scholars have carried on regular correspondence with me and are kept informed about each ceremony program.

What are those Lincoln connections that lead us each year to this picturesque cemetery under such terrible weather conditions? While there is no evidence that the 16th president actually visited this area, this Shenandoah Valley location is one of the most significant in the history of the Lincoln family.

His great-grandparents, "Virginia John" and Rebeka Lincoln, lived more than 20 years in this community and were buried in the Lincoln Cemetery. His grandfather, Capt. Abraham Lincoln, a member of the Virginia Militia during the Revolutionary War, lived on Linville Creek near his parents for more than a dozen years. He and his wife, Bathsheba, a native of Dayton, had all five of their children, including the president's father, Thomas, while living on Linville Creek.

Even after Capt. Abraham and his family moved to Kentucky in the early 1780s, his brothers and sisters remained in the area. Descendants of these siblings constitute the five generations of Lincolns buried in the family cemetery where the ceremony is held (about six miles north of Harrisonburg). The last Lincoln family member was buried there in 1938. In addition to Lincoln graves, there are graves and headstones for the last two Lincoln slaves, Ned and Queen.

The purposes of the annual ceremony are both to celebrate and better inform our community and others about the significant Lincoln connections in Rockingham County and also to remind ourselves of the significance of Abraham Lincoln in American history. In addition to his roles as the savior of the Union, emancipator

*This is an edited version of an article by Bridgewater College President Dr. Philip Stone in the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society newsletter. Stone, a Lincoln scholar and former president of the society, has given two talks in Roanoke on the Lincoln connection to Virginia. More than 300 people braved 55-mile-per-hour winds to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Lincoln's birth at the family cemetery on Feb. 12, 2009.*



and architect of the concept of national citizenship, his personal values and characteristics have enduring value for us all, not just for presidents and those in high public office.

While serving in Congress in the 1840s, Lincoln wrote to a cousin in Rockingham County, asking for information about his family. He was very interested in his Virginia connections. Lincoln emancipated the slaves despite great opposition in the North as well as in the South, in spite of the fact that his own relatives were slaveholders. Some of his cousins threatened to shoot the president if they ever met him because of his position on slavery. Lincoln never made any statement that was not negative about slavery. He said, "I don't care who's doing it, it is a curse."

Although many Americans did not agree with emancipation and did not want to continue fighting the war, Lincoln won re-election in 1864. That victory said a lot about how people felt about the president. They believed in Lincoln, they trusted him. Lincoln kept his eye on the ball. He was patient, he was wise, he was an honest man.

Capt. Abraham Lincoln and his wife settled in Springfield, Ky., and he was killed in an Indian ambush, leaving his son, Thomas, with no inheritance. Thomas

Lincoln married Nancy Hanks and they had three children – Sarah, Thomas and Abraham, who was born in 1809. The family moved to Indiana and later to Illinois, where Abraham grew to manhood and became a lawyer. He married Mary Todd, a case of a man marrying above his class.

There was a great contrast between the Lincolns of Virginia, who were substantial land-owners who built large houses and owned slaves, and the western Lincolns, who lived a subsistence lifestyle.

Two other men who deserve significant acknowledgment for their work on the history of the Lincoln family in Virginia were John T. Harris Jr., a local attorney and son of a congressman who was personally acquainted with Abraham Lincoln, and John W. Wayland, who published "The Lincolns in Virginia," providing invaluable information about the history of the Lincoln family in our area. Wayland is owed so much for preserving the heritage, traditions and history of the entire Shenandoah Valley. Harris wrote an article for a national magazine, describing the Lincoln family connections in Rockingham County.

At several of the cemetery programs I have quipped that it would be appropriate to honor such significant connections with any past president, even if it were James Buchanan or Franklin Pierce. But, I have always added, it's a lot more fun to honor connections with Abraham Lincoln!

While the anniversary reminds us that this ceremony has taken place for many years, I have no intention to quit now. Even when I am no longer able to conduct the ceremony, there will be others who will step forward. Who knows, maybe even my own grandchildren.



*Dr. Philip Stone conducts the annual ceremony at the Lincoln family cemetery just outside Harrisonburg.*







## Col. J. Sinclair Brown: "Hard to beat"

by George Kegley

Col. J. Sinclair Brown, the only Roanoke Valley resident to serve as speaker of the House of Delegates in Virginia's General Assembly, gave up a chance to run for governor in the 1930s in order to devote service as president of Virginia Bankers Association and continue his banking career in Salem.

Brown, an influential figure in state government for a quarter-century, is remembered as one of the architects of the state highway system, starting when he was elected to the House in 1915. He served 20 years in the House, holding the important post of speaker for six years, from 1930 to 1936.

Born in Warm Springs in 1880 to the Rev. George Langhorne Brown, a Presbyterian minister, and Margaret Anderson Brown, he attended public and private schools, including Burnsville Academy in Braxton County, W.Va. His father, George Brown, a Salem native, served in the Salem Flying Artillery during the Civil War and later attended Roanoke College. A family story relates that the Browns held prayers in three languages – the father reading from a Hebrew Bible, a brother from the Greek, and Sinclair reading from the King James version. Sinclair Brown was said to be the fifth generation of his family who belonged to Salem Presbyterian Church.

The younger Brown began teaching school for \$25 a month for two years and worked as timekeeper and assistant manager in Chesapeake & Ohio Railway construction camps in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. By 1904, he planned to move to Oklahoma and open a hardware store but he stopped in Salem to learn the business from his uncle, Frank Brown, and never moved west.

A shrewd businessman, Brown used to display the first dollar he made – a silver coin he earned while sweeping out a grocery store at Bridgewater for 25 cents a week. He ran the Salem hardware for six years, then served as president of Salem Retail Merchants Association and was co-owner of a contracting business.

In 1913, Brown joined the board of Farmers National Bank of Salem and in 1922, while he was serving in the House of Delegates, a group of Salem businessmen offered him the post of president of the bank, starting at the top. He agreed and led the bank for 32 years, then continued as board chairman from 1954 until 1962. Self-described as "a cornfield banker," Brown once expressed his philosophy to the Salem Times-Register: "...if it works, then the theory behind it must be correct. I maintain that the same basic principles of sound business management apply to the operation of a bank as to any other institution." He later rose to president of Virginia Bankers Association and vice president of American Bankers Association. Among many recognitions, Brown held a title he did not earn. Gov. E. Lee Trinkle gave him a commission in the Virginia militia and the title of "colonel" in 1922.

In 1910, Brown and his wife, the former Jane Lewis Johnston of Salem moved "to the country" and built a house, "Poplar Hill," above Lee Highway, next to present-day Brandon Oaks Retirement Community in south-

*George Kegley has edited the Journal since 1968.*



west Roanoke. His granddaughter, Lucy Ellett, lives there with her husband, Frank Ellett, today. Lucy Ellett recalls that her grandfather once reminisced that when he drove his horse and buggy across the bridge over the railroad leaving Salem that he would be home in an hour.

This farm near the Roanoke River, between Roanoke and Salem, was part of what was once known as Brown's Bottom, owned by the Brown family for almost 200 years.

Brown entered politics with a tough victory in the Democratic primary for a House seat. He and his wife toured the county, helping shock corn and bunch onions, riding with farmers to market and standing in kitchens and barns during a "political apprenticeship," according to the Times-Register. But once elected, he was unopposed for 16 years in the House. Remarkably, during Brown's 20 years in the General Assembly, no bill for which he was a patron was defeated but he admitted to several close calls.

He was elected at a significant time with two new state senators: Harry Byrd, later to become governor and longtime political chief, and A. Willis Robertson, both future U.S. senators. In 1916, the new trio served on a joint committee that prepared the master plan for Virginia's first road system of more than 4,000 miles. Brown was named chairman of the House roads committee and his influence in improving Roanoke County roads was so strong that one legislator remarked, "I hear they are going to enlarge Roanoke County, Sinclair." "Why?" Brown asked. "In order to make room for all of those new roads," the legislator replied.

When they started work, the longest stretch of paved road in the state was the Valley Pike, running less than 100 miles from Staunton to Winchester. Toll roads were commonplace and many localities could not be reached by car. "Our objective," Brown said, "was to get a

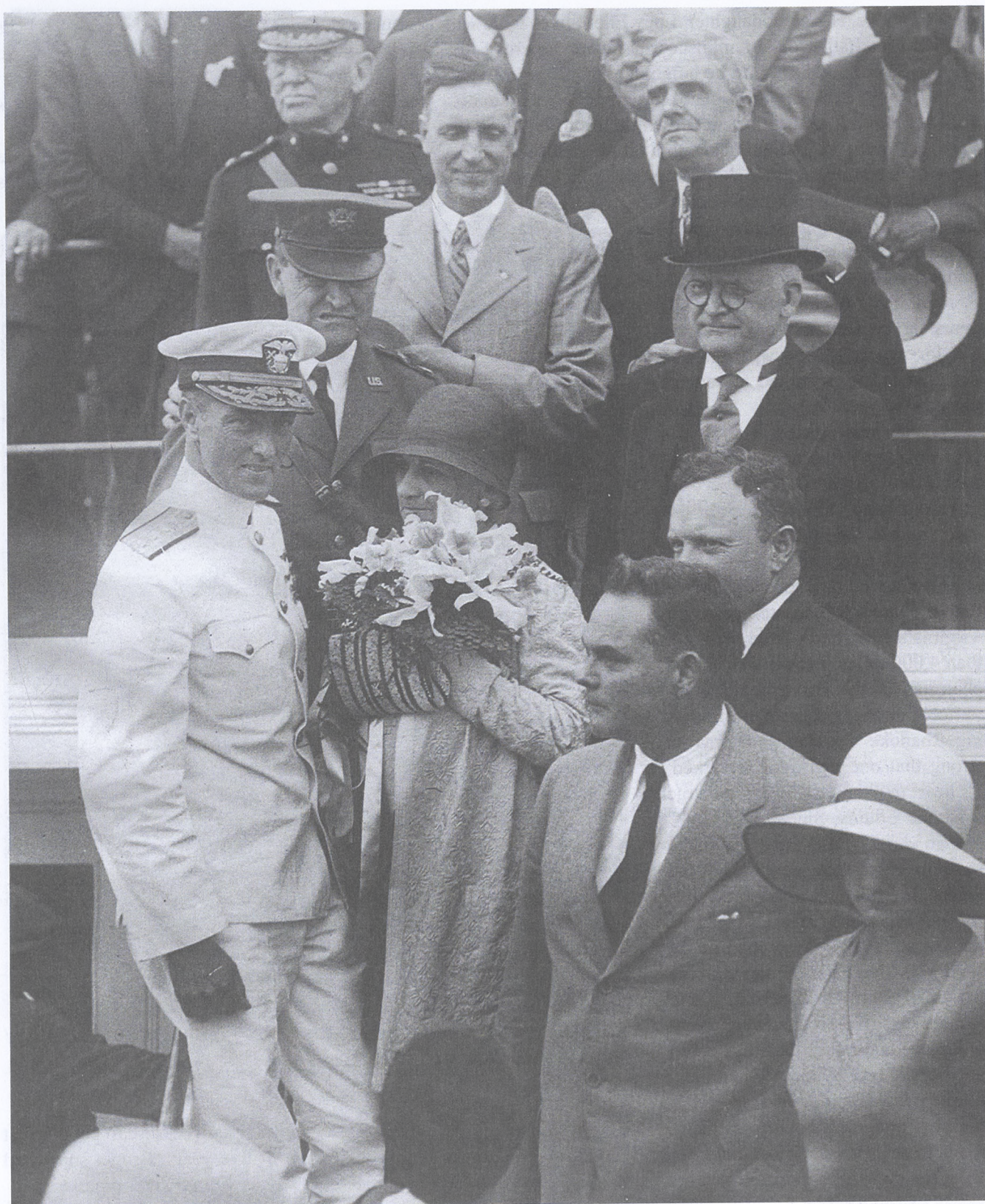
highway into every county seat in the state." The legislators also had to resist communities' pressure to get the first roads in their area, a movement which led to a state highway bond referendum in five years. Brown supported Byrd's successful opposition to a bond issue. Byrd's conservative approach of "pay as you go" was popular.

Brown's first highway experience was a public subscription campaign to build the Lee Highway by his farm, Melville Carico wrote later in *The Roanoke Times*. This was a three-way program, supported by convict labor, an appropriation from the county board of supervisors and public subscription. Brown helped raise the public share of \$27,000. His home was in a rural area and "the only lights you could see from our house were those of the convict camp at Mud Lick Creek," he said.



*Speaker Brown stands between former Gov. Harry Byrd (left) and Gov. John Pollard.*





Col. J. Sinclair Brown, speaker of the House of Delegates (top, center) was a prominent member of the welcoming party for Rear Admiral Richard Byrd (left) when he returned to New York City from the South Pole. Others in the photo were Gov. John Pollard (top hat), brothers former Gov. Harry Byrd and Thomas Byrd, and Maj. Gen. John A. Lejeune (upper left), commandant of Virginia Military Institute.



The Roanoke Times called Brown the co-father of the state highway system and the father of the state budget. When he was first elected in 1915, the state had no specified budget. As Brown put it, "In the old days, the fellow with the longest pole got the persimmons." Gov. Westmoreland Davis named Brown to the Governor's Advisory Board and he helped set up the state's first budget. He became chairman of the powerful House Appropriations Committee and his financial influence in 1924 led to passage of the appropriations bill without debate or amendment for the first time. He was also chairman of a joint commission to study the tuberculosis problem.

Brown's service in the legislature drew high marks from many people. Douglas Southall Freeman, editor of the Richmond News-Leader, said of Brown: "In the councils of the General Assembly, his was steadfastly the voice of courage, of moderation and of sound judgment." As a result of his close study of legislation, a Roanoke newspaper said that when a House delegate wanted to know the provisions of a bill, he was told to "ask Brown." He was described as a businessman who believed in running the state government as a business.

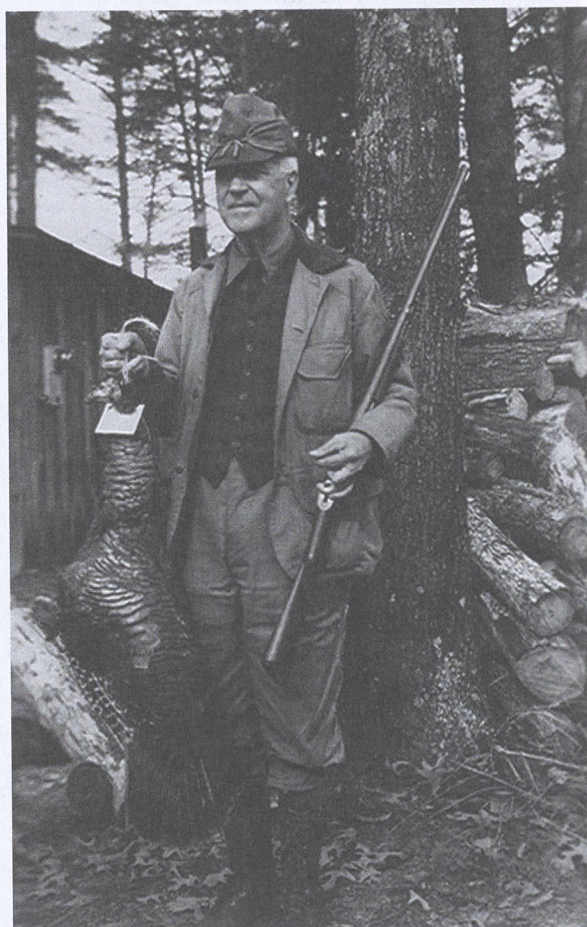
In 1935, when Brown announced that he would not be a candidate for re-election to the House, the Richmond News-Leader said he had the right to retire temporarily from public office when his business interests or personal inclinations dictate but his decision "is causing very general distress in Virginia." The newspaper asked him to reconsider because "he is desperately needed. He is worthy of any of the highest offices in Virginia."

He did not seek re-election but there was considerable talk of drafting him for the race for governor in 1936. Brown did not comment publicly and he did not run. He said he had announced his decision to leave the House "and I have seen no reason to alter it." However, in 1945 he was commissioned as a member of the Virginia Constitutional Convention and he was unanimously elected president. And in 1956 he confessed, "I'm still interested in politics." He did serve on the State Commission on Game and Inland Fisheries, as chairman of the State Board of Education and on a group named to evaluate the State Alcoholic Beverage Commission after his legislative experience. His public service was under five governors.

Brown's interests and activities extended beyond banking and the General Assembly. He was an accomplished hunter and marksman, winning first place in a target shoot at the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, N.Y., as a youth of 20 in 1901. A Salem friend once threw a half-dollar in the air and Brown shot it in half. He once calculated that he had killed 81 wild turkeys and 11 deer with friends at an Amelia County hunt club.

Brown held many Roanoke Valley civic posts and he was recognized for 50 years as an ordained elder at Salem Presbyterian Church. Brown was a longtime chairman of the County School Trustee Electoral Board. In the 1920s, he was president of the Farmers Mutual Fire Insurance Co. and vice president of the State Association of Mutual Fire Insurance Associations. He led the county savings bond programs during both World Wars I and II and he was director of the Roanoke County-Salem-Vinton Defense Council in World War II. He was a trustee of Roanoke College and president of Salem Kiwanis Club, an officer in the Chamber of Commerce and a member of a number of fraternal organizations.

In 1949, he became the only living person in the state to have a bridge named for him when the Lee Highway bridge in Salem was named the J. Sinclair Brown Bridge. Later, the library at Virginia Western



*Brown, the hunter, holds a trophy.*



Community College was named the Brown Library for him. After his death, the Roanoke World-News said, "Assuredly, he must be rated among the valley's first citizens of the 20th century." When the House of Delegates noted his death in January 1965, Speaker E. Blackburn Moore described Brown as one of the fairest and finest men he ever knew.

When the Farmers National Bank marked its 75th anniversary in 1946, the Times Register printed pages about Brown. As House speaker, he was a member of the official Virginia Committee representing the state at the inauguration of President Franklin Roosevelt. He and his wife attended a reception at the Pan American Union in Washington honoring state governors. He was a member of a welcoming committee to greet Rear Admiral Richard Byrd when he landed in New York from a first trip to the Antarctic. With other members of a state commission, Brown received a French medal for his role in a Yorktown Exposition. After his three terms as House speaker, the Times Register quoted a poem about his service from an unnamed Richmond newspaper:

### *Hard to Beat Him*

*Though you perambulate the town  
Both east and west, both up and down,  
You'll find no match for Sinclair Brown.*

*We have ourself searched everywhere  
To pick a fellow to Sinclair;  
We've given up in deep despair.*

*About him all the virtues throng  
His head is clear; his legs are long.  
He merits well both praise and song.*

*Join with us, brethren, as we sing,  
Let every heart its tribute bring,  
Let every bell go ting-a-ling.*

*A royal rooster of renown,  
We place upon his dome this crown.  
Salute the king – J. Sinclair Brown.*



*Brown stands by an old church sign, near his home on Lee Highway. The church has been removed. (Roanoke Times photo)*

After a full life, John Sinclair Brown died at the age of 84 on Jan. 15, 1965. He was buried at East Hill Cemetery in Salem. He and his wife had two children. James S. Brown was in charge of two farms – the Lee Highway homeplace and another on Old McVitty Road where Lewis-Gale Hospital is located today. A daughter, Lucy Johnston Brown, married William Scott Russell, a Fredericksburg native who was vice president of Rish Equipment Co. in Salem. The Russells had two children: Lucy Ellett and Dr. William S. Russell Jr., a retired neurologist, who lives with his wife, Carol, in Marathon, Fla. The doctor and his wife have three children: Mary Scott Russell and William S. Russell III, who live in Florida, and John E. Russell, Philadelphia, and three grandchildren. The Elletts have two children: Russ Ellett, Roanoke, and Katherine S. Gillespie, Charlotte, N.C., and four grandchildren.

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The Times Register, May 24, 1946

Family papers



# *Men of the House*

In addition to the service of Col. J. Sinclair Brown of Roanoke County as Virginia House of Delegates speaker from 1930 to 1936, these men from Southwest Virginia have presided over the House:

**Peter Johnston Jr.** from Prince Edward County served in the House as speaker from 1805-07, and as a judge, but later moved to Abingdon. He was a brother of Charles Johnston, who was captured by Indians and owned a hotel at Botetourt Springs, now Hollins University. Peter Johnston was the father of Confederate Gen. Joseph Johnston.

**George Washington Hopkins**, speaker from 1850-52, served in the House from Russell and Washington counties, as a Congressman for 12 years, as a judge and minister to Portugal.

**Hugh White Sheffey**, speaker from 1863-65, was a native of Wytheville but he served in the House and Senate from Augusta County.

**Henry Clay Allen**, speaker from 1877-79, was a Botetourt County native who represented Shenandoah County in the House and later was district attorney and a judge.

**Isaac Chapman Fowler**, speaker from 1881-83, was a native of Tazewell County who represented Washington County in the House and served as mayor of Bristol and clerk of the U.S. District Court at Abingdon.

**Edward Watts Saunders**, speaker from 1899-1901, served in the House from Franklin County and in Congress and as a State Supreme Court judge.

**Edwin Piper Cox**, 1914-1916, was a Bland County native who served in the House from Richmond and later was a judge.

**Harry Rutherford Houston**, speaker from 1916-20, was a Botetourt County native who served in the House from Elizabeth City County.

**Thomas B. Stanley**, speaker from 1942-46, represented his native Henry County in the House, served in Congress and as governor.

*Source: Speakers and Clerks of the Virginia House of Delegates, 1976*



# What is it about the Civil War?

by S. Waite Rawls III

**T**he Civil War, the War Between the States, the War of Southern Independence, the War of Northern Aggression, the War of the Rebellion, the Second Revolutionary War – What is it about that conflict which captures our intellect and our emotions still today? We don't even know what to call it.

There have been more books written about the Civil War than any other subject, except Christianity.

Since it ended 143 years ago, on average, there has been one book published every day – and they're coming out now at the rate of three a day.

There are more books about Abraham Lincoln than any other person, except Jesus Christ.

Eight million people per year visit the battlefields, and one of the largest member organizations in the country – the Civil War Preservation Trust, 80,000 strong – is devoted to saving those battlefields from developers and urban sprawl.

It is the only area of history that is showing increases in popularity – and we're still three years away from the sesquicentennial, the 150th anniversary of the war.

It is a distinctive part of American history that captures the imagination of foreigners. In September and October of this past year, more visitors came to the Museum of the Confederacy from England than from any state in the U.S., other than Virginia. Normally, California is our top state, followed by New York, Pennsylvania and Florida. Last year, 10 Confederate re-enactors showed up from Stuttgart, Germany, complaining that you couldn't find any-

one in Germany who wanted to be a Yankee. And the most enjoyable two hours that I have spent on my job was with Margaret Thatcher, who was coming to Richmond to make a speech and wanted to drop by.

One of the best Civil War publications is a quarterly magazine, published in French by the Confederate Military History Society of Belgium.

And what is it about us Virginians?

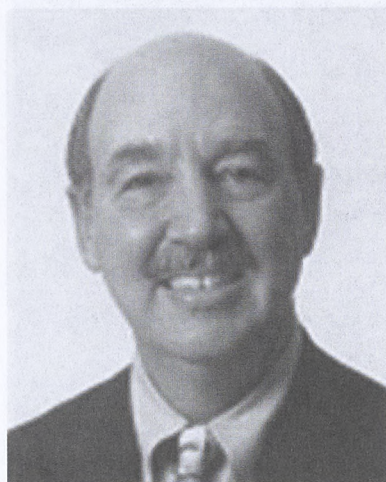
There's a well-known disease among Civil War buffs known as "V.D." It's called "Virginia Disease." So much of the Civil War was here – 60 percent of all battles were fought here – that we think we know more about it than anyone. Or do we actually know less because we think it all happened here?

We furnished more troops, more generals and more manufactured goods than any other state.

We suffered more devastation and economic loss than anywhere else in the history of America. We have all heard of Phil Sheridan's boast that a crow would need to carry its own provender to cross the Shenandoah Valley. He could have said the same thing about the areas around Culpeper or Fredericksburg or Petersburg.

Gettysburg was a big deal, but its casualties were less than half of those in Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County. And the two-mile radius around Cold Harbor and Gaines Mill in Hanover County is the bloodiest spot in America, not Sharpsburg.

Perhaps we Virginians are that way because the Confederate armies were led by so many Virginians that



S. Waite Rawls III

*S. Waite Rawls III, president and chief executive officer of the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond, gave this talk for a Feb. 3, 2008, brunch of the Historical Society of Western Virginia at Hotel Roanoke.*



the other states often complained. Not only Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, but J.E.B. Stuart, Joe Johnston, Albert Sidney Johnston, Jubal Early, Dick Ewell, A.P. Hill, Fitz Lee, Rooney Lee, William Pendleton, James Kemper, Robert Rodes, George Pickett, and my favorite, Little Billy Mahone.

Perhaps we are that way because Virginia was the most important state in the Union at the time of the way, having furnished seven of the 16 U.S. presidents.

There was no question that Richmond would be the Capitol of the Confederacy as soon as Virginia seceded.

Yes, what is it about that war?

More Americans died – 620,000 – in the Civil War than in all other conflicts in our history added together. Let's look further at that number so that you can appreciate the magnitude. At the beginning of the war, there were about 9 million people living in the South – 5 million white people, 3.5 million enslaved black people and 400,000 free black people. Of the 5 million whites, about 1 million were men of military age – 17 to 50. Of the million, 950,000 served in the army – virtually the entire population – and 260,000 of them died. Another quarter million were maimed – the biggest item in the 1866 state of Mississippi budget was for artificial limbs. Looking at these proportions and applying them to today's population, that would be 9 million war deaths. In Iraq, we have slightly over 3,000 war deaths in five years. During the Civil War, it would have been 3,000 every 12 hours for four years.

What is it about that war? .

Most of those men volunteered and until the end when desertion became the Confederate Army's biggest enemy, they stayed, starved and fought.

They thought it was their duty – their personal honor required their sacrifice. I have read thousands of diaries and letters, which are far more interesting than the memoirs, and the words of the participants – from the greatest general to the most humble private – are simply inspiring.

When the bugles blew and the drums rolled, they marched shoulder to shoulder across open fields into the teeth of cannons spewing canister – 50 and 60 and 70 percent casualties were not uncommon in certain regiments.

And they all knew each other. We all know the story of the Bedford Boys – notable today because of the high level of casualties among friends and neighbors. That was the rule during the Civil War, not the exception. When Pickett's Division made its famous charge, there were 65 VMI men holding officer's ranks in the front of their lines. Thirteen of the 15 regimental commanders were VMI men and 11 fell in the charge, including two sets of roommates. (Sorry to talk about VMI men in front of at least some Hokies. At least Tech was started by John Lane, a VMI man and Confederate colonel, after whom your stadium was named.)

What is it about that war?

We love to talk about the brilliance of the founding fathers but the Civil War is a testament to the fact that they didn't get it right. They did settle one big issue – we were no longer British colonies. But they couldn't figure out what to do about state sovereignty and they couldn't figure out slavery. Their pledge of allegiance to the flag could have ended with "one nation, under God, divisible, with liberty and justice for some."

It took our Civil War, our internal conflict, to create a union and to advance the cause of personal liberty.

The Civil War defined us all today, whether our ancestors were here to greet John Smith at Jamestown, fought for or against the Confederacy or recently immigrated. How many of you have seen the advertisement on PBS? A Japanese-American speaks about the importance of watching the Ken Burns Civil War series. He says that he was never a true American until he understood the Civil War. I am a proud member of the Sons of

*The Virginia General Assembly  
has created a commission  
to plan the state's  
commemoration of the  
Civil War's sesquicentennial.  
A national kickoff event  
will take place at  
Harper's Ferry, W.Va.,  
on June 25, 2009.  
For more information, visit  
[www.viriniacivilwar.org](http://www.viriniacivilwar.org).*



Confederate Veterans, but I don't pretend to own the story of America because I have ancestors who arrived at Jamestown in 1608 or who fought in the 41st Virginia, the 13th Virginia Cavalry, the 23rd North Carolina and the 44th North Carolina. I am pleased to share the heritage of the American story with a citizen whose great-grandfather fought a civil war in Ireland or Africa or Afghanistan..

Yet, what is it about that war?

Today, a lot of people would rather sweep it under the rug than discuss it, particularly in schools and governments.

Today, the names of Lee and Jackson and Davis are being removed from schools or roads or bridges or Boy Scout Councils.

Today, in the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs), Robert E. Lee is mentioned twice and Jackson and Stuart not at all.

Let me tell you what it is about that war. When I was a kid, the Confederacy and the Confederates were synonymous with honor and duty and sacrifice and patriotism. Today, they are not – to many, they are synonymous with slavery and racism. They are politically incorrect. They are the electric third rail of history.

Teachers are afraid to teach about the Confederacy. Students are afraid to learn about the Confederacy. And corporations and foundation donors are afraid to support the study of American history and culture and humanity if the subject matter is the Confederacy. Many would sweep the Confederacy under the rug. But there's a problem. It won't stay there. And, if people like us don't deal with it, the stage is left to 21st century ideologues who would try to demonize all Confederates or to deify them all.

I don't know what any of you can or will do about this, but let me tell you what we are doing at the Museum of the Confederacy. If we are to know anything of who we are, what we stand for and where we might be going as a nation, we need to understand who we were and why we disagreed so vehemently and so violently in the 1860s. We need to understand why a quarter of the South's white population would think that their sense of duty and patriotism could call for their ultimate sacrifice.

The Museum of the Confederacy exists to contribute to that understanding. Its artifacts – the real things used by the real people – tell the story of a very human conflict. Its exhibits and programs do not "celebrate" the Confederacy. They allow us to get closer to an understanding – warts and all – of those people who defined us. The women who suddenly found themselves in charge of farms and plantations, the free and enslaved African-Americans who powered the Southern economy and contributed to both the Southern and Northern war efforts and the men who lined up shoulder to shoulder to cross a field ablaze with gunfire because they thought it was their duty – all come under scrutiny at the Museum of the Confederacy.

We think it is important to know the complexity of American history. We think it is important to understand that different people can draw different meanings from the same facts. So we don't shy away from controversy. Certainly, it makes me uncomfortable to hear someone announce their hatred for the Confederate flag. It probably makes them uncomfortable to hear me announce my respect for it. But I doubt if either of us has an exclusive claim on the truth. So a trip to the Museum of the Confederacy should not be a pilgrimage to a shrine to the Confederacy. It should be an opportunity to deepen your understanding of the Confederacy no matter where you started – well-informed, ill-informed or not informed. Real education does not shy from controversy, nor does it pretend to have the only answer. And real education is what we are all about.

If we are going to shoulder that responsibility, we need to expand so that we can reach more people. We have recently announced our intentions to open new museums – not branches or satellites, but full-fledged museums – in Appomattox, in Chancellorsville and inside the moat of Fort Monroe. We know that we can get three or four times the number of artifacts into the public's view; and we think we can attract four or five times the number of people to see them.

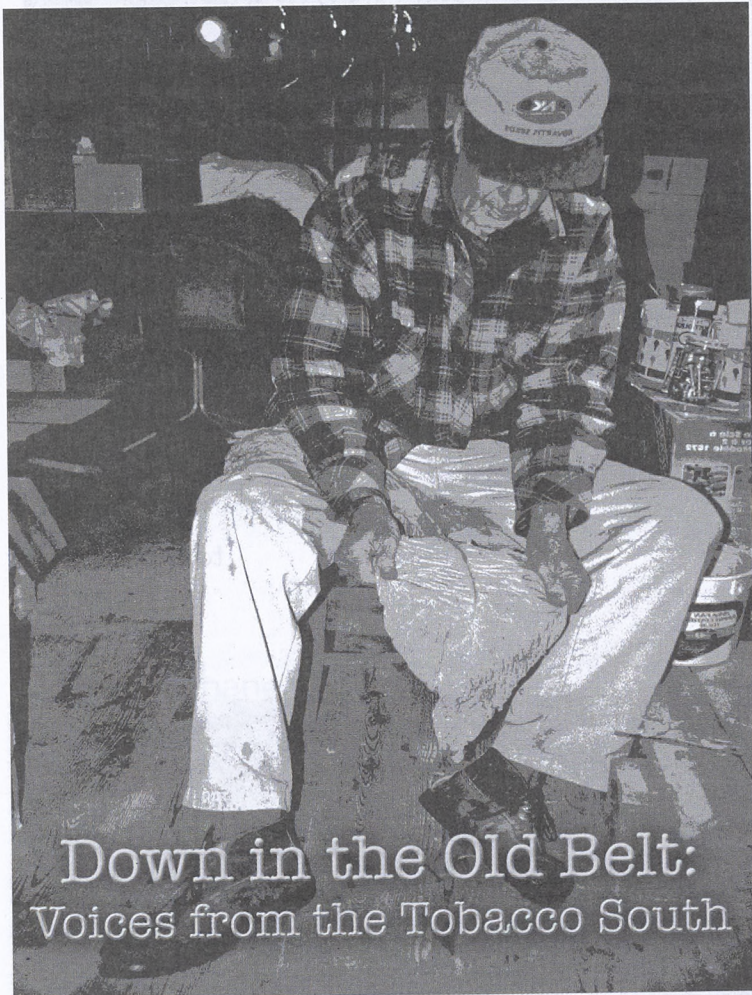
We think we can make a difference in the public's understanding of the Confederacy. And we think that will make all of us better Americans for the 21st century. If you believe in anything I said, we would be pleased to have you as a member of the Museum of the Confederacy.





# Images from the Old Belt

edited by Christina Koomen Smith



Down in the Old Belt:  
Voices from the Tobacco South

Well, it's built the homes, it's paid the bills, it's educated the children. My dad was a tobacco grower, my grandad before me. ... Tobacco is everything to us. If we don't plant that crop, someone will. And we know we grow tobacco that is considered number one in the world.

*Ed. note: Excerpts have been selected to be reflective of the the images, and are not necessarily literal representations.*

Roanoke cultural geographer Jim Crawford is the writer and producer of the acclaimed documentary "Down in the Old Belt: Voices From the Tobacco South," which has aired on Blue Ridge Public Television, among other broadcasts. Crawford holds bachelor's and master's degrees from Virginia Tech and has taught at VT and at Hollins University. The film was commended as "an outstanding documentary of the history and culture of tobacco" in a Senate Joint Resolution approved by the Virginia General Assembly. The Virginia Foundation for the Humanities supported the documentary with a grant and the Historical Society of Western Virginia was the fiscal sponsor for grant applications.







My mother came from a farming family of six boys and six girls, that were dependent on the farm all the way from their food source to their income. You see how the family pulled together so closely just for survival.

—Clarence Bryant III  
tobacco farmer

In those days we worked the tobacco with mules, and my first job, I guess, was handing leaves, because that's what little children could do, put three or four leaves to a bundle and hand it to somebody to string it.

— Lucy Conner  
tobacco farmer





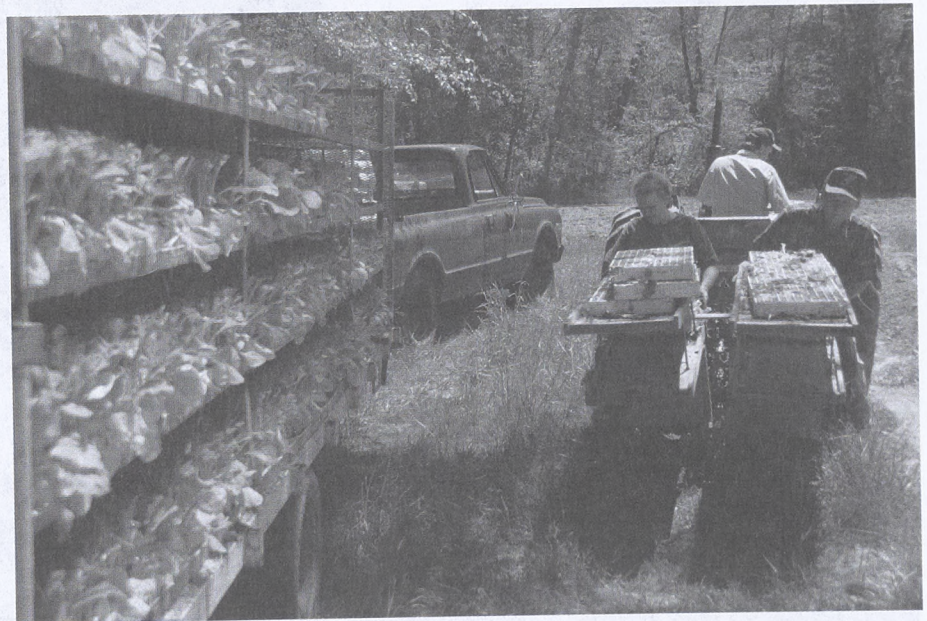


Most all of the labor on the farm then was family. I mean, it was not migrant labor, it was done with families and people who lived on the farm, the sharecroppers. And so that was a system that I have watched in my lifetime almost all but disappear.

– Charles Hawkins  
tobacco farmer

Tobacco changed a lot after the allotment came out. We made it by tending that little allotment. The crops and the garden and stuff like that meant as much to us as tobacco did then. Money – tobacco was the money crop.

– Talbert Callands  
tobacco farmer





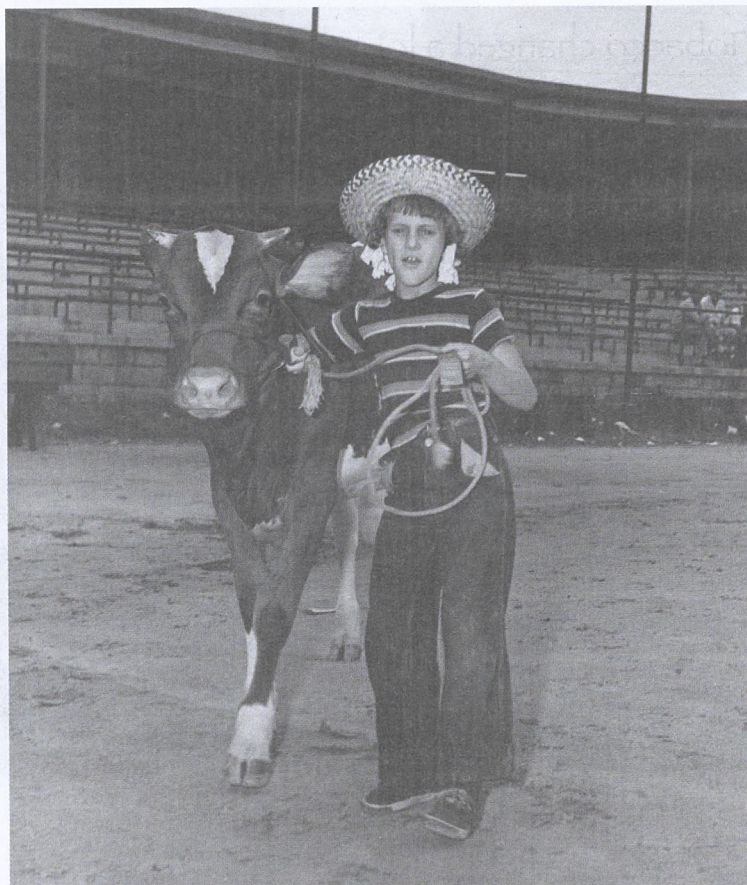


In the '30s we were posing for the National Tobacco Festival in South Boston. ... I was 16 when it started. ... I look at the old pictures of how many is gone, and very few of us are left. I love the publicity – isn't that awful?

– Louise Patterson Slayton  
Virginia's Lady Nicotine

We raised our cows, hogs, chickens, vegetables, we canned a lot of berries. ... [W]e didn't have no deep freezers or Frigidaïres or nothing like that at that time. So they canned what they used. And we lived good.

– Talbert Callands  
tobacco farmer







When I started working with tobacco I didn't have anything. The man came and talked to me about farming. ... One row for him and one row for me. I started out just like that.

– Willie Thompson  
tobacco farmer

In this day and time when a farm is sold, it is so rare that a person like myself or another farmer can go and buy that land. The land is broken up. It will never be farmed again, by anyone. That is gone. So you change your landscape, the beauty that people talk about when they drive through Southside and the rolling hills and say "Oh, isn't that pretty?" Well, you better look while you can, because I don't know how much longer it will be here.

– Clarence Bryant III  
tobacco farmer





# Residential segregation in the City of Roanoke

by Naomi A. Mattos

In the summer of 2005, I gave a talk entitled "Residential Segregation in Roanoke City: Residential Segregation Ordinances and their Effect on the Gainsboro Community from 1911-1917" at the Gainsboro Library. The talk was about research I completed through my summer internship with the Roanoke Regional Preservation Office. This article is a condensed version of my library talk and explains the why and how of my research, the history of residential segregation laws in the City of Roanoke, and how these laws affected both the black and white communities. An in-depth examination of Gilmer Avenue NW illustrates the effect of the laws and their lasting impressions long after the Supreme Court decision of 1917, which made residential segregation laws unconstitutional.<sup>1</sup>

In the beginning of the summer I was given a task to research four houses on the 400 block of Gilmer Avenue NW (401, 405, 411, and 415). The main purpose of this assignment was to record the history of four prominent families in the black community of Roanoke. When given the topic, my supervisor and director of the Roanoke Historic Preservation Office, Dr. John Kern, made the observation that on this particular block of Gilmer Avenue an abrupt racial demographic shift occurred between 1914 and 1915. Before 1915, the entire 400 block was white. A year later, the 400 block was predominantly black. My research quickly turned into trying to find the cause of such a drastic change in this short span of time. After speaking with a colleague, the topic of residential segregation laws and how they were implemented in Richmond became a likely candidate as the cause for the change in the racial makeup of the 400 block of Gilmer. Come to find out, Roanoke adopted such laws as well. As a result of this new information, I set out on a quest to find out all I could about the history of residential segregation laws and how they were adopted and implemented within the City of Roanoke.

I used many resources to research Roanoke residential segregation laws. I found the old Roanoke City Directories in the Virginia Room of the Roanoke Library full of relevant information. Not only do they have the address of the head of household but also his/her occupation and spouse. The directories also have a cross-reference so you can look up an address and gather information about a block including its racial makeup, because during this time period, directories specified whether a resident or business was white or colored owned. To gain proof of the land being transferred from white to black residents, I used the Roanoke Circuit Court Land Records. To find the actual laws implemented, I reviewed Common Council (now as the City Council of today) Ordinances and minutes from council meetings. I also reviewed various newspapers and law journals including the Roanoke Times, Roanoke Tribune, Richmond Planet, New York Age, and the Virginia Law Review, to name a few.

*Naomi Mattos was a 2005 summer intern for the Roanoke Regional Preservation Office (RRPO) in Roanoke. A recent graduate from the College of William and Mary, Mattos received her BBA (Marketing) and BA in Black Studies in May 2005. She was assigned to the Gainsboro Documentation Project by her supervisor and director of the RRPO, Dr. John Kern. Originally, the assignment was to research four houses on the 400 block of Gilmer Avenue NW, in Roanoke; however, while exploring possible causes for the racial demographic shift from white to black residents in 1915 on the 400 block of Gilmer, the topic of residential segregation laws became the focus of her research. Since not a lot is written on both the black community in Roanoke and the City's residential segregation ordinances, most of the paper is based on primary research. Mattos would like to thank: Dr. John Kern and the Roanoke Regional Preservation Office, Ann Field Alexander, Ed Barnett, Shelia Hartman, Alice and Margaret Roberts, Ekoko Omadeke, the Virginia Room of the Roanoke Library, the Roanoke Courthouse Law Library, the Gainsboro Library, and the Library of Virginia.*





*Of the four prominent homes in the 400 block of Gilmer Avenue NW, the Oliver Hill house is at right. Next are the Edward Dudley home, the Dr. J.H. Roberts home, and Rufus Edwards home.*

The historical context of the time period is rooted in the post-Reconstruction era. Between the years of 1890 and 1910, blacks were systematically disenfranchised due to new Jim Crow legislation. State constitutions instituted grandfather clauses and implemented poll taxes to inhibit black voting. At the advent of such laws, a majority of the black population lost their right to vote; thus limiting the power of blacks to determine their political destiny. American society also subjected blacks to social segregation. Then, the landmark Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* of 1896 occurred and the phrase "separate but equal" had legislative backing. This decision allowed for segregation of passengers on trains and was later extended to city streetcars. The decision also allowed states to segregate institutions such as hospitals, jails and city establishments from places of employment to eateries and water fountains.

#### **AFRICAN AMERICANS MIGRATED FROM FARMS TO CITIES**

During this time, there was an influx of African Americans migrating from rural communities into the urban centers of cities in search of labor opportunities. For example, Roanoke saw a huge growth of black citizens because of the Norfolk & Western Railway. Because the rate of blacks coming into the city was increasing at a faster rate than the colored sections into which they moved could expand, overcrowding within these colored communities often occurred. The social conditions of colored sections not only included instances of overcrowding but also included poor living conditions due to city officials' lack of help to remedy the poor sanitary conditions and poor police protection.

Also, around this time some blacks were becoming economically self-sufficient. Blacks with the means to do so were moving out of the colored sections into better housing arrangements which resulted in blacks moving into white neighborhoods. Due to this perceived encroachment, the white community felt threatened and a heated



discourse ensued. This discourse included discussions of lost property value of white neighborhoods and the deterioration of the moral fiber within white blocks. To remedy this situation, cities began to implement residential segregation laws.<sup>2</sup>

Within the U.S., these laws were adopted in both the southern and western regions, including cities such as Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and St. Louis, Missouri. Although my focus is on the segregation laws implemented in Roanoke, I am going to first give the background of two cities' adaptation of the law to illustrate the law's evolution. Those two cities include Baltimore, Maryland, and Richmond, Virginia.

Baltimore, Maryland, was the first city to adopt and implement a residential segregation law in 1910. The purpose of the law was to maintain "peace, health, good government and welfare of the city."<sup>3</sup> The law forbade black residents to move into a majority white block and vice versa for white residents. Under this law mixed blocks, or blocks that had more than one or more of both black and white residents, remained mixed. New neighborhoods were designated on a first-come first-served basis, meaning the first to move in (black or white) would decide the racial makeup of the neighborhood.<sup>4</sup>

A year later, Richmond, Virginia, adopted a residential segregation law in 1911. They considered their law an updated and more legally sound version of the Baltimore ordinance. Like Baltimore's ordinance, blacks could not live in predominantly white neighborhoods and vice versa; however, unlike Baltimore, the black people of Richmond could own land in a predominantly white neighborhood. The catch, however, was that although black residents could own land on a predominantly white block, they could not actually use or inhabit the land they owned in the white neighborhood. This provision of the law led to a lot of confusing situations. For example, a white Methodist church sold its church to a black Baptist congregation. The transfer of land created uproar within the white community because the entrance of the church opened up into a white neighborhood; however, the rest of the church was situated in a predominantly black community. To actually use the church the black congregation had to build and use a side entrance. This action seemed to appease the white citizens, but after the first service, it was reported that the pastors and deacon of the black congregation allegedly used the front entrance and were subsequently arrested and fined.<sup>5</sup> Due to the confusing nature of the law this situation happened more than once within the city of Richmond.

Between 1911 and 1917, Roanoke City also enacted residential segregation ordinances similar to those passed in Baltimore, Maryland; and Richmond, Virginia. The first segregation law was Ordinance 2470 passed by the Common Council on May 8, 1911. The purpose of this law was "to secure for white and colored people respectively the separate location of residence for each race." Like the other ordinances of this time, this ordinance forbade black residents to reside on predominantly white blocks. Also according to this law, it was unlawful for a white person to inhabit or conduct a place of business on, in between, or adjacent to a predominantly black block and vice versa. Furthermore, the law also contained a provision that allowed for white and black servants and/or employees to live on the block where they were employed and the law did not affect already established neighborhoods or public assemblies.<sup>6</sup>

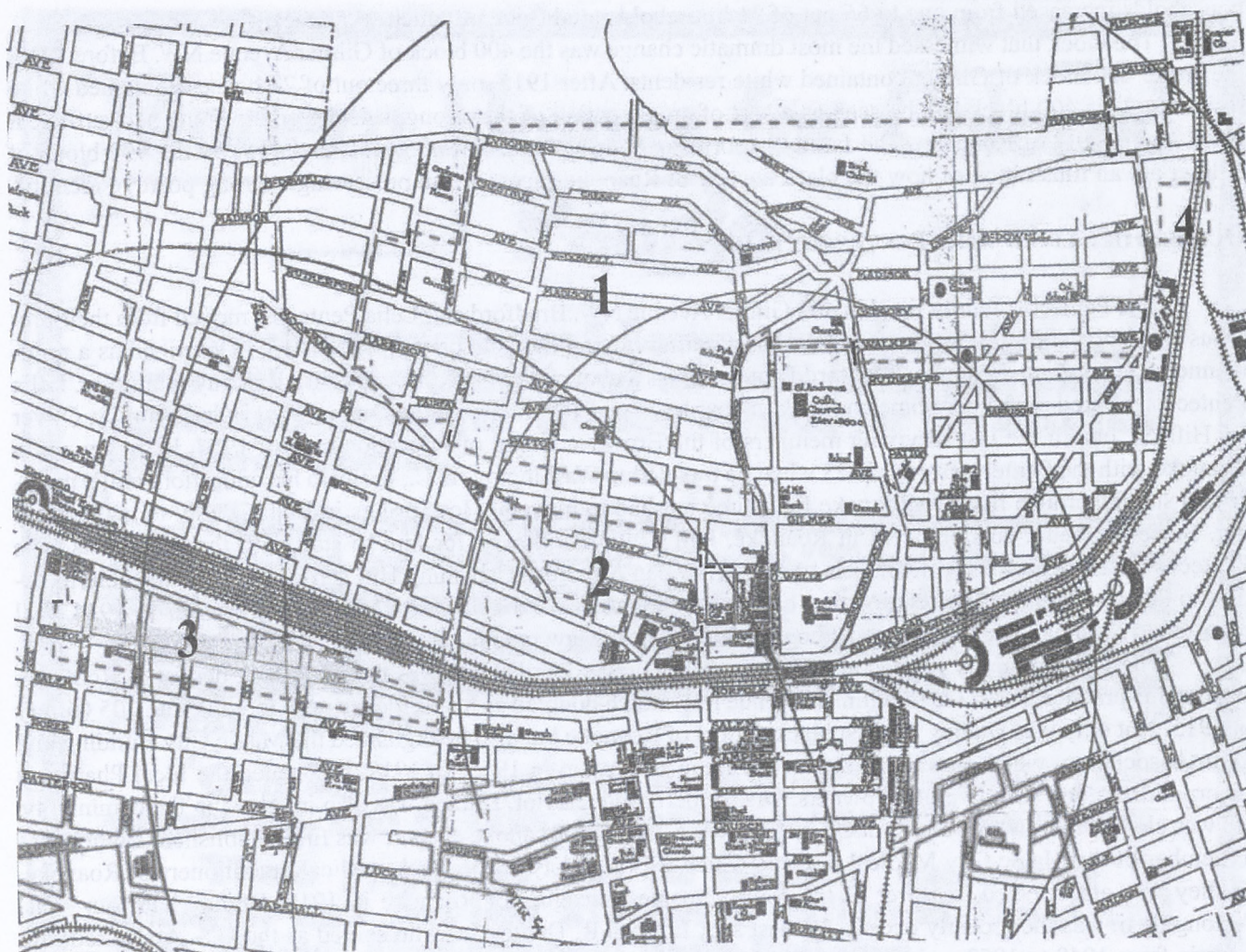
A year later, on March 12, 1912, an important act was passed by the Commonwealth of Virginia. This act granted the municipalities of Virginia the right to divide their cities into "segregation districts"; thus, constructing a map detailing where white and colored citizens could live. In response to the passing of this act the City of Roanoke began drafting its own segregation map.

#### COMMON COUNCIL DRAFTED SEGREGATION MAP

On March 8, 1913, the Roanoke Times reported that the Common Council was drafting a segregation map and a corresponding ordinance.<sup>7</sup> The council formed the Special Committee of Segregation to perform the task, and during a council meeting the 1912 Act passed by the General Assembly was discussed. Within the minutes of this meeting, it was recorded that two Northeast black residents voiced objections to the adoption of the 1912 Act and subsequent map. The council decided to table the discussion until the next Common Council meeting.<sup>8</sup> During the next council meeting, Ordinance 2947 was adopted on March 12, 1913. This ordinance adopted the 1912 Act passed by the General Assembly of Virginia and allowed for the City of Roanoke to be divided into segregation districts.<sup>9</sup>

Two years later on February 8, 1915, the Common Council passed Ordinance 3605, which endorsed a seg-





*Description of Segregation Districts superimposed by author, based on written descriptions in City of Roanoke Segregation Ordinance 3605, 1915. Source: Charles E. Moore. "Map of Greater Roanoke" (New York: McAlpine-Kay Co., 1918).*

regation map drafted by the Special Committee of Segregation. The map divided Roanoke into five segregation districts. Segregation Districts 1 through 4 were designated as colored and Segregation District 5 (which was all the land not covered within the first four districts) was white. Segregation District 1 was the biggest of the districts covering a good part of the Northwest and Northeast sections of Roanoke. Segregation District 2 was located directly south of the first district in the Northwest section. Segregation District 3 was in the Southwest section just below the Norfolk & Western Railway tracks. And Segregation District 4 was the smallest district and located in the Northeast section.<sup>10</sup>

The 1915 segregation map affected both the white and black communities, specifically within Gilmer Avenue NW. To white citizens, Gilmer Avenue was seen as the only "bone of contention" when discussing the segregation map of 1915. White citizens of Roanoke wanted to keep the avenue for the white community because Gilmer Avenue NW was seen as the only exit Northwest white citizens had to Northeast and the business section without going through a black section.<sup>11</sup> However, the argument that Gilmer Avenue NW should stay white had no legal standing and was inevitable. The reason being that according to the law it was unlawful for a white person to inhabit or conduct a place of business on, in between, or adjacent to a predominantly black block and vice versa. Gilmer Avenue NW, more specifically the 100 to the 400 blocks, was situated directly in between Segregation Districts 1 and 2, making that section of Gilmer Avenue NW automatically, in theory, a black block. Because of the location of Gilmer Avenue NW it became part of a "changing neighborhood." Between 1910 and 1915, black



households increased from one to 66 out of 91 households total (nine of which were vacant).

The block that witnessed the most dramatic change was the 400 block of Gilmer Avenue NW. Before 1915, the entire 400 block of Gilmer contained white residents. After 1915, only three out of 22 houses contained white residents. This 400 block can be seen as a sort of cross section of the strong, self-determined, and self-sufficient black community of Roanoke. The family histories of four houses, 401, 405, 411, and 415, on the 400 block of Gilmer are an illustration of how the black society of Roanoke succeeded in preserving a strong positive identity.

#### **OLIVER HILL LIVED WITH PENTECOST FAMILY**

The Pentecost family lived in 401 Gilmer Avenue NW. Bradford and Lelia Pentecost moved from their previous residence at 39 Gilmer Avenue NW shortly after buying the land on April 21, 1915.<sup>12</sup> Described as a mild-mannered, even-tempered man, Bradford Pentecost was a chef on the Norfolk & Western Railway dining car. Lelia Pentecost worked out of her home and took in boarders – one of which was the famous civil rights attorney, Oliver W. Hill, Sr. one of the last surviving members of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case of 1954. Hill grew up in Roanoke with the Pentecosts until 1923 when he traveled to Washington, D.C., to finish his education. Hill's mother and stepfather also lived in Roanoke for a time but had to move to Hot Springs in Bath County to make a living. Since the better schools were in Roanoke, Hill's mother allowed for him to stay with the Pentecosts. The Pentecosts were wonderful role models of strong African Americans, teaching Hill self-respect and the determination to succeed in life. After completing his law degree at Howard University and passing the bar in 1934, Hill returned to Roanoke and the Pentecost household to start his law practice from 1934 to 1936.<sup>13</sup>

The Dudley family resided at 405 Gilmer. Dr. Edward R. Dudley was the first black dentist in Roanoke, starting his practice in 1911 at 29 Gilmer Avenue NW which doubled as his residence until moving into 405 Gilmer in 1915. Not only was Dudley the first black dentist of Roanoke but also he organized the Magic City Building and Loan Association, which was the first black lending institution in 1915. In 1919, he opened the Ideal Pharmacy Incorporated along with two other owners, Drs. Roberts and Claytor. Dudley was also involved in the community. He was elected treasurer of the NAACP in 1918 when the local Roanoke chapter was first established. Dudley was a member of the Magic City Medical Society, which was a society of the black medical practitioners of Roanoke. Dudley was also elected treasurer of the Negro Business League for Roanoke in 1919. Dudley had four sons. Among them was the recently deceased eldest son, Edward R. Dudley Jr., who served as the U.S. Ambassador to Liberia from 1948 to 1953 and served on the New York State Supreme Court from 1964 to 1985.

At 411 Gilmer Avenue NW was the house of the Roberts family. Dr. J.H. Roberts and his wife, Alice Barnette, had two daughters, Alice and Margaret. Roberts received his B.S. and M.D. degrees from Howard University. Dr. Roberts was the co-founder, vice president, and secretary of Burrell Memorial Hospital, the famous black hospital that served the community for many years. He was a member of the Magic City Medical Society and one of three owners of the Ideal Pharmacy which opened at 439 Gainsboro Avenue NW in 1919. Roberts was also on the planning committee of the first black YMCA, the William A. Hunton YMCA, in 1928.

The Edwards family lived at 415 Gilmer Avenue NW. Rufus and Josephine Edwards had seven children – four sons and three daughters. Rufus Edwards was a brakeman for the Norfolk & Western Railway. In 1939, he was the co-founder and grand secretary-treasurer for the Association of Colored Railway Trainmen and Locomotive Firemen Local Chapter 35. The Association worked for fair and equal treatment of colored railroad workers. Edwards was also involved with Citizens Undertaking Establishment Incorporated, which was a local, affordable funeral service.

The above family histories were just a sample of how, despite the inhumane treatment and laws they faced, the blacks of Roanoke still maintained a strong black community. The residential laws that were endured by black society came to an end with the Supreme Court ruling in 1917.

The case, *Buchanan v. Warley*, declared residential segregation ordinances unconstitutional in 1917. This decision was the result from a test case challenging the segregation law in Louisville, Kentucky, presented by the NAACP legal counsel. This Supreme Court decision was the first big victory achieved by the NAACP. The Supreme Court ruled that the law violated the 14th Amendment which prevents state interference with property rights except by due process of law. Even though this decision was seen as a victory for the black community, the decision did not overturn *Plessy v. Ferguson*; therefore, it did not end racial discrimination and segregation.



# Modern Homes for Colored People

Twelve modern small homes, some bungalow type; some hot water heated and all with bath, gas, electric lights and sewerage. All now offered for the first time to colored people.

This property located in Northeast Section; close in; bounded by Rutherford Avenue, Third Street, Harrison and Commonwealth Avenue. Good streets and granolithic side walks; conveniently located to market, shops, and all points of interest in our city. No street car fare needed.

Only high class colored people will be offered these properties, and to such, attractive terms will be made.

These properties will be handled exclusively by Glasgow and Bowling 213 South Jefferson Street and S. R. Mason, First National Bank Building.

**C. H. BRADY, Owner**

Because of this fact, the effects of the past residential segregation laws were still evident in cities such as Roanoke long after the 1917 decision declaring them unconstitutional.

## 'COLORED CITIZENS' PROTEST SEGREGATION

For example, an article in the New York Age titled "Colored Citizens of Roanoke, Va. Effectively Protest Against a Movement to Start Segregation" reported that at a council meeting in 1921, councilmen wanted to discuss a possible resolution that would ask the white citizens to refrain from selling land in white neighborhoods to black citizens, employing the same arguments used to rationalize the past residential segregation laws. Any violation of this understanding was to be "regarded as in violent conflict with the characteristic customs of our splendid citizenship." At this meeting a group of black community leaders, which included Drs. Dudley and Roberts, opposed such a resolution, citing the 1917 Supreme Court decision declaring such acts unconstitutional. The opposition of the black community was so strong that the resolution was not even brought up for discussion.<sup>14</sup>



The lasting impression left from the segregation laws is also illustrated through an advertisement in the Roanoke Times entitled "Modern Homes for Colored People." The advertisement highlighted 12 modern small homes in the Northeast section. The homes were described as "close in; bounded by Rutherford Ave, 3rd St.; Harrison and Commonwealth Ave.," are being offered only to "high class colored people." The white real estate office handling the houses was Glasgow and Bowling located at 213 S. Jefferson Street and S.R. Mason located in the First National Bank Building.<sup>15</sup> The property offered for sale to black residents was outside of the black Segregation District 1 as established in the Ordinance 3605. Thus, racially segregated housing in Roanoke continued to be sold after the Supreme Court decision against residential segregation ordinances in 1917 and after the withdrawal of the proposed Roanoke City segregation resolution of 1921.

It is evident that racial discrimination and segregation still remained long after the 1917 Supreme Court decision. The above examples illustrate residential segregation taking on different forms. Whether the form takes on the appearance of a resolution passed by the City Council, real estate offices advertising for racially specific housing, or a covenant enacted by homeowners associations, the end result is the same – racial segregation. Such injustices would not be remedied legally until the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* of 1954 and not actually taken into effect until much later beginning with the Civil Rights Acts of 1964. Thus history continues to teach that although the legislation can be in place to remedy the wrongs of society, the social reality takes a while to mirror the well-intentioned legislation.

## NOTES

- 1 A Copy of the full report titled "Segregation by Custom vs. Segregation by Law: Residential Segregation Ordinances and their effects on the City of Roanoke, 1910-1917," can be found at the Gainsboro Library and the Virginia Room in the Roanoke Library. Both libraries are located in Roanoke, Virginia.
- 2 Roger Rice, "Residential Segregation by Law, 1910-1917," *The Journal of Southern History* 34, no. 2 (May 1968): 180.
- 3 "Police Power – Segregation of Races," *Virginia Law Review* 1 (1913-1914): 333
- 4 S.S. Field, "The Constitutionality of Segregation Ordinances," *Virginia Law Review* 5, no. 2 (November 1917): 83-84.
- 5 Ann Field Alexander, *Race Man: The Rise and Fall of the 'Fighting Editor' John Mitchell Jr.* (University of Virginia Press, 2002), 175-177.
- 6 "Ordinance 2470," Book 2, Ordinances and Joint Resolutions, Common Council and Board of Aldermen (Aug. 28, 1908-March 10, 1913) (Roanoke City Council, Virginia: 8 May 1911)
- 7 "Segregation Map Now Being Drawn," *Roanoke Times*. 8 March 1913, 1.
- 8 Common Council Minutes (Roanoke City Council, Virginia: 8 March 1913), 441.
- 9 "Ordinance 2497," Book 3, Ordinances and Joint Resolutions, Common Council and Board of Aldermen (March 10, 1913-July 9, 1917). (Roanoke City Council, Virginia: 12 March 1913)
- 10 "Ordinance 3605," Book 3, Ordinances and Joint Resolutions, Common Council and Board of Aldermen (March 10, 1913-July 9, 1917). (Roanoke City Council, Virginia: 8 February 1915)
- 11 "Segregation Lines Fixed by Council," *Roanoke Times*. 9 February 1915.
- 12 City Tax Map of 401 Gilmer Avenue NW
- 13 Oliver W. Hill, Sr. *The Big Bang: Brown v. Board of Education and Beyond*. (Four-G Publishers: Florida, 2000).
- 14 "Colored Citizens of Roanoke, Va. Effectively Protest Against a Movement to Start Segregation," *New York Age*, 1921.
- 15 "Modern Homes for Colored People," *Roanoke Times*, 11 April 1922.





# The Prestons ~ A Southwest Virginia Dynasty

by Malcolm W. Bryan III

John Preston, founder of the Virginia family of that name, was born at Newtown-Limavady (County Donegal) in Northern Ireland. John's date of birth has not survived. His wife, nee Elizabeth Patton, was born 25 December 1700. Elizabeth was socially superior to Preston, according to their granddaughter, Letitia Preston Floyd. She reported that they met in the following manner:

Elizabeth, crossing the river Shannon in a boat, was much attracted to the beauty and deportment of a young man whose name was John Preston. On inquiry he was found to be a ship-carpenter. Nothing daunted by his humble fortunes, an understanding took place, and Miss Patton consented to a runaway match.

The marriage took place in Ireland and four of their six children were born in the old country. Colonel James Patton, brother of Elizabeth Preston, brother-in-law of John Preston and holder of mercantile interests in Virginia, convinced John to come to America. Preston was promised 4,000 acres of land in Orange County, some of which later became Augusta County. The land was part of an agreement between James Patton and Colonel William Beverley, who was attempting to develop land in western Virginia. Beverley wrote the following note to Patton on 8 August 1737:

"I should be very glad if you could import families enough to take the whole off from our hands at a reasonable price and tho' the order mentions families from Pensilvania yet families from Ireland will do as well."

John and Elizabeth (Patton) Preston had six children. Most of them became persons of immense importance to Virginia and this nation: The oldest child, Letitia, married Robert Breckinridge, as his second wife. Their children became potent in the political world, particularly in Kentucky. Margaret, the next in line, married John Brown, Princeton graduate, Presbyterian minister and founder of Augusta Academy, forerunner of Washington & Lee University. William Preston, the eldest son, was a man of enormous importance to the history of Southwest Virginia. Ann, the fourth child, the last born in Ireland, married Francis Smith, early Botetourt justice and one of the founders of Fincastle. Mary Preston mar-



No portrait of Col. William Preston has ever been located but a painting of his wife, Susannah Preston, hangs at their home, Smithfield. However, the publishers of Kegley's Virginia Frontier used this profile of Preston, with no identified source, to accompany a photo of his wife's portrait.

*Malcolm Bryan, a Roanoke native and descendant of Robert and Letitia Breckinridge (William Preston's sister), attended the former Richmond Professional Institute and is a retired small business owner. He has written many historical articles, including an unpublished biography of his ancestor, Timothy Matlock. He is a member of the Mayflower Society, Sons of the American Revolution, Magna Charta Barons and The Jamestown Society. The Fincastle Resolutions chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution has announced plans to place a monument in memory of Col. William Preston on the grounds of his former Greenfield Plantation, now a Botetourt County office and industrial park.*





*Greenfield, Botetourt County home of William Preston from 1759 until he moved his family to Smithfield 15 years later. The house burned in 1959.*

ried John Howard, a pioneer settler of what is now the Commonwealth of Kentucky. James, the sixth child of John and Elizabeth Preston, died young.

William Preston probably deserves more credit than any other member of the family for his remarkable prominence. His parents' success in America was not a foregone conclusion. They were encouraged by Elizabeth's uncle, James Patton, to immigrate to America in 1738. William Preston's future was indeed in jeopardy when his father died circa 1747-1748.

James Patton immediately came to William's support after his father died. He placed William under the tutelage of the Reverend John Craig of Tinkling Spring Presbyterian Church in Augusta County. Although relatively young, Preston was too old to begin a classical education. He learned history, mathematics and penmanship under Craig. This allowed him to become James Patton's private secretary. In that position he learned to interact with the Indians. Patton was a strident taskmaster, insisting that his nephew keep accurate records at all times. This diligence continued for the rest of his life and has been of great benefit to historians of Southwest Virginia. His writings are the only records which remain in some cases.

His sweeping understanding of Native Americans played a great part in his actions for the rest of his life. He was able to negotiate and sometimes become friends with Cherokee Indian leaders. Preston also had the ability to fight them when negotiations failed or circumstances required armed intervention.

James Patton was killed by an Indian raiding party at Draper's Meadows (Blacksburg) in July 1755. The site of his death is now part of the Virginia Tech campus. In a circumstance which undoubtedly saved his life, William Preston had been sent by his uncle to a German family on Sinking Creek to recruit harvest hands. Had he been with Patton and the others, no doubt the 16 Shawnees in the raiding party would have counted Preston among



their victims and the nation would have been dealt a serious blow. Mary Draper Ingles, whose miraculous escape has been written about many times, was taken prisoner in this same raid.

William Preston was one of the trustees in the act of incorporating the town of Staunton in 1761. Earlier in that same year he had purchased the nucleus of his plantation, Greenfield, from Stephen Renfro. Preston's official duties were so numerous and varied that it becomes difficult to enumerate his many positions. Due to his uncle's influence, Preston was hired as clerk of the Vestry of Augusta County in 1750 before his 21st birthday. The next day he acquired 334 acres in Beverley Manor and another 365 acres on Lewis Creek, thus beginning a life-long occupation of buying and selling land.

Preston's military career also began at an early age. On 14 July 1755, he was commissioned captain of a company of rangers. As such, he served immediately under the governor and finally under Major Andrew Lewis. In the winter his party and others marched against the Shawnees in the Sandy Creek expedition. This foray was in retaliation for the raid which killed Patton. Ultimately they were unable to locate the Indians. Sandy Creek was a complete disaster for Preston and the other commanders. Nearly frozen, without food and facing many desertions, they were forced to return home.

In 1756, Preston accompanied George Washington from Augusta Court House to Looney's Ferry (Buchanan) in Washington's survey of the western frontier. Preston and his men were stationed in several of the forts which protected the populace from the Indians in the years 1757 and 1758. He became colonel and commander of the militia in Augusta County in 1763. William Preston served in the House of Burgesses representing Augusta County from 1766 to 1769. When Botetourt County was formed on 22 December 1769, Preston was commissioned colonel of its militia. He was also named one of its coroners.

William Preston's important duties continued during the short life of Fincastle County. He served on the Committee of Safety and when it was reorganized in October 1775, he became chairman. He was one of 15 signers of the Fincastle Resolutions in 1775. He was also commissioned lieutenant and commander-in-chief of the militia of Fincastle County.

During the American Revolution, William Preston continued with his varied duties. During this period he faced three enemies: the Indians who were still active in the area; the Tories who were plentiful even near Smithfield, which was now his home; and, of course, the third enemy – the British Army. He faced them all with the skill he had learned over his life. He addressed the Shawnees in 1778 in an attempt to alleviate their hostility. In 1779 he held a meeting with his neighbors at his home in order to oppose the possibility of a Tory insurrection. Early in 1781, when an invasion of Virginia loomed, Preston called out troops without waiting for permission from Governor Thomas Jefferson. He and his troops took part in the Battle of Guilford Courthouse in North Carolina. Jefferson was grateful and commended him for his course of action with the following words:

"I am obliged to you for the Narrative of your proceedings to the Southward. It was certainly not only justifiable but laudable and even indispensably necessary that you should have proceeded as you did to oppose the public Enemy without orders from Government which it would have been fatal to have awaited."

William Preston became ill on 28 June 1783, while attending a muster of the Montgomery County militia. It was a warm day and Preston had spent several hours at the reviewing field about three miles from Smithfield. He died about midnight at the home of General Evan Shelby who lived nearby. His daughter, Letitia Preston Floyd,



*Susanna Smith Preston, wife of Colonel William Preston. (Source: Kegley's Virginia Frontier)*



wrote this description of her father:

"Colonel Preston was above the ordinary height of man – five feet eleven inches. He was large, inclined to corpulency; was ruddy, had fair hair and hazel eyes. His manners were easy and graceful. He had a well-cultivated intellect and a fine taste for poetry. I remember reading several beautiful productions of his, addressed to my mother, in praise of her domestic virtues."

When one considers political dynasties from Virginia, he or she is apt to think of aristocratic Tidewater families, such as the Lee family, the many Benjamin Harrisons or other clans of eastern Virginia. Beginning with their arrival in Virginia in 1632, the first five Benjamin Harrisons were elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses. This began the longest unbroken line of politicians in American history. John Adams was quoted as saying the fam-

ily of Lee has more merit in it than any other family. St. George Tucker also established a political dynasty when he left Bermuda in 1771 to attend the College of William and Mary. The Tucker family, descended from a Norman yeoman who crossed the Channel with William the Conqueror, ultimately produced five United States congressmen and a wealth of educators, jurists and men of letters. Causing a nightmare for genealogists, the Tucker clan was steadfast in sticking to their family names. There were three St. George Tuckers, five Henry St. George Tuckers, four Nathaniel Beverley Tuckers and six Beverley Tuckers. Additionally, there were female Beverley Tuckers and one Henry Tucker on the distaff side.

The Southwest Virginia Preston dynasty began in February 1759, when William Preston purchased 191 acres from Stephen Renfro, in what is now Botetourt County. He moved his family to what would become Greenfield about three years after the purchase. The Greenfield acreage increased to 1,590 by 1765. In its early years the home was no more than a blockhouse or fort, surrounded by a stockade.

Preston did not spend the remainder of his life at Greenfield. In 1773 he purchased over 500 acres at Draper's Meadows (now Blacksburg) and established Smithfield. His wife and children moved there in March



*Gov. John Floyd, son-in-law of William Preston, was elected governor in 1830. His son, John Floyd, also served as governor. (Courtesy of the Library of Virginia)*

1774. The beautifully restored home stands today near the Virginia Tech campus.

Some time later William Preston convinced his sister and her husband, Robert Breckinridge, to settle in Botetourt County. Their home was a short distance from Greenfield, located in the general area of Tinker Mountain. The exact date of the Breckinridge move has not been determined, but it is a fact that James Breckinridge was born in Botetourt County on 7 March 1763. His older brother, John, was born on 2 December 1760, in Augusta County. The move occurred between the births of the two sons, consequently not long after the Preston family came to the area.

A book authored by Stephen Hess, titled *America's Political Dynasties*, was published in 1966. This dependable volume has included one Southwest Virginia dynasty. The addition of the Breckinridge family in the



Hess book questions the old Virginia adage: Gentlemen and clams end at the fall line. In a surprising departure from the norm, this family did not have its beginnings in the aristocracy of Tidewater Virginia, but arose in the sparsely-settled mountains of western Virginia. While preparing his manuscript, Stephen Hess evidently was not aware that the Breckinridge and Preston families were one and the same. This omission of the Prestons (as a dynasty) in his work detracts greatly from the inventory of accomplishments of the Breckinridge family.

There is little doubt that both the Breckinridge and Preston families owe their remarkable accomplishments in subsequent generations to William Preston's industry in obtaining a respectable library, with books obtained from both England and the larger American cities. These publications were placed in his then-backwoods plantation. This admirable collection enabled him to start a school for his children and those of his sister, both male and female. Preston's daughter, Letitia Preston Floyd, wrote the following words in her memoir:

"It was always a rule with Colonel Preston to require every young man who was employed in his surveyor's office to teach school six months at least, thereby finding out his temper, diligence, habits and trustworthiness. Mr. Breckenridge's, Smith's children, and my brothers and sisters constituted Floyd's school."

Preston hired John Floyd as his tutor when the school was established. His daughter, Letitia Preston, married Floyd's son.

The following letter was written by William Preston to the Reverend John Brown from Greenfield on 27 July 1763:

"Our situation at present is very different from what it was when we had the pleasure of your company. All the valleys of Roanoke River and the waters of the Mississippi are depopulated, except Captain English and a few families on the New River who have built a fort, among whom are Mr. Thompson and his family. They intend to make a stand till some assistance be sent them. Seventy-five of the Bedford militia went out in order to pursue the enemy, but I hear the officers and part of the men are gone home, and the rest are gone to Reed Creek to help James Davies and two or three families that dare not venture to travel. I have built a little fort in which eighty-seven persons, twenty of whom bear arms. We are in a pretty good position for defense, and, with the aid of God, are determined to make a stand. In five or six other places in this part of the country they have fallen into the same method and with the same resolution. How long we may keep them is uncertain. No enemy has appeared as yet. Their guns are frequently heard and their footing observed, which makes us believe they may pay us a visit. My two sisters are here and all in good health. We bear our misfortunes so far with (fortitude) and are in great hopes of being relieved. I have a thousand things – Captain William Christian can't wait. I give you joy."

This letter is revealing in a number of ways. It presents a graphic example of the desperate situation faced by the inhabitants in western Virginia before the Revolution. If the fort had not offered protection for those 87 persons, the Commonwealth of Virginia might be a different place today. While only one of Preston's children was alive at the time of this incident, three of Letitia Breckinridge's children were at the Greenfield fort. John, who became attorney general of the United States, was a toddler at the time and his brother James was an infant. Had William Preston been killed the loss to the country would have been disastrous. He and his wife had 12 children. Many of them made significant contributions to the state and the nation. Their names were:

- Elizabeth Preston, b. 31 May 1762, married William Strother Madison.
- William, died at age 29 of smallpox contracted in Revolutionary service.
- John Preston, b. 2 May 1764, married first Mary Radford, second Elza Ann (Carrington) Mayo. John served under his father at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. He was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates in 1783. He later served in the Virginia Senate (1792-1799). He was a trustee in the act establishing Christiansburg. He was appointed treasurer of the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1809 and continued in that capacity until 1819. The town of Prestonburg, Kentucky is named in his honor.
- Francis Preston, b. 2 August 1765, married Sarah Buchanan Campbell, daughter of General William and Elizabeth





*Smithfield, Preston's home from 1774 until his death in 1782, is located adjacent to the Virginia Tech campus in Blacksburg.*

(Henry) Campbell. He attended the College of William and Mary and studied law under George Wythe. Francis represented Montgomery County in the Virginia House of Delegates, 1788 and 1789. It is interesting to note the building which now houses the Martha Washington Inn in Abingdon, was the Francis Preston Home.

- Sarah Preston, b. 3 May 1767 at Greenfield. Sarah married James McDowell, son of James and Elizabeth McDowell. James was justice of Rockbridge County and represented that county in the House of Delegates in 1795. He was a trustee of Washington College (now Washington & Lee University) from 1796 until his death in 1841. He served in the Virginia militia throughout his active years and was offered General James Breckinridge's command at his death. He declined due to old age.

- Ann Preston, born 12 February 1769. Anne died at Greenfield at age 13.

- William Preston, b. Greenfield 5 September 1770. William married Caroline Hancock, daughter of George and Margaret (Strother) Hancock of Fincastle. Fotheringay, which exists today near Elliston, was the home of the Hancock family. It has long been maintained that the home Santillane, near Fincastle, was built by George Hancock. This is yet to be proven. This William Preston spent many of his younger years in military service, first in the militia as first cornet, later ensign and finally captain in the United States Army. He spent a number of years in military service, some of it in the War of 1812. In 1814, the family moved to Kentucky and occupied land which he had inherited from his father and which is now a part of Louisville. In 1815, he was elected a director of the Louisville Branch of the Bank of Kentucky.



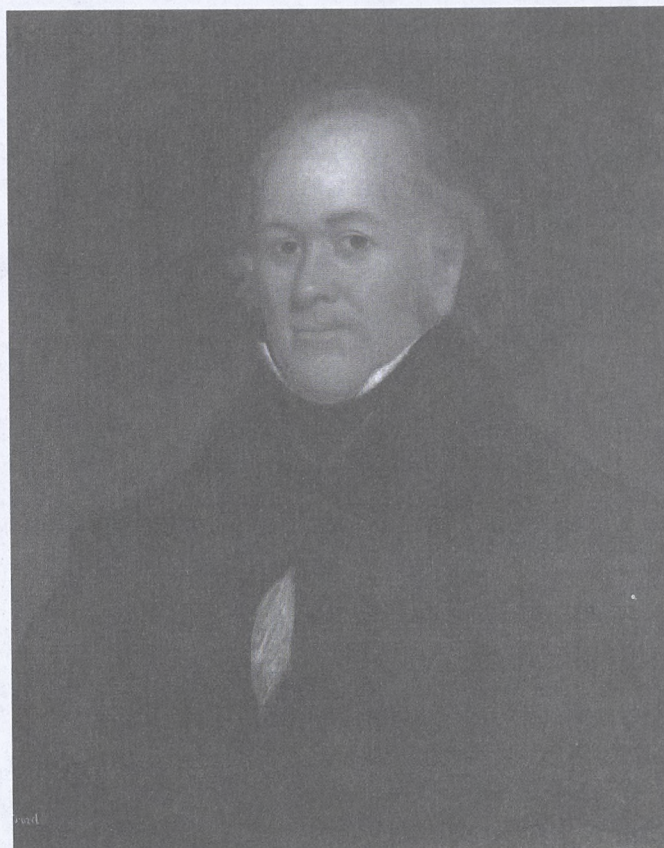
- Susanna Preston, b. 7 October 1772 at Greenfield. She married Nathaniel Hart, son of Nathaniel and Sarah (Simpson) Hart. As was the case of almost all Preston men of his generation and the husbands of their sisters, Nathaniel Hart was an Indian fighter. He took part in the Battle of Fallen Timbers. During the War of 1812 he made two trips to Philadelphia for the Bank of Kentucky, transporting large amounts of gold to Kentucky to finance war measures.

- James Patton Preston, b. 21 June 1774 at Smithfield. James was the first of William and Susanna's children to be born in that home. He married Ann Barraud Taylor, daughter of Judge Robert and Sarah Curle (Barraud) Taylor. James became deputy surveyor of Montgomery County in 1793. The following year he entered William and Mary. Later, he was a planter at Smithfield. In 1798, he was named a trustee in the Act establishing the Town of Blacksburg. He served in the Virginia Senate from 1801 to 1804. In 1808, he was a presidential elector. From 1810 to 1812 he served in the Virginia House of Delegates from Montgomery County. Preston, following the family propensity for military service, was wounded in the thigh in 1813 at the battle of Chrysler's Field in Canada. This crippled him for life. After serving in the House once more in 1816 he was elected by the House as governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia on 10 December 1816. He was again elected in 1817, 1818 and 1819. During his 1819 administration, the University of Virginia was established and Preston County (now Kentucky) was created in his honor in the same year. James Patton Preston spent his later years serving under President Monroe as one of the Indian commissioners dealing with the Creek Indians in Florida. His final duty was as postmaster of Richmond.

- Mary Preston, b. 29 September 1776 at Smithfield. She married John Lewis, son of William and Ann (Montgomery) Lewis. Lewis served in the Ninth Virginia Regiment of the Continental Line as ensign and later second lieutenant. He was later detached under General Daniel Morgan and joined General Horatio Gates in the expedition up the Hudson River to engage General Burgoyne. Lewis settled at Sweet Springs. He built Brick House, the first building of its kind in Monroe County (now West Virginia).

- Letitia Preston, b. 29 September 1779 at Smithfield. She married John Floyd, son of John and Jane (Buchanan) Floyd. Floyd studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and served as surgeon during the War of 1812. He represented Montgomery County in the Virginia House of Delegates. He later served in the United States Congress. He is given credit for first proposing the occupation and territorial organization of the Oregon Territory. On 9 January 1830, he was elected governor of Virginia.

- Thomas Lewis Preston, b. 19 August 1781 at Smithfield. Thomas attended Rockbridge Academy, Washington College and the College of William and Mary. He was expelled from William and Mary for acting as second for James Breckinridge in a duel. He read law in Richmond in 1804. He served in the Virginia House of Delegates for Rockbridge County from 1806 to 1811. He was trustee for Ann Smith Academy in Rockbridge County.



*Gov. James Patton Preston, son of William Preston, was governor of Virginia 1816-1819.  
(Courtesy of the Library of Virginia)*



- Margaret Brown Preston, b. 23 February 1784 at Smithfield. She married John Preston, son of Robert and Margaret (Rhea) Preston. John graduated from Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in 1799. He studied law under St. George Tucker at the College of William and Mary in 1801-02. His home was at Walnut Grove in Washington County.

The children of Letitia Preston and Robert Breckinridge were also prominent in both Virginia and national politics.

- William Breckinridge served in the American Revolution as an express rider. He divided his time between Virginia and Kentucky. He had no political aspirations.

- John Breckinridge, b. 2 December 1760, near Staunton. He married Mary Hopkins Cabell, daughter of Colonel Joseph Cabell and Mary (Hopkins) Cabell. John Breckinridge was educated at Augusta Academy and the College of William and Mary. While yet a student he was elected to the House of Delegates by the voters of Botetourt County. While still residing in Virginia, John was elected to the United States Congress, but moved to Kentucky in 1792 and did not take his seat. John was appointed by the governor of Kentucky as attorney general of that state in 1795. He represented Fayette County in the Kentucky House of Representatives and was elected Speaker in 1799. He was elected to the United States Senate in 1801, but resigned in 1805 to become attorney general of the United States. Serving in Thomas Jefferson's administration, John Breckinridge played an important role in opening the West and in the Louisiana Purchase negotiations. He also worked with Jefferson on the Kentucky Resolutions. John was born in Augusta County, but grew up in Botetourt County.

- James Breckinridge, b. 7 March 1763 in Botetourt County, married Ann Selden, daughter of Colonel Cary and Elizabeth (Jennings) Selden of Buckroe, in Hampton. James served under his uncle, Colonel William Preston, at Guilford Courthouse during the Revolution. He was elected to several terms in the Virginia House of Delegates, both before and after being elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, where he served from 1809 to 1817. He was commissioned brigadier general of the Virginia militia on 1 February 1809. James Breckinridge attended the Afton Mountain meeting, 1 August 1818, where a site was selected for the University of Virginia. He served on its Board of Visitors until 1827 when he was unable to attend due to failing health. James was the only member of his family who did not migrate to Kentucky. He built the home, Grove Hill, which was a showplace in Botetourt County until it burned in 1909.

- Elizabeth Breckinridge married Samuel Meredith, son of Samuel and Jane (Henry) Meredith. They moved to Fayette County, Kentucky, in 1790 and established the plantation, Winton.

- Preston Breckinridge was b. 17 March 1770. He married Elizabeth Trigg, daughter of Stephen and Mary (Christian) Trigg from Bedford County. This family also settled in Fayette County, Kentucky.

*Note:* In this article the spelling of the name Breckenridge or Breckinridge varies. The descendants of John and James Breckinridge use the "i" spelling; those of others generally use the "e." It is thought that the spelling change was instituted to avoid confusion in the land transactions which were constantly made by most of the men of the family.

Space requirements eliminate the possibility of a complete biography of the Preston and Breckinridge descendants. Their accomplishments were many and varied. A comprehensive study and cataloging of their services in the political, educational and military areas is quite revealing and covers a substantial portion of the nation. Some of the national attainments are noted below, along with a number of governorships in several states.

## GOVERNORS OF VIRGINIA

- James Patton Preston (1774-1843) was the fourth son of William and Susanna Smith Preston. The General



Assembly elected him governor of the Commonwealth in 1816. He was again elected in 1817 and 1818. He served the three years allowed by law.

- John Floyd (1779-1852) was the husband of Letitia Preston Floyd, sixth daughter of William and Susanna Smith Preston. He was elected governor of the Commonwealth in 1830. He was reelected in 1831 for a three-year term.
- James McDowell (1795-1851) was the only son of James and Sarah (Preston) McDowell. He served as governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia for three years, beginning 1 January 1843. Sarah Preston was the second daughter of William and Susanna Smith Preston.
- John Buchanan Floyd (1806-1863) was the eldest son of John and Letitia Preston Floyd. He served as governor of the Commonwealth for three years beginning 1 January 1849.

#### GOVERNORS OF OTHER STATES

- George Madison (1763- 1816) married Jane Smith Preston, second daughter of Francis and Ann Smith Preston. Madison was elected governor of Kentucky in 1816 but died two months afterward.
- Benjamin Howard ( -1814) was the only son of John and Mary (Preston) Howard. James Madison appointed him governor of the District of Louisiana in 1810. This was later renamed the Territory of Missouri. Howard remained as governor until 1813.
- John B. Weller (1812-1875) married Susan McDowell Taylor, daughter of Susan Preston McDowell Taylor and William Taylor. Weller was governor of California from 1858 to 1860. He later served as minister to Mexico.
- Benjamin Gratz Brown (1826-1885) son of Mason Brown and Margaretta Mason Brown, was elected governor of Missouri in 1871. He was a candidate for vice president of the United States with Horace Greeley in 1872.

#### UNITED STATES SENATORS

- James Brown (1766-1835), son of Margaret Preston Brown, served as United States senator from Louisiana from 1813 to 1823. He later served as minister to France.
- John Breckinridge (1760-1806) was the son of Letitia Preston Breckinridge. He was elected to the United States Senate in 1801. He resigned in 1805 to become attorney general of the United States. Breckinridge was prominent in effecting the Louisiana Purchase. He worked with Thomas Jefferson in promoting the Kentucky Resolutions.
- John Brown (1757-1837), second son of John Brown and Margaret Preston, became United States senator when Kentucky was admitted to the union in 1792. He served until 1805. He was president *pro tempore* of the Senate in 1803-1804.
- John Cabell Breckinridge (1821-1875), grandson of John Breckinridge, was James Buchanan's vice president prior to the Civil War. He was elected to the United States Senate when his term as vice president expired in 1861. After an unsuccessful campaign as southern presidential candidate against Abraham Lincoln, Breckinridge fought for any compromise which would save the Union. After Fort Sumter, he joined the Confederacy and was declared a traitor. Although he had little military experience he fought successfully in both theatres as a major general. In 1865, Jefferson Davis made him secretary of war of the Confederate States.
- Benjamin Gratz Brown (1826-1885), great-grandson of John Brown and Margaret Preston, served as United States Senator from Missouri from 1863-1869. He was candidate for vice president in 1872. His running mate was Horace Greeley.



- William Campbell Preston (1794-1860), eldest son of Francis and Sarah Buchanan Campbell Preston, was elected to the United States Senate in 1833 from South Carolina. He was re-elected in 1837, but resigned in a conflict with the South Carolina Legislature.
- Wade Hampton III (1818-1902) was married to Margaret Frances Preston, youngest child of Francis and Sarah Buchanan Campbell Preston. He served two terms in the United States Senate, from 1879 to 1891. His service to the Confederacy is well known. He also served as governor of South Carolina from 1876 to 1879 and as commissioner of Pacific Railways from 1893 to 1897.
- John B. Weller (1812-1875) was the spouse of Susan McDowell, granddaughter of James and Sarah Preston McDowell. He served in the United States Senate from 1852 to 1857. He was governor of California 1858-1860.
- Thomas Hart Benton (1782-1858) was elected to the United States Senate in 1820. He served there with distinction for 36 years. An advocate for the opening of the west he was also a distinguished author. He was married to Elizabeth Preston McDowell, sister of Susan McDowell Weller noted above.
- John Charles Fremont (1813-1890) was a member of the Senate briefly in 1850-51. He was married to Jessie Ann Benton, daughter of Thomas Hart and Elizabeth Preston McDowell Benton, named above. He was a noted explorer of the western American states. He served as major general in the Union Army during the Civil War. It is noted that Jessie Ann Benton was active in Fremont's affairs during much of his career.
- Randall Lee Gibson (1832-1892) was the son of Louisiana Breckinridge Hart and Tobias Gibson, one of the leading cotton planters in Louisiana. Gibson rose to the rank of brigadier general in the Confederate Army. After serving in the House of Representatives he was elected United States senator from 1883 until his death. He was an advisor to Paul Tulane in establishing Tulane University.
- Johnson Newlin Camden, Jr. (1865-1942) married Susan Preston Hart, daughter of William Preston Hart and Rebecca Carnan Tevis. Educated at Virginia Military Institute, Columbia University and University of Virginia, Camden was United States senator from Kentucky in 1914 and 1915.
- John W. Johnston (1818-1889) was the husband of Nickette Buchanan Floyd Johnston. When Virginia was readmitted to the Union in 1869 he was elected to a two-year term in the United States Senate. He was re-elected for two full terms and served until 1883.
- Francis Preston Blair (1821-1875) was the son of Francis Preston Blair and Eliza Violet Gist. Blair was described as an "unyielding unionist." He took part in both the Mexican War and the Civil War. He was appointed attorney general of New Mexico when it was taken from Mexico. He was chosen by the Missouri Legislature as United States senator in 1868.

#### **MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

- John Breckinridge, 3rd Congress
- James Breckinridge, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th Congress
- John Brown, 1st and 2nd Congress
- Francis Preston, 3rd and 4th Congress
- John Floyd, 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th Congress



- Benjamin Howard, 10th and 11th Congress

- Peter Buell Porter, 11th and 12th Congress

- John Cabell Breckinridge, 22nd and 23rd Congress

- William Campbell Preston Breckinridge, 49th, 50th, 51st, 52nd and 53rd Congress

- Charles C. Johnston, 22nd Congress

- William Taylor, 28th and 29th Congress

- John B. Weller, 26th, 27th, 28th Congress

- Francis Thomas, 22nd, 23rd 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th 28th, 29th and 30th Congress

- William Preston, 32nd and 33rd Congress

- William Franklin Draper, 53rd and 54th Congress

- Randall Lee Gibson, 44th, 45th, 46th and 47th Congress

- William Ballard Preston, 13th Congress

- Peter Johnston Otey, 54th, 55th, 56th and 57th Congress

- Francis Preston Blair Jr., 35th, 36th, 37th and 38th Congress

- Carter Henry Harrison, 44th and 45th Congress

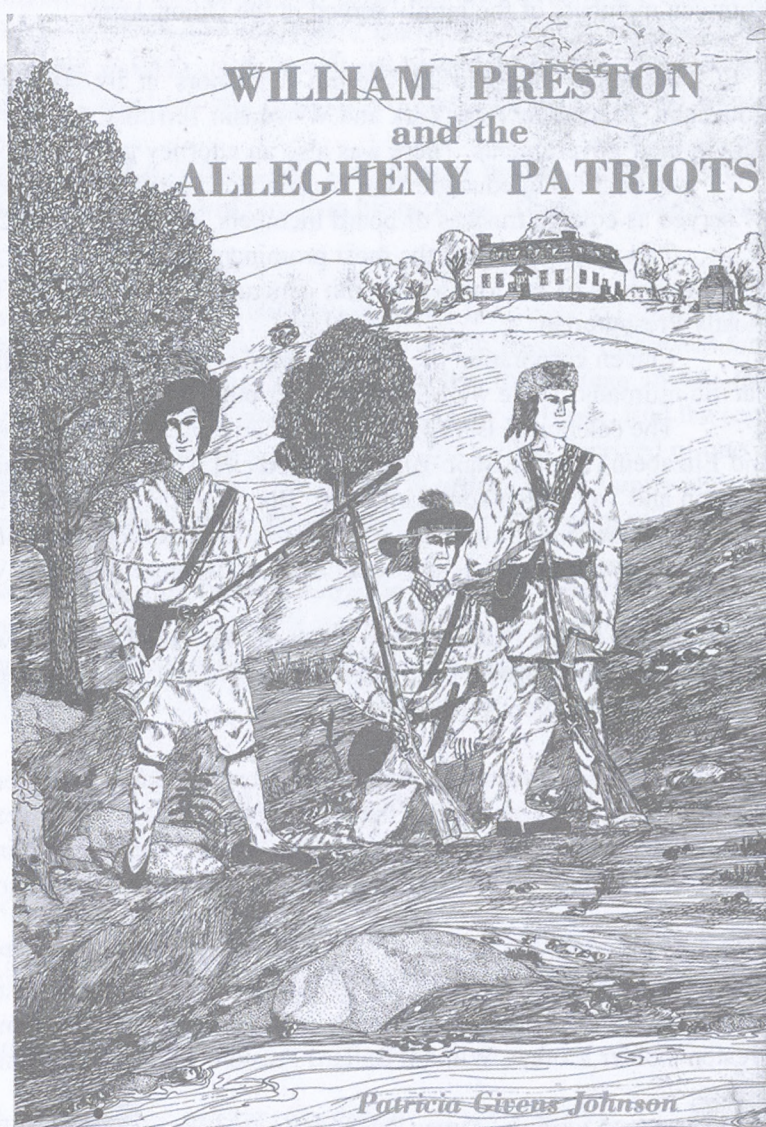
- Thomas Francis Marshall, 27th congress

- Clifton Rodes Breckinridge, 51st, 52nd and 53rd Congress

- James Douglas Breckinridge, 17th Congress

Among the many members of the Preston family who performed important federal duties, there were two secretaries of war, one secretary of the navy, one U.S. consul and one consul general. Along with these, five served as foreign ministers, one as postmaster general. John C. Breckinridge was vice president of the United States under James Buchanan.

Twenty-three have served in the House of Delegates or Virginia Senate. One hundred forty-seven family



Cover of William Preston biography, by Patricia Johnson.



members wore the gray uniform during the Civil War. There were two members of the Confederate Congress and one treasurer of the Confederacy. John C. Breckinridge was Confederate secretary of war when the conflict ended. Fourteen members of the family served in the Union Army.

Kentucky has had 13 Preston legislators in its state government. California has had one legislator. Louisiana, Tennessee, New York and Wisconsin Territory, and the Republic of Texas all had Preston family members in their governments. There was also an attorney general of New Mexico.

In the field of education the Preston/Breckinridge family was notable. Twenty-five were college professors, 37 served as college trustees or board members. There were five college presidents and two founders.

The area of law was the most prominent profession in the family. One hundred-eight attorneys are cited in the biographies of the fourth and fifth generations of the family. There were 16 judges, 43 doctors, 17 ministers, mostly Presbyterian.

Eleven corporation presidents were discovered, along with four railroad presidents and a commissioner of Pacific railroads. There were 10 newspaper publishers.

The celebrated Blair House in Washington, D. C. is named for Francis Preston Blair, second son of James and Elizabeth (Smith) Blair. Blair was editor of *The Globe*, a Washington newspaper which was powerful in the Jackson and Van Buren administrations. Blair was the grandson of Ann Preston Smith, sister of William Preston.

The beginnings of many of the institutions of higher learning in Virginia and elsewhere were greatly assisted by the Preston family. It is evident that the Commonwealth of Virginia has been blessed by their contributions:

- Washington & Lee University: In 1774, the Reverend John Brown established a grammar school near his home in Augusta County. Brown was trustee from 1776 to 1782. It moved to Lexington as Augusta Academy. It ultimately became Washington & Lee University.
- Virginia Military Institute: John Thomas Lewis Preston, grandson of William Preston, wrote a series of newspaper articles in 1835, advocating the arsenal at Lexington be converted into a school which could pursue academic and military studies and also serve as guards. In 1836, the Virginia Legislature passed the acts establishing the school. J.T.L. Preston and Francis H. Smith were the only professors at VMI from 1839 to 1842.
- Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University: Robert Taylor Preston, grandson of William, was named trustee incorporating Preston & Olin Institute in 1854. The Methodist institution eventually became Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University and today it is Virginia Tech.. Preston & Olin Institute was named for Robert Taylor Preston's older brother, William Ballard Preston, who was also one of the first trustees.
- University of Virginia: James Breckinridge, nephew of William Preston, was present with Thomas Jefferson and others at the 1 August 1818 Rockfish Gap meeting which chose Charlottesville as the permanent site for the University of Virginia. Breckinridge also served on the first board of visitors and remained a member until his death.
- Tulane University: William Preston Johnson, grandson of William Preston, was president of Louisiana State University in 1880. He was appointed by the Tulane Education Fund to take charge and establish Tulane University. Randal Lee Gibson, a great-grandson, also advised philanthropist Paul Tulane and was president of its board of administrators.
- Transylvania University: John Breckinridge, nephew of William Preston, was a member of the original board of Transylvania Seminary located at Lexington, Kentucky, the first English-speaking institution of higher learning west of the mountains. Many Breckinridges and Prestons attended this institution.
- Emory & Henry College: Maria Thornton Carter Preston married John Montgomery Preston who, in 1840, was named trustee in the act establishing Abingdon Female Academy. He was one of the early supporters and largest contributors to Emory & Henry College.



Few people made a greater impact on this nation than William Preston. The history of Southwest Virginia is often overshadowed by that of the more numerous and more publicized neighbors who lived to the east of the mountains. The so-called Tuckahoes of eastern Virginia have their Lees, Tylers, Harrisons, Tuckers and many more. It must be remembered, however, that the Blue Ridge and Allegheny mountains have their McDowells, Lewises, Browns, Floyds, Marshalls, Randolphs, Carringtons, Campbells and Hamptons (along with many others) all connected to the Breckinridge and Preston families.

The words of John Breckinridge when he learned of his uncle's death sum up the worth of William Preston's life. No one was more devastated when the news reached him than his nephew. These are John's words to his mother:

"Yesterday I received the news of uncle's death the most melancholy that I have ever yet heard. If the repeated marks of his tenderness & affection & the constant exertion of every fatherly & friendly office instituted him to the respect, love & Gratitude of anyone, I think it could not be more justly due to him than anyone than myself. This shock I have been for some time preparing myself to receive, & after all my fortitude, find the separation almost insupportable. The subject is really too gloomy to think seriously on. To be thus deprived of one, in whom all our affections, were placed, & in whom I fear dyed the greatest Honour, & ornament our family will ever hereafter see is truly a melancholy circumstance. His value & worth we will now know by the want of him."

John Breckinridge more than likely would have agreed the most lasting and positive effect William Preston had on the nation was his commitment to education. From Greenfield and continuing to Smithfield, the small school which directed his family to higher education allowed generations of his descendants to be leaders of the Commonwealth of Virginia and the country as a whole.

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# Virginians facing reality ~ The 1959 Perrow Commission

by Judge George M. Cochran

My friend, Kossen Gregory of Roanoke, and I are surviving members of the 1959 Perrow Commission appointed by Governor J. Lindsay Almond Jr., February 5, 1959, to recommend measures to solve the crisis in the Public Free School System of Virginia. We feel that our service on the Perrow Commission and thereafter in actively supporting in the General Assembly the legislation recommended by the majority of the Commission was the most difficult and important of our legislative years. We also feel that the leadership role of the late State Senator Mosby G. Perrow Jr., as chairman of the Commission, has never been adequately recognized or appreciated.

I am using the Report of the Commission, dated March 31, 1959, Concurring Statements, Dissenting Report, various newspaper clippings, especially from The Roanoke Times, and the fading memories of Kossen Gregory and myself to give a reasonably accurate general description of the five-year period (1954-1959) that we believe was the most difficult for Virginia in the 20th century.

I have also had the benefit of discussion that Kossen Gregory has had with Melville Carico, now retired, then an active political reporter for The Roanoke Times, who covered the report of the Perrow Commission and the 1959 Special Session of the General Assembly that acted on the legislation recommended by the Commission.

The Supreme Court of the United States, on May 17, 1954, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 US 483, struck down the State constitutional provisions and laws requiring racial separation of children in public schools. This decision, though unanimous, shocked the majority of the people of Virginia. I know of no member of the General Assembly of Virginia who ever voiced approval of the opinion. Some of us who began our legislative service in 1948 were veterans of World War II. We had introduced legislation providing for elimination of the "Jim Crow" laws and the Poll Tax as inappropriate restrictions on black citizens. Having recently served in a war which all Americans helped to win, we favored these concessions. We felt that voluntary action of this kind would promote racial harmony and might lead to greater cooperation between the races and less pressure to integrate the public schools at a later date. Whether this theory had any merit will never be known because the proposed legislation was never approved in Virginia.

Governor Thomas B. Stanley appointed in August 1954 a commission of 32 members of the Senate and House of Delegates, chaired by Senator Garland Gray, to consider the *Brown* case and to make such recommendations for Virginia as might be appropriate. Chief counsel for the Commission was David J. Mays, a distinguished lawyer. The Commission reported to the Governor in November 1955, recommending a plan of pupil assignment that may not have been approved by the Federal courts, and a tuition grant program to assist students wishing to attend private (segregated) schools. The tuition grant proposal required amendment to the Virginia Constitution and this was promptly accomplished. The amendment was approved by the General Assembly and then by the voters of Virginia in a special election.

I had an opportunity to discuss briefly with David Mays the recommendations of the Gray Commission. They were, he said, the absolute maximum that could be drawn from *Brown*. He had informally reported this to

*Judge George M. Cochran of Staunton served in the House of Delegates, 1948-1966, and in the State Senate, 1966-1969. He was president of the Virginia Bar Association and a member of the Constitutional Revision Commission in 1966-1969. He served as a justice on the Virginia Supreme Court, 1969-1987. Kossen Gregory, a longtime Roanoke lawyer, was a member of the House of Delegates in 1954-1963. He was chairman of the House Welfare Committee*



Senator Harry F. Byrd Sr., in Washington and the Senator had said that integration of the public schools could not be permitted to happen but could offer no reasonable alternative.

#### **'MASSIVE RESISTANCE' WAS A RALLYING CRY FOR MANY**

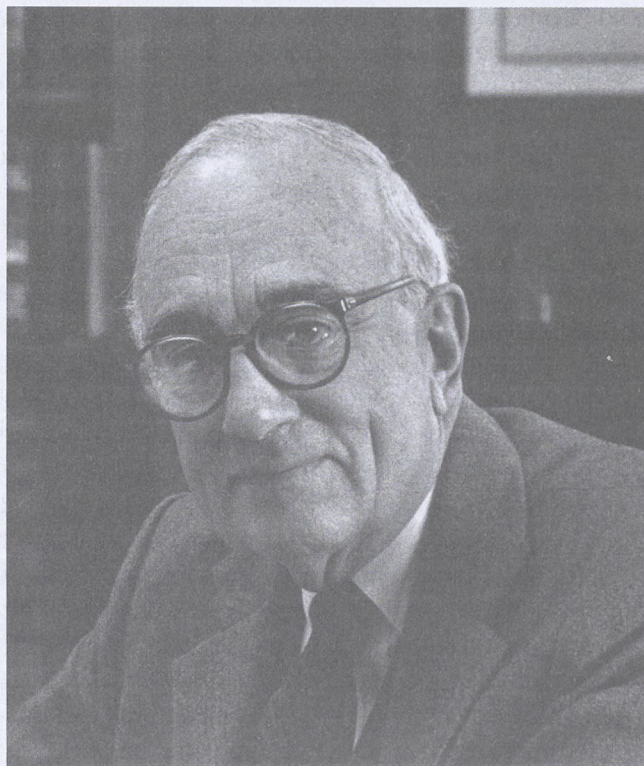
The term "massive resistance," refusal to permit any integration, was attributed to Senator Byrd and with such influential support it became a rallying cry for thousands of people throughout the South. The intellectual leader of this movement, or lack of movement, was James J. Kilpatrick, the fiery editor of *The Richmond News Leader*, who began to write powerful editorials espousing the doctrine of "interposition," under which a state would interpose its sovereignty against the tyranny of the national government. The General Assembly of Virginia approved a resolution expressing this principle. Some doubtful members felt that this revival of John C. Calhoun's old theory that appeared to have been defeated by the Civil War could be no more successful at this later date.

The Gray Commission had recommended a pupil assignment plan designed to continue for the most part racial segregation in the public schools and a tuition grant program for those unwilling to send their children to integrated schools. When it became clear that no one could guarantee that there would be absolutely no school integration under the Gray Commission plan, sentiment quickly changed in the attitude of the political leaders of Virginia. Governor Stanley, who had been a business executive and not a lawyer, declined to approve the Gray Commission report. Senator Garland Gray, chairman of the Commission, repudiated its recommendations, followed by other Commission members. The Commission had been heavily weighted in favor of the Southside areas where the black population was larger than elsewhere in the state. Those who rejected the recommendations, made after more than a year of deliberating, became some of the most fervent leaders of the massive resistance movement.

In Washington, D. C., the massive resistance theme appeared to be strongly promoted by Senator Harry F. Byrd Sr., Congressman and former Governor William M. Tuck, and Congressman Watkins Abbott. In Richmond, the strongest voices were those of Attorney General J. Lindsay Almond Jr., and Senator Mills Godwin.

In 1956, legislation was approved in special session that would close any public school integrated by federal order. The following year, Attorney General Almond announced that he would run for governor. This announcement took at least one prospective candidate by surprise. Senator Garland Gray, a successful business executive and a longtime leader of the conservative bloc of the Senate, had wanted to be governor. He was close to Senator Byrd Sr., but he had not acted fast enough. Many people had committed themselves to Almond.

I remember receiving a call from J. Randolph "Bunny" Tucker Jr., an able member of the Richmond delegation in the House of Delegates. He was soliciting support for Almond. "He is a good lawyer," said Bunny, "and smart enough to know that if the massive resistance laws are invalidated, some integration will follow." I agreed to support him. Not long afterwards, Senator Gray's son-in-law, Thomas Tullidge of Staunton, called on me to sound me out on Gray's prospects if he ran for governor. Since Senator Gray had headed the Commission which made a recommendation of pupil assignment and tuition grants and then repudiated the recommendation, I suggested that Gray's indecision would be hard to explain or overcome.



*Judge George Cochran*



Lindsay Almond went on to win the governorship, beating Senator Ted Dalton, the Republican candidate, who had almost defeated Governor Stanley four years earlier. Dalton proposed local pupil assignment and Almond, a fire-eating Southern Fourth of July orator, overwhelmed him with massive resistance purple prose.

The year 1958 opened with Lindsay Almond as governor and former Senator Albertis Harrison Jr. as attorney general. The governor gave a typically militant message to the regular session of the General Assembly. He had included in the Appropriation Act an appropriation of \$3,000,000 or a sum sufficient to pay tuition grants of \$250 for each student withdrawing from the public school system to go to a private school.

The new attorney general began a series of uphill fights in the federal courts to sustain the massive resistance laws. He later told me that it was a sad experience for a lawyer to enter a federal court knowing he was almost certain to lose.

### GOV. LINDSAY ALMOND MADE THE COVER OF TIME MAGAZINE

In September 1958, my wife and I were in Rome on our first trip to Europe, scheduled to feature in Paris the dedication of a plaque in memory of Woodrow Wilson, given by the people of Virginia to the people of France. We passed a newsstand and saw, to our amazement, a copy of Time magazine with Lindsay Almond's face adorning the front page. There he was, in full battle mode, white hair scattered over his face, holding the line on massive resistance.

The massive resistance laws came under attack in the fall of 1958 in the federal courts when six public schools in Norfolk, two in Charlottesville and one in Warren County were closed under Virginia law because they were ordered integrated by federal courts. A three-judge Federal Special Court heard Norfolk petitions objecting to the school closing. In the meantime, a petition was filed by the attorney general of Virginia against the state comptroller requesting entry of a writ of mandamus after determining the validity of several massive resistance laws. Decisions in both cases were announced on the same date, the Federal decision after the state one.

The Supreme Court of Appeals of Virginia (now the Supreme Court of Virginia) decided, on a 5 to 2 vote, that the writ of mandamus be denied. The majority opinion written by Chief Justice Eggleston held that Section 141 of the Virginia Constitution, validated by *Brown v. Board of Education*, was independent of Section 129, requiring the state to maintain an efficient system of public free schools throughout the state. Thus the laws under consideration violated Section 129 "in that they remove from the public school system any schools in which people of the two races are mixed, and make no provision for their support and maintenance as a part of the system." The court, however, found no constitutional objection to the prescribed provisions for making tuition grants and left the matter to the discretion of the General Assembly. (*Harrison v Day*, 200 VA. 439 [1959])

On the same date, January 19, 1959, the Federal Special Court decided that the Virginia school-closing law violated petitioners' rights under the United States Constitution.

Governor Almond's initial reaction to the unfavorable court decisions was to make an appeal by radio and television to Virginians to stand firm with him because "we've only begun to fight." A few days later, he called the General Assembly into special session to consider the crisis. This would be the third special session called within three years.

In addressing the special session, the governor was more realistic in his more thoughtful consideration of the court decisions. He acknowledged that he was now powerless to block the entry of most Negro students into some Virginia schools the next week. This admission enraged diehard segregationists who preferred for him to lock the schools or surround them with state police. I remember one Southside delegate on the floor of the House calling the governor a "traitor" to Virginia for his capitulation. This eloquence enabled him to run successfully for the Senate where he served for many years.

The governor proposed three stopgap measures that were duly approved. One repealed the mandatory schools attendance law. Another activated the tuition grant program by approving grants of \$250 each and appropriating \$3,000,000 or a sum sufficient to finance the grants. The third provided more severe penalties for making false reports of bombs to public buildings.

The governor announced that he would appoint a commission of members of the General Assembly to study the public school problems and make recommendations. On February 5, 1959, the governor appointed such a commission to be headed by State Senator Mosby G. Perrow Jr., Lynchburg, as chairman, to make recommenda-



tions to him by March 31, 1959. Four members were appointed for each of the ten Congressional districts in the state. .

An executive committee, consisting of one member from each Congressional district was appointed, as follows: Delegates Davis, Roberts, Pollard, Moore and Cochran, and Senators Fitzpatrick, Godwin, Hagood, Button and Fenwick.

An able lawyer and former member of the House of Delegates, W.R. Broaddus Jr., of Martinsville, was named counsel to the committee. He was assisted by C.F. Hicks, Walter E. Rogers and Henry T. Wickham.

After extensive hearings and discussions, a majority report was signed by 35 of the 40 members of the Commission. This report recommended a bill to require the State Board of Education to adopt rules and regulations for the use of local school boards in making initial placement of pupils in the public schools, and creating a State Placement Board of Appeals to review the placement of pupils, with appeals to the state courts.

The report further recommended a bill to provide for "local option" in dealing with compulsory attendance and a bill to provide for each child a minimum scholarship (tuition grant) of \$250. Drafts of bills to carry

out the recommendations were included in an appendix. The report further recommended repeal of various sections of the Code.

Several qualifying or explanatory statements were filed by members of the majority. A dissenting report was filed by Godwin, Wheatley, Thompson, Hagood, Hutcheson, Carneal, Daniel, McCue and Gray. This recommended removal of the mandatory provisions of the Virginia Constitution requiring the establishment and maintenance of an efficient free public school system throughout Virginia in order to continue massive resistance. Some of us in the majority believed that many dissenters knew the majority position was correct but voted against it for political protection in re-election campaigns.

On March 31, 1959, the Special Session of the General Assembly, in recess since February 2, 1959, reconvened to act on the Report of the Commission on Education (the Perrow Commission) filed that day with the governor. The atmosphere in the Capitol was tense. Many of us who were preparing to sponsor or support the legisla-

## MEMBERS OF THE PERROW COMMISSION

Mosby G. Perrow Jr.,  
*Chairman*

Harry B. Davis,  
*Vice Chairman*

### 1st Congressional District

Howard W. Adams  
Russell M. Carneal  
Harry B. Davis  
W. Marvin Minter

### 6th Congressional District

Earl A. Fitzpatrick  
Kossen Gregory  
Mosby G. Perrow Jr.  
H. Ray Webber

### 2nd Congressional District

Edward L. Breeden Jr.  
W.T. Leary  
William J. Moody  
James W. Roberts

### 7th Congressional District

Curry Carter  
George M. Cochran  
Lawrence H. Hoover  
Robert Whitehead

### 3rd Congressional District

Fitzgerald Bemiss  
Fred G. Pollard  
Edward E. Willey  
Joseph G. Williams Jr.

### 8th Congressional District

Robert Y. Button  
Robert R. Gwathmey III  
Edward G. McCue Jr.  
W. Tayloe Murphy

### 4th Congressional District

John H. Daniel  
Mills E. Godwin Jr.  
Garland Gray  
Joseph C. Hutcheson

### 9th Congressional District

M.M. Long  
Garnett S. Moore  
Vernon C. Smith  
Harry C. Stuart

### 5th Congressional District

J.D. Hagood  
S. Floyd Landreth  
C. Stuart Wheatley Jr.  
Hunt M. Whitehead

### 10th Congressional District

John A.K. Donovan  
Charles R. Fenwick  
C. Harrison Mann Jr.  
James M. Thomson



tion proposed in the majority report did not underestimate the difficulties. We firmly believed, however, that this was the most important session of the General Assembly since Reconstruction days after the Civil War. And several of us, brought by the governor from relative obscurity during the depths of massive resistance to active participation in the effort to face reality welcomed the opportunity to make an affirmative impact.

### KOSSEN GREGORY PROPOSED 'FREEDOM OF CHOICE'

Thus, Kossen Gregory felt that a short affirmative slogan would be helpful in promoting the Perrow Commission program. He proposed calling it the "Freedom of Choice" plan and this happy upbeat label was enthusiastically adopted as the motto for the crucial contest.

Although the governor strongly backed it, passage of the legislative package recommended by the Perrow



*Kossen Gregory*

Commission was far from certain. The dissenters, who preferred to continue massive resistance, had substantial support in the Senate and House. Composition of committees was important. In both bodies, massive resisters in substantial numbers were members of key committees. Moreover, in the Senate of 40 members, two, counted on to support the Perrow legislation, were absent. One, Stuart B. Carter of Botetourt, was in Richmond but ill. The other, Robert Baldwin of Norfolk, was absent without explanation. Baldwin was a man of courtly appearance and manners, popular in Norfolk, re-elected without effort, and admired in the General Assembly in Senate and House. Upon inquiry, I was told that the senator had gone to visit his daughter who was living in Italy. Later, it was suggested that he might be suffering from cancer and did not have long to live. This rumor was subsequently found to be incorrect. A sad ending to a political career – he failed to report for duty when it counted most.

Mosby Perrow took charge of the campaign in the Senate to pass the legislative program recommended by the Perrow Commission. He was assisted by Senator Fenwick and the other senators who served on the Commission, including Senator Edward L. Breeden Jr., of Norfolk, a master of parliamentary procedure. The opposition was led by Senator Godwin, assisted by

Senator Gray and other dissenters. The commanding figure of Mills Godwin, however, was the magnet that attracted the defiant support of the massive resisters in and out of the General Assembly.

On the House side, Harry B. Davis, vice chairman of the Commission and chairman of the House Education Committee, led, assisted by Pollard, Gregory, Cochran and others from the Perrow Commission. C. Stuart Wheatley, a Danville lawyer and a dissenter on the Perrow Commission, led the opposition, quietly supported by the Speaker of the House, E. Blackburn Moore.

Representatives from white Citizens Councils and other anti-integration groups made their wishes known



for continued massive resistance. It was a tense time. There was even a report, never verified, that a shot may have been fired at the governor as he walked from the Executive Mansion to the Capitol. But there had been a considerable change in public opinion, especially in the business community, since the massive resistance laws had been invalidated in January 1959, by both Virginia and federal courts.

The so-called anti-Perrow Commission bloc in the special session of the General Assembly filed a resolution calling for a constitutional amendment to rewrite Section 129 to free the General Assembly from having to appropriate funds for public schools. The bloc also expressed opposition to the pupil assignment bill proposed by the Perrow Commission and to passage of any kind of compulsory attendance law.

The key recommendation of the Perrow Commission was the pupil assignment plan and, of course, it was bitterly opposed by the dissenters and their allies in the special session. Duplicate bills, one filed in the Senate, the other in the House, were designed to enact the pupil assignment plan into law. The bills were referred to the Education Committees of Senate and House, respectively, for action.

A day or two before the House Education Committee was to vote on the legislation, Hunt Whitehead, a member of the Perrow Commission (he had filed a qualifying statement) and a member of the Education Committee, spoke to me in confidence. He knew the bill was in the best interests of Virginia, he said. But he was in an impossible political situation. His people in Pittsylvania County were violently opposed to integration of the public schools. A man was standing on the street in Chatham, waiting to see how he voted on the pupil assignment bill. If he voted for it, he would never return to the General Assembly. Knowing how close this might be on the Committee, I could only sympathize with Hunt and tell him to make the best decision he could under the circumstances. On April 13, 1959, the vote was taken in committee on my motion to approve. It passed by one vote and Hunt Whitehead cast the winning vote. As he had anticipated, he never was re-elected to the General Assembly. Without using his name, I have often cited this as an act of political courage that was crucial but never rewarded. I am glad to record my eternal admiration for a statesman with the heart of a lion.

On the following day, April 14, the Senate Education Committee, after a public hearing, defeated on a voice vote the Senate pupil assignment bill. The next day, after four hours of debate, the House approved the House bill reported from the Education Committee, 54 to 45, leading to final passage, 54 to 46, which came without difficulty. This action brought the approved House bill to the Senate for final disposition. The problem was the anti-Perrow Commission majority on the Senate Education Committee.

The parliamentary device used to permit a full vote on the pupil assignment bill was to resolve the Senate into a Committee of the Whole, with Senator Breeding presiding. This was accomplished in dramatic fashion when Senator Stuart B. Carter was wheeled into the Senate chambers on a stretcher to cast the 20th favorable vote. The total vote was 20 to 19 (Baldwin absent) with Senator Curry Carter, who had signed the majority report of the Perrow Commission, voting against the motion. Then, on April 20, on the same 20 to 19 vote, the local pupil assignment bill was approved. Earlier on that date, the House defeated the Wheatley resolution calling for an amendment to the Virginia Constitution.

### SAVING VIRGINIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS BY A 'TINY MARGIN'

Various other non-controversial legislation recommended by the Perrow Commission was duly approved, including, for instance, provision for reinstating compulsory attendance laws on a local-option basis. Those of us who served on the Perrow Commission and helped put the program into law felt the satisfaction of having done something worthwhile for the Commonwealth. We felt that we had saved the public school system of Virginia by a tiny margin. The "Freedom of Choice" plan had prevailed.

We were confident that continuation of the policy of massive resistance would have brought chaos to Virginia and would have permanently damaged the reputation of the state. We believed that the proposal to submit to the electorate a constitutional amendment to eliminate the requirement of funding for the public school system was only a delaying tactic. The majority of voters doubtless would have rejected the proposed amendment but the contest itself would have led to a continuation of bitter animosity.

Reckless, indeed, was the independent action of Prince Edward County in closing its public schools for five years, 1959-1964, by declining to appropriate local funds for public schools until a federal court intervened. Only recently, 50 years after *Brown v Board of Education*, has official action been taken to recognize and provide



some compensation for the pain and suffering caused to victims of the closing of public schools between 1954 and 1964. In the 2005 session of the General Assembly, the Brown v Board of Education Scholarship Program and Fund was established (Code 30-231.1-10) to provide educational opportunities for persons who were unable to begin or continue their education because of public school closings in Norfolk, Charlottesville, Warren County or Prince Edward County between 1954 and 1964. Of this fund of \$2,050,000, the sum of \$1,000,000 was contributed by a Virginia philanthropist. Scholarships are presently being awarded to qualified applicants.

We admired Mosby Perrow, a genial giant, a conservative senator who generally would have been tempera-

mentally close to the massive resisters but who was determined to save the public schools. He stayed in close association with the governor and planned the strategy for overcoming practical problems. Through his political skill and personality, he converted a group of rugged individuals into an effective legislative team. His political fate followed that of other prophets – he was defeated in the 1963 election.

As for Governor Almond, after he decided to appoint the Perrow Commission, he never wavered in supporting the work of the Commission. The days of purple oratory were over. He worked day and night to promote the legislative program recommended by the Commission. I specifically suggested that he call, among other executives, Stuart Saunders, president of the Norfolk & Western Railway, and ask him to organize the statewide business executives who would suffer from abolition of the public school system. He promptly agreed and acted at once.

The governor was a pitiful figure at this time. The political leaders of Virginia remained committed to the repudiated doctrine of massive resistance. He was left alone in the Mansion with his devoted wife, Josephine, and he was happy to have some of us eager Perrow Commission members come to him, even late at night, to plan ways and

means of advancing the remedial program. As Bunny Tucker had told me months earlier, Almond was a good enough lawyer to know, when Virginia and federal courts invalidated the massive resistance laws, that the end of massive resistance must be recognized. For thus facing reality, his reputation suffered – but the Commonwealth benefited from the return to the rule of law.



*Mosby Perrow*





# *A Small Bag of Spices ~ Farming in Montgomery Co.*

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*by Tom Word*

**M**y father died in 1954 when I was 15. He was a country lawyer and a farmer. Each day after office hours when I was a small boy, he drove the three miles to his 133-acre farm south of Christiansburg. I opened the gates so we could inspect his 20 Hereford cows and 60 grade Hampshire ewes. He'd drive fearlessly across the steep rocky pastures to find the stock; we'd count them and look for newborns or birthing mothers in distress.

He took boundless pleasure from this stewardship. Worry often furrowed his brow as he drove out of town, but by the time our bluegrass pastures came into view, his expression would be relaxed, his eyes twinkling beneath bushy eyebrows and behind bifocals.

On Sundays we'd have a companion, Mr. Charlie Atkinson, N&W trainman and shrewd farmer, whose near-town acres pastured my Shetland pony, Dixie. We'd inspect his herd first, headed by a retired show bull named Ferdinand who let me sit on his back as he stood under a tree swatting flies with his tail. We'd bring salt and pour out little piles on a hilltop cowpath. Then I'd be ordered to call, "Soo calf, soo! . . . coo sheep, coo!" I'd chant as my father and Mr. Atkinson smiled in amusement. The stock would come thundering. My father was a died-in-the-wool agrarian, and he stamped me one.

My father's solo law practice was typical for the time and place, but how he became a lawyer is a remarkable story of determination and self-reliance. His practice was grounded in real estate, estate, and personal tax work. The tax work was grueling, preparing returns for farmers, merchants, and wage earners, many for a \$5 fee.

"Partnership is an instrument of the devil, and seven is not our lucky number," he'd often say with rueful conviction. He had good reason to think so, his history reveals.

My first job at age 10 was sweeping out my father's law office after school and burning his waste paper to assure confidentiality. If my father were not in his office, he'd be across the street in the clerk's office searching a title. I'd often find him with tracing paper and a compass, checking the accuracy of a deed description for a farmer seeking a Federal Land Bank loan to build a milking parlor.

My father loved the mystery of a title search. He built a solid reputation for accuracy and punctuality. In 1950, Esso (now Exxon Mobil) hired him to search title and negotiate petroleum-drilling leases on much of the county. Two wildcat wells went down through Merrimac Mountain where the Confederacy had mined its iron-smelting coal. Sadly, they proved dry holes, but the project led to my father's best year as a lawyer – he cleared \$10,000, his life's financial ambition, he told us as he carved the Christmas turkey. It was the only mention of his income I ever heard.

When I turned 12 in the summer of 1950, my father was 54 years old. My sisters, Mary Ann and Harriet, who'd been valedictorians at Christiansburg High, were off at grad school and college. My parents were engrossed in plans to build a house on the farm, a dream they'd long held but postponed because of the war. The site was high on a hill with views of five counties (Giles, Roanoke, Floyd, Pulaski, and our Montgomery). But my father's health was precarious. He'd suffered a heart attack a few years before, and he lived with a chronic skin ailment caused by poor circulation.

Despite his health problems, my father was always upbeat. His utterances were punctuated with humor,

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*Tom Word is a Richmond lawyer.*



self-deprecating, gently teasing, or aimed to skewer someone pompous. His favorite poet was Ogden Nash, with whom he shared a bemused outlook on life. He gave everyone a nickname – mine was Beelzebub, Mary Ann's Oscar, and Harriet's McGillicuddy.

On my 12th birthday, my father retired our ancient draft mares Maud and Bird and bought a John Deere



*For a Christmas dinner 1950, Jack Word carved a turkey; Mary Word sat opposite. Other family members (from left) were Tommy, Harriet, Mary Ann, and Ethel Privett (Mary's mother).*

MT – on condition that the dealer teach me to operate it. The dealer owed us a favor. In 1934 my grandfather Harry had given him Seed & Fertilizer Company, a business he'd started in 1919. The business was not profitable but came debt free, for my grandfather remained saddled with its \$10,400 of debt, partly endorsed by my father. The donee brilliantly converted the failed business to a John Deere dealership, still prospering today.

As plans for the modest farmhouse progressed, excitement grew in the family. For its walls and chimneys, my father bought the limestone ruins of Fort McDonald, an 18th Century Indian fighting fort in the Ellett Valley. He hired a Spanish stone mason employed at Virginia Tech to cut and lay the stone on weekends. In 1952, we moved to the

farm. But for my father, the dream would be short lived – he died from injuries sustained in a car crash in February 1954. X-rays revealed a large tumor in a lung. Had he not died of his injuries, he'd have died soon and painfully of lung cancer. Like most men of his generation, he was a heavy smoker.

After my father's death, my mother and I continued to farm, just the way my father had. High school classmates helped me make hay. Mr. Harris, a retired dairy farm manager who'd bought a small place near us, served as my mentor as we traded our labor and machinery use. I pursued college as a day student at Virginia Tech, meanwhile continuing to farm. Only after my second year of law school in 1960, when I'd decided to practice in Richmond, did we sell the cattle and sheep and rent the farmland to a neighbor. I would take nothing for my farming experience, for it taught me more about life than college and law school. My mother lived on the farm with my sister Mary Ann to the end of her long life in 1999. Plans now are for Mary Ann's sons, Nigel and Jack, reared on the farm, to move with their families to the hill where the farmhouse stands. (Mary Ann became a lawyer in Montgomery County in 1984, 50 years after our father, also by reading law. She practices in Christiansburg where she recently retired as Commissioner of Accounts. She limits her practice now to serving as a court-appointed special advocate for children.)

I reflect often on my short years with my father. They were magic years filled with boyhood joy. I wonder about my father's life before I knew him. With clues from family lore and the records of Montgomery County's clerk's office, his story emerges.

\* \* \* \*

Among the rituals of my boyhood was visiting farmers on Thanksgiving morning. Thanksgiving was hog killing day in our county. By then it was cool enough to avoid flies and meat spoilage, but not so cold as to make





*Jack Word and his Model T.*

the work uncomfortable. Families were gathered for the holiday, creating a work force.

As we approached a farm, we'd see smoke rising from wood fires beneath steaming barrels of water. Into the barrels slain shoats would be dipped to loosen their hair. Then the shoats would be scraped and cut into hams, bacon sides, fat back, shoulders, roasts, spare ribs, tenderloins and jowls. The trimmings would become sausage or be rendered for lard. The organs and innards would go into washtubs for souse and chitterlings.

For each of the farmers, my father brought a gift – a small bag containing packages of sage, thyme, and red and black pepper. We'd deliver the spices and talk briefly with the farmer and his family, all busy at assigned tasks. Then we'd be off to the next farm.

The week after Thanksgiving, packages of fresh sausage would arrive at my father's office. Through the New Year holiday, we would enjoy fresh sausage, seasoned light or hot with my father's spices. How my father came to give spices to farmers at Thanksgiving provided the opening clue to his story.

My father was the fourth of five sons of Harry McClanahan Word and Mary Scott Charlton. They were born in 1865, Harry in Roanoke, Mary Scott in Wythe County. They were married in 1890, and my father was born in 1897. Harry was then a farmer and livestock dealer.

A 1915 family photo shows a smiling and petite Mary and six serious men, including my father, movie-star handsome at six feet tall and 170 pounds, with broad shoulders, an aquiline nose and piercing, slightly hooded eyes. That was the year he finished high school and embarked on his first business venture – a livery stable bought in partnership with his father and a family friend. Its business was ferrying passengers by buggy between



the drummer hotel on the town square and the train depot two miles away. Henry Ford's Model T promptly sunk it, and on May 1, 1917, its assets were auctioned from the courthouse steps for the benefit of creditors. But it is not as a failed business that the livery is remembered – rather as the venue of a tragedy.

In his spare time at the livery, my father trained a colt to do circus tricks – kneel, dance, and, as a finale, rear and balance on its hind legs. The signal for the finale was a wave of my father's handkerchief. An oaf who'd seen my father put the colt through its routine walked into the stable where the colt munched hay in its stall. He waived his handkerchief. The colt reared obediently and struck the crown of its head on a joist. It died instantly. My father never ceased to mourn the colt or to curse his stupidity for missing the danger his signal entailed.

Soon after, my father was drafted for service in World War I. He applied for officer candidate school, and was sent to Fort Zachary Taylor in Kentucky. He completed OCS at the top of his class just in time for the armistice. His army photo in profile shows a handsome young man with a slight smile, his long straight nose the dominant feature (he looks much like Eddie Hinshelwood, his great grandson who inherited his love of horses).

He returned from service to Christiansburg in 1919, to the opportunity of a lifetime. Colonel Sidney Sheltman, the county's most prominent citizen, invited him to be managing partner of a 777-acre farm at the headwaters of the Roanoke River. The farm economy was at its zenith – cattle were bringing \$9 a hundred weight, farmland \$69 an acre national average, \$200 an acre in the mid-west. The partners bought the Walters farm for \$30 an acre, \$1,000 down, the rest over five years. What a deal!

As a boy, my father had drovered stock for his father on horseback, aided by Border collies. In fact, he was named for one. His nickname Jack came from a favorite stock dog that died the week of his birth. He loved horses and dogs and was adept at training them and at managing livestock. I can picture him now, riding horseback across the 777 creek-side acres beneath Paris Mountain, feasting his eyes on fat grazing cattle.

Then came 1920. The bottom fell out of the farm economy. Cattle dropped to \$4.50 and would bottom at \$2.50 in 1932. In 1923, Sidney Sheltman died of influenza, the scourge brought from Europe by the doughboys. His estate – including the 777-acre farm – went into receivership. Only the \$1,000 down payment had been paid to Walters. Sheltman's estate was hopelessly insolvent, his many holdings virtually worthless. His widow and daughter were left penniless; his creditors got cents on the dollar – and that after waiting years. A hotel, sawmills, timber, town lots, and farmland went begging. (The cruel devaluation and illiquidity of land in the county is starkly illustrated by an 840-acre tract Sheltman owned on Pilot Mountain. It was sold at auction by his receiver in 1923. Harry Word bought it for 31¢ per acre, 10¢ an acre down and the rest over three years. He sold it to my father in 1932 for 50¢ an acre. My father sold it to a stranger in 1942 for \$1 an acre.)

Sheltman's financial wounds to the Word family were not limited to my father. Also in 1919, Sheltman bought Harry's 250-acre farm east of town for \$48 an acre – half on credit, of course. It was resold in the receivership to sons of an old cattle-trading partner of Harry's, also on credit. Harry was not fully paid until 1938.

In 1925, my father had moved to Birmingham, Alabama, to sell life insurance. There he met my mother, four years younger, petite and pretty, and teaching music in public school. She'd attended Birmingham Southern to earn a teaching certificate. She'd had her share of hard luck too – her father, a railroad station agent at Calera Junction, Alabama, had died of tuberculosis when she was 12, leaving her mother with four young children. The family had moved to Birmingham where, with her two sisters, my maternal grandmother operated a boarding house for schoolteachers. My father boarded in the neighborhood with a friend of my grandmother. Through this connection, he met my mother. They soon married and moved to Bradenton, Florida. My father's 1925 and 1926 income tax returns survive. He made almost \$3,000 in 1925 and almost \$4,000 in 1926, when he paid \$3.75 in federal tax. Then the Florida land bubble burst. (Even while selling life insurance in Florida, my father could not resist an agrarian play. He bought two railcars of yearling ewes and shipped them north to Harry to fatten on bluegrass. But alas, they were seized and destroyed in South Carolina by animal health officials in a hoof-and-mouth disease scare. They were not insured.)

By 1929, my parents' Florida dreams were in shambles. But the year of the stock market crash brought them some joy – their first child, Mary Ann, arrived February 5. She was born in Birmingham where my mother had gone to be with her mother while my father struggled back in Christiansburg to salvage his father's failing seed and fertilizer business. Harry had started it with the proceeds of his farm sale to Sidney Sheltman. While the 1920s roared for industrial America, the farming economy never recovered from its 1920 drop. Soon both





*Mabry's Copper Valley Store.*

economies were mired in the Great Depression. (My mother proposed naming their firstborn Anita Duval after an illustrious forebear in her family. My father countered, "How about Ineeda De Cash?" They compromised on Mary Anita, my mother's name.)

In 1927, Walters bought his 777-acre farm back from Sheltman's receiver for \$12,000. Walters released my father on the partnership debt – probably he judged my father a bloodless turnip. In a note to the court, my father endorsed Walters' buy-back offer, saying it was "far more than the property would bring at auction."

I imagine my parents' predicament at the start of the 30s – living in a rented apartment, no job, a new baby, saddled with Harry's crumbling business laden with debt. Then in 1931, their luck changed – Sidney Johnson, clerk of Montgomery's circuit court, died. The circuit court judge would appoint his successor for the term expiring in 1936. My father secured the appointment. How much pay? "Between \$700 and \$1,200 for the year 1931," according to the 1930 Virginia Acts of Assembly. The county board of supervisors set the exact amount, after the Byrd Machine's powerful compensation board set the range. A fourth of what my father had earned selling insurance in 1926, but a paycheck.

How had my father, then age 34, secured the post of clerk? Again Sidney Sheltman's ghost appears. The Colonel had been county Democratic Party chairman until relinquishing it to become town postmaster in 1919. Harry succeeded him as chairman. This could not have hurt.

My father found the clerk's office in shambles. After Roosevelt's election in 1932, he secured a New Deal grant to modernize. The deed and will books were re-indexed and rebound, and duplicates sent to the state archives in Richmond. Although he had only a high-school education, my father "read law" at night while serving as clerk. In 1933, on July 4, Harriet arrived. In 1934, my father passed the bar exam. This would be his anchor when luck again turned against him.

In 1936, my father stood for election as clerk on the ticket with fellow Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt, seeking his second term as president. While Roosevelt was hugely popular nationally, not so in Montgomery. His repeal of Prohibition had angered Baptists, bootleggers, and Republicans. My father and Roosevelt were defeated



by the county's voters, though it didn't hurt Roosevelt.

And so my father again found himself unemployed in the depths of the Depression. My mother was devastated. But my father had his law license and hung out his shingle. Like everyone else, he struggled through the remaining Depression years until the war finally brought a small measure of prosperity.

In 1934, my grandfather had given up on the seed and fertilizer business, literally giving it away. In 1941, my father assumed the last \$3,400 of its debt in buying Harry's small farm on the Riner Road. Later that year, Harry died; my grandmother Mary followed him in 1946. Their trip through the first half of the 20th Century had been a rough one, as it had been for most Americans.

My father's one bid for elective office brought defeat, but in the long run, the defeat proved a blessing. Had he won, he would not have practiced law, which he enjoyed almost as much as his farm.

During his 1936 campaign for clerk, my father had driven about the county visiting the farmers he'd known since childhood to ask for their votes. He sensed strong anti-Democrat sentiment. But he knew one remote and unlikely corner of the county where he felt he might garner a few votes.

The farm community of Copper Valley lay in the far southwest, on the Little River straddling the Floyd County line. Floyd had been a Republican stronghold since Civil War days, the birthplace of the moonshine industry and later of NASCAR, whose drivers and car builders made or hauled whiskey for day jobs. Floyd became a sanctuary for deserters from both armies during the Civil War; pacifist Dunkards harbored refugees in gray or blue. General Lee sent Colonel John S. Wise with a regiment to root out the deserters and punish their protectors, but the stubborn Dunkards and Floyd's steep wooded mountains and laurel-clad hollows defeated Wise's effort.

My father felt he could garner votes in the Montgomery County part of Copper Valley because it was the lair of the Mabry clan. Shortly after becoming clerk in 1931, my father had stopped at Fred Mabry's Copper Valley filling station for gas and a Coca-Cola.

"How are you, Fred," he'd asked his old high-school classmate.

"Not good, Jack. I can't feed my family."

That's when my father noticed Mabry had a woodworking shop in the back, with a few sticks of primitive furniture and a coffin in inventory.

"What if I could get you a contract to make pauper coffins for the county?" my father asked.

Fred Mabry's face lit up.

"That would be great, Jack."

As clerk, my father served as minute-taker for the board of supervisors and recalled they'd recently ordered coffins from an Ohio maker. It would be a logical thing in these tough times to keep the business local. At its next meeting, the board authorized the purchase of coffins from Mabry.

So that's why my father believed Fred Mabry would be a source of votes. He found Mabry hard at work on a coffin in the back of the store. Taking a Coke from the red icebox, my father asked, "How are you making it, Fred?"

"Very well, Jack. And I thank you for getting me the contract with the county."

"I'm glad it worked out, Fred. I hope you will ask your family and your Montgomery County neighbors to vote for me for clerk next month."

Mabry paused, then looked my father in the eye and said: "Jack, I've knowed you all my life and you've been a good friend. But I'd cut off my arm before I'd vote for a damn Democrat."

In shock, my father put a nickel for the Coke beside Mabry's cash register and walked out to his Model A. The trip back to town was a long one. My father lost his bid for clerk. But when he hung out his shingle to practice law, the farmers whose votes had defeated him for clerk were his potential clients.

Thanksgiving came soon after Election Day. That's when my father first delivered his sausage-spice gifts to let his farmer friends know he held no grudges for their votes against him. He kept up the gifts at Thanksgiving the rest of his life in appreciation for their patronage.





# Roanoke area family road builders ~ Part II

by Stan Lanford

Before we continue with Part II of our history of Roanoke families who were highway contractors in the mid- and early 20th century, a few corrections should be made to Part I in the 2006 Journal. Jack Kite, a friend who was raised on a farm in Orange County, sent information in a letter about some of the people written about in Part I :

"In the 1920s and '30s we lived in a rented house on Main Street in Orange during the winters, since the dirt road from near Montpelier or from Somerset to my grandfather's farm became impassible. The rest of the year we lived on the farm where my mother looked after my grandfather. My father was a clerk in Crafton & Sparks men's clothing store. Marcellus ("Cell") Crafton had a drinking problem and was forced to sell his interest in the store and my father bought him out. Mr. Tom Sparks retired in the early '40s and my father bought him out. The farm was sold in 1944 after my grandfather's death and my parents bought a house in Orange. I went into the Air Corps in 1943 and really never returned to Orange.

"Two of my first cousins were Marion and Beale Wilhoit. Their father owned the Dodge-Plymouth dealership in Charlottesville. In the mid '30s, Finley (Sam Finley Inc.) had a water-bound macadam job on Rt. 250 from Charlottesville south towards Richmond on which Bob Smith was the superintendent. The Wilhoits also rented rooms to 'Overnight Guests' as the sign said and Bob rented a room there. Marion and Bob ended up marrying. In 1947, Beale, Marion's younger brother, asked Bob for a job and I tagged along.

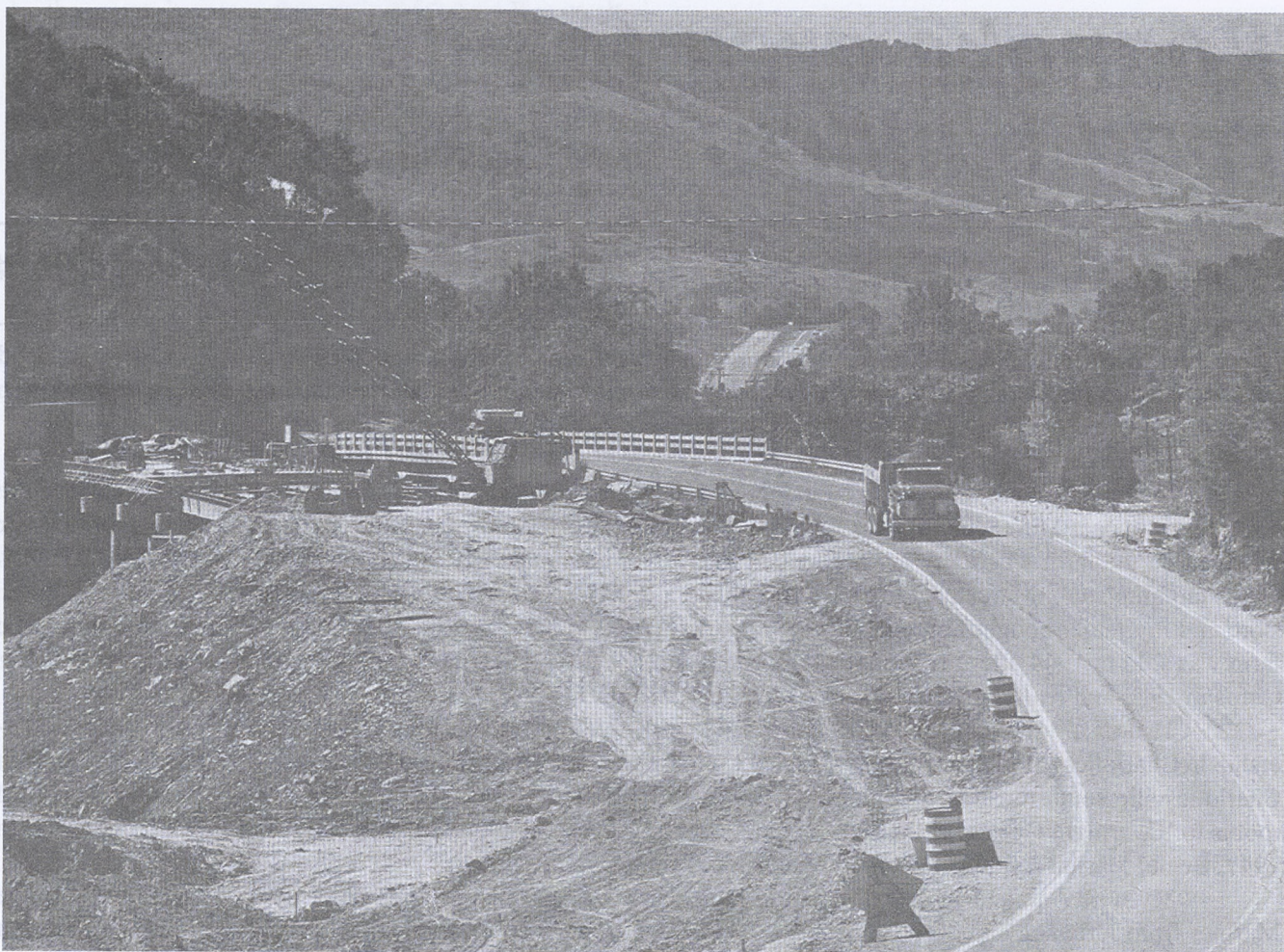
"My wife Ann and Jack Hall dated in high school at Jefferson and she confirms that Jack went into the Marines from Jefferson and never went to VMI. What his connection with Bob or Marion was, I have no idea, but Bob gave him a job as timekeeper the summer of '47 when he was at Tech. Jack knew someone at W & L who arranged for the three of us to rent rooms at the Kappa Sigma house. I found out years later that Wiley Jackson, Bob Smith, and I think Jimmy Turner, all had interests in John A. Hall Co. In the fall of 1949, Finley got two sand asphalt jobs in eastern North Carolina, on either side of the Pamlico River. I was superintendent on the north bank job and Oscar Lloyd on the south side. Jack was Oscar's timekeeper. After that I worked at various jobs in Virginia and North Carolina and didn't get back to Roanoke until the fall of 1957. Consequently I kind of lost track of Jack, but obviously he couldn't have gone into business for himself until the early 1950s."

Jack Kite, who worked for Sam Finley for over 40 years, offered several corrections in the Sam Finley Company and Adams Construction portions: Paul Rotenberry's name was not spelled correctly. The date that Hardaway Contracting Company sold Sam Finley Company to APAC was 1970 and the Roanoke office of Sam Finley closed in March 1973. Bob Smith worked on the Alcan Highway from Washington State to Alaska during his time in the Corps of Engineers as well as building an airfield in Recife, Brazil (not Argentina). Bob Smith died in 1975. Kite also offered corrections to the events in John A. Hall's life. Hall worked for Sam Finley Company for the first time in 1947 during summer while attending Virginia Tech for part of the year.

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*Stanard "Stan" Lanford, vice president of the Society, has written a second part in a series on Roanoke area family road builders. He retired as president of Lanford Brothers, a Roanoke County contractor, after 50 years of experience. The first installment of this story appeared in the 2006 issue of the Journal.*





*Lanford Brothers worked with Sam Finley and Oman Construction on a parallel bridge over the railroad tracks in the 460 corridor just west of Bluefield. (Virginia Road Builder magazine, Vol. XXIII, No. 18, Sept. 25, 1967)*

The second part of our history describes many of the early excavating, bridge, and a few specialty contractors who have operated from the Roanoke region over the years. One of the older firms was Albert (pronounced All-bert) Brothers Company. The three Albert brothers, raised on a farm near Shawsville, were looking for a better way to make a living. They were living adjacent to the Vaughan family. J.L. Vaughan had done work as a contractor in the coalfields of Virginia, starting around 1900.

Charlie Albert was born in 1877 and in 1900 was working on his father's farm as a laborer. "Mr. Charlie" and his two brothers, Lewis and Archie, founded Albert Brothers Company after 1920, when J.L. Vaughan had gotten in financial difficulty. In his 1918 World War I draft registration, Charles Allen Albert was living on a farm in Shawsville, and he was shown as a farmer and a construction manager for Vaughan Construction Company. Brother Archer was working in Dary, West Virginia as a foreman for Vaughan Construction Company in 1918. Lewis was living in Roanoke in 1920 and was employed by the railroad as a yard clerk.

Their new company was awarded a Virginia Department of Highways project in 1921 to build 12 miles of road from Jackson's Ferry to Hillsville in Wythe and Carroll counties. I was told that Archer Albert was not involved in the construction projects. Brother Lewis died in 1940 and ended his participation in the company. Early on, Charlie Albert hired Bill Beasley to be his shovel operator, and he was a stockholder in the company by virtue of having some of his wages paid in company stock when the company did not have enough cash to cover its payroll.

Albert Brothers built the first of a number of projects in Virginia and North Carolina. In the late 1920s,



Albert had a highway project in Avery County, North Carolina. Apparently there were some very good men near this job site who had the potential to be excellent construction workers. Two that he hired on this job were Bob Buchanan and Dave Abernathy, and both of these men became key employees.

The survey party chief for the North Carolina job was Link (Lincoln) Missimer, who joined the Albert Brothers firm and became a shareholder and ultimately the next president after Charlie Albert passed away. Albert Brothers had moved from Shawsville to Salem by 1930. Albert was living in Salem on High Street in a house he owned, valued at \$18,000 when the federal census was taken on April 3-4, 1930. He listed his occupation as railroad contractor. Link Missimer was living in Floyd County, Ky., in 1930 where he was working as superintendent on road construction. In the 1939 Roanoke Directory, Chas. A. Albert is listed as a road contractor, and president of Albert Brothers Company, Bank of Salem and Sherwood Burial Park.

In the 1930s, Albert Brothers built over 20 miles of road bed on the Skyline Drive in Virginia and later several projects for the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina and Virginia. Albert Brothers completed the building of the last stretch of the Blue Ridge Parkway from south of the Peaks of Otter to U.S. 460 near Montvale about 1950.

In the 1940s and '50s, they constructed many miles of primary routes along U.S. 11 and 460. This included a project on Route 11 from Dublin to Pulaski. On this job there was a large amount of seeding to be done under the contract and Link Missimer made a deal with Albert Brothers superintendent Clyde Sisson to do the seeding work as a subcontractor. Prior to this project, seeding was generally not a part of Department of Highways contracts.

After Link Missimer passed away in 1974, his son, Charles, took over the management of the company. The firm went bankrupt on a contract to build the U.S. 220 bypass around Martinsville in 1975. The bid price was too low for the firm to be able to complete this job. The bonding company took all the assets of the corporation to help offset their losses in paying another contractor for completing this project.

Philip L. Baird of Roanoke apparently bid Department of Highways projects as an individual from 1927 to 1947 when he completed his last project. I could not find any other information on this firm.

Jim Bennett founded Bennett Construction Co. Inc. I think he worked for McDowall and Wood before starting his own business. Bennett was awarded his first VDOT project in 1952 to construct a bridge over the Southern Railway. His last project awarded by VDOT was in 1966. Jim also built a lot of concrete box culverts as a subcontractor on interstate and primary road projects. Jim sold his company to Wiley N. Jackson Company around 1972.

E.F. (Fred) Blankenship was born in 1901 in Virginia and in the 1930 census was working as a bridge construction foreman in Caswell County, N.C. He may have worked with T.A. Loving Company from North Carolina before coming back to Salem. E.F. Blankenship Company was awarded its first project by VDOT in September 1948. This company built many bridges for the next 37 years.

When Fred Blankenship Sr. passed away in 1981, control of his company went to his son Fred Jr. and as happened frequently, the second generation could not achieve a successful transfer of ownership. Fred Blankenship Jr. was the low bidder to rebuild the I-81 and Rt. 311 intersection for the Salem exit in 1983. The work was bid at such a low price that the contractor could not complete the project. In June of 1986, the bonding company took the assets of the defaulting company to help pay the extra cost of completing the project.

Fred Blankenship Sr. had a nephew, Les Blankenship, who had worked with the E.F. Blankenship Company and decided by 1979 to set up his own outfit, B & F Company located in Rocky Mount. Les maintained a small bridge crew and worked on VDOT projects from 1979 to 1992 when his company disappeared from the list of pre-qualified bidders.

Claude McAlister was born in 1905 and raised on a farm in Ringgold, Catoosa County, Ga. In the 1930 census Claude McAlister (frequently called "Mr. Mac") was boarding in a household in Davidson County, Tenn., and his occupation was foreman on highway construction. At one time in his life Mr. Mac worked for Chandler Brothers, one of the early railroad and highway contracting companies located in Virginia. He met his wife near Nashville and they had one daughter, Betty, who married Bill Branch from west Tennessee after they met at a church function in 1950. These family connections led to the founding of one of the largest construction companies in Virginia.

Mr. Mac formed a partnership with Ralph E. Mills of Frankfort, Ky., and Salem to strip mine for coal in



Kentucky. By 1952, the coal business was not doing well and they decided to bid on a VDOT project on Rt. 460 near Raven in Tazewell County. The firm of Mills and McAlister, the low bidder, completed this project in 1953 and then bid a project on the West Virginia Turnpike just north of the Bluestone River Gorge. After the successful completion of the turnpike project Mills and McAlister did not have any highway work for several years. Mills and McAlister hired a new Georgia Tech civil engineering graduate from Salem named William Robertson as project engineer on this job. During this time when few contracts were available to bid, Mr. Mac had determined to try to set up his own company and had moved to Roanoke. He was awarded several small private jobs and in the fall of 1955 he asked his son-in-law, Bill Branch, a Georgia Tech engineering graduate, to leave his job in Georgia working in a cable manufacturing plant and move to Roanoke to help him expand his new business. As soon as they got a job large enough to need the equipment that Mr. Mac owned jointly with Mills, they approached Mills about renting the equipment. Instead of a rental deal, Mills offered a "buy or sell" deal.

In this instance, Mills placed a value on the equipment and set a low price (to buy or sell) for the equipment. If his partner would not want to risk his cash, Mills could buy it at the price he had set. Mr. Mac had saved his money and had money in the bank and accepted the low price for the equipment and bought it from Mills. Mills told Mr. Mac and Bill Branch that they had just made the best deal of their lives. He then offered to finance the purchase price over several years allowing the new company to conserve cash to use for working capital.

McAlister Construction built several jobs for private parties and graded some school sites. By 1957, it was awarded its first VDOT project in southwest Virginia. VDOT records show that McAlister Construction was awarded 12 projects between 1957 and 1965. One of these projects was in Washington County on the Kings Mill Pike. Lanford and Slater, later to become Lanford Brothers Company, got its first bridge building experience in 1957 when it sub-contracted the small bridges and box culverts on this project.

Early on, the partners realized that a corporation would be a better form for the construction business than a partnership and set up a new corporation in Roanoke known as Branch and Associates. Branch and Associates' first VDOT project was awarded in 1965. Bill Branch purchased Mr. Mac's interest in Branch and Associates and McAlister Construction Company at this time. Mr. Mac subsequently had a stroke and was never in good health again for the rest of his life. He passed away in 1972.

Branch and Associates continued to bid on highway projects even as it expanded its construction activity into constructing buildings and acquired a local mechanical contractor. By 1988 Branch and Associates had split to form Branch Highways for the purpose of highway construction and Branch and Associates for building construction. Both divisions are still active in the business of constructing roads and buildings. Branch Highways acquired the E.V. Williams Company in Norfolk in 1996. This firm is a major road building company in eastern Virginia. Former Roanoker Tom Partridge is the current president of E.V. Williams Company.

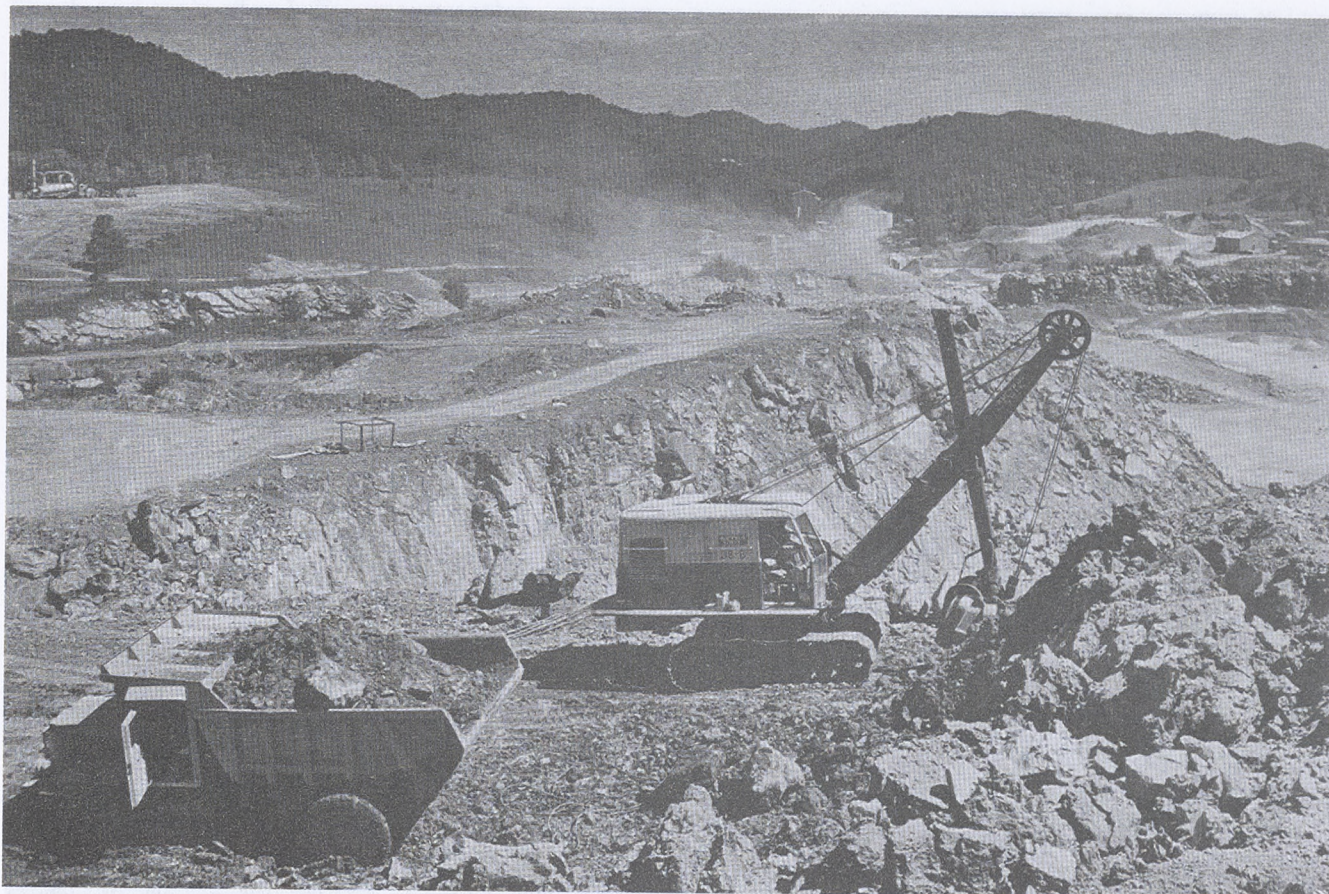
Branch Highways was one of the first companies in Roanoke to inaugurate a 100 percent Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) that gives shares of the company's stock to the employees as part of their retirement plan. ESOPs allow the owners of company stock to have a market to sell their stock. A portion of the capital of the company is placed in an ESOP Trust where it can be used to purchase the original owners' shares and/or newly issued stock. Each employee who has worked for a certain period of time (usually one year) is allocated a block of company stock based on a formula in the ESOP plan. The formula usually considers the annual earnings of each individual stockholder as a percentage of the sum of all the stockholders' earnings as a means to allocate to each stockholder his or her portion of that year's contribution to the ESOP Trust.

Bill Branch was able to successfully change the management in his company from a family business to an employee-owned business. He also was able to do real estate deals in the Roanoke Valley by buying "hills and holes," hauling dirt from the hills to level the holes. Bill's ability to get his managers to learn all they could about each job they were bidding and then paying attention to the daily profit or loss on each job undertaken has led to many profitable projects for his firms.

Bill's cousin, Ralph Shivers, who had a background in accounting, followed Bill as president of Branch and Associates by 1988. Shivers was also a leader in the Virginia Road and Transportation Builders Association (VRTBA), moving through the chairs to become president in 1990. When Shivers retired in 2002, Jim Harrison, a longtime Branch employee and head of the building corporation (Branch and Associates), took over as president of both companies. In 2006, Will Karbach was named president of Branch Highways Inc.

Bill has a son, Mike Branch, who also worked at Branch Highways. Mike was an estimator and vice pres-





*Sam Finley erected an asphalt plant at W.W. Boxley Co.'s Pounding Mill quarry near Bluefield. (Virginia Road Builder magazine, Volume XXIII, No. 18, Sept. 25, 1967)*

ident for business development before he left the company in 2004 to work with his dad in the real estate business. Mike also was elected president of the VRTBA in 1999 and served subsequently on the Joint Highway Cooperative Committee.

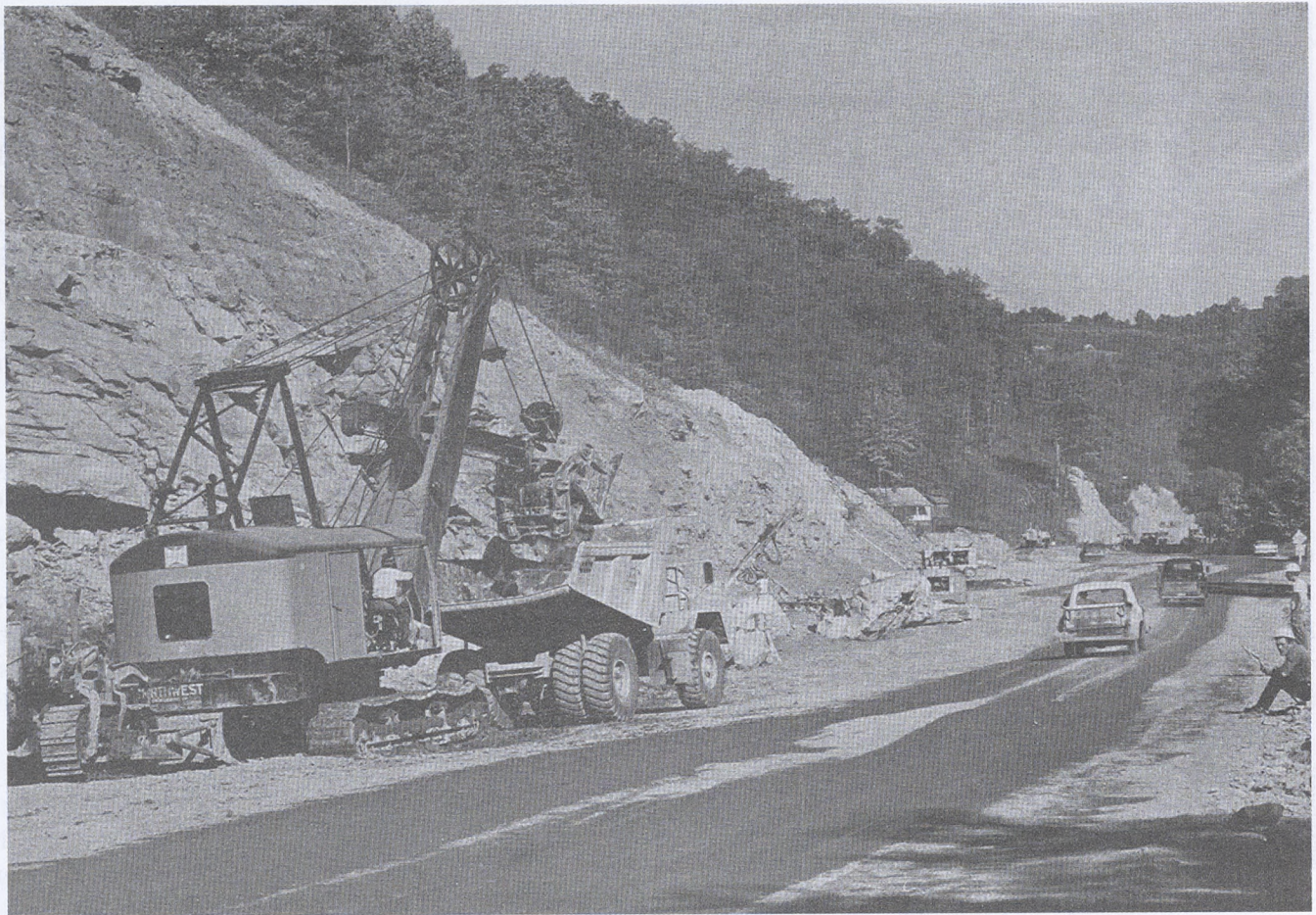
Bill Branch has been active in several organizations such as Young Life, Habitat for Humanity and the Rescue Mission that offer help and hope to the homeless. Other contributions not noticed very often are his real estate deals that have helped bring better jobs and economic development to our area. A prime example is the property where the ITT Night Vision factory is located on Plantation Road in Roanoke County. Branch provided this property to ITT, as well as an additional warehouse space.

One of the oldest companies in the Roanoke valley is the firm of W.W. Boxley and Company. This firm's history as a railroad contractor dates back to the early 1890s and continued for over 30 years when it became proficient at furnishing crushed stone for railroad ballast, building roads and use in asphalt paving and Portland cement concrete. VDOT's records show that Boxley was active in constructing roads from 1922 to 1925.

Another family connection was that Harold G. Robertson and his brother, Frank D. Robertson, both worked for Boxley Brothers, located in Salem in 1910. These Boxleys were cousins of W.W. Boxley and his brother and their children in Roanoke. When Harold Robertson filled out his draft card information on June 1, 1917, he gave his occupation as timekeeper and store clerk for Boxley Brothers and he was living and working at Whitesville, W.Va., on a railroad construction project. Harold Robertson was ultimately to become a lawyer (he did not enjoy construction work) and finally president of the Liberty Trust Bank and then president of the newly formed Colonial-American National Bank in Roanoke. Harold's brother, Frank Robertson, left Boxley Brothers about the end of World War I and was involved in the founding of several construction companies.

An interesting note found in the minutes of the November 1921 meeting of Virginia's Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) authorized W.W. Boxley of Roanoke to "advance \$30,000 for construction work on





*Wiley N. Jackson Co. works on a stretch of U.S. 460 in Buchanan County. (Virginia Road Builder magazine, Vol. XXIII, No. 18, Sept. 25, 1967)*

the Lynchburg Rustburg Road.” In the 1920s, many businessmen and local governments were advancing funds to VDOT in an attempt to get roads constructed in their area of the state. As late as 1940, Boxley was listed in the Roanoke Business Directory as a railroad contractor. Today, Boxley continues as a major supplier of building construction materials in Virginia, using the name of Boxley Materials Company. The current president is fourth generation Abney Boxley III.

Draper and Company is another family road building firm from Roanoke that was active in the 1920s. Shirley Draper, founder of the S.R. Draper Paving Company still in business today, told Jack Lanford that his dad was in business building streets around 1925. The 1935 and 1940 Business Directories show Shirley R., W. Linwood, Walter W., and William B. Draper as general contractors. Draper Construction Company is in the directory from 1950 to 1970 under the headings of general, excavating, or road contractor. I cannot find any records of Draper Construction ever receiving any VDOT projects.

Louis Hartman and Howard Selander started H & S Construction Company in Roanoke in the early 1960s. The firm made its first successful bid with VDOT in March 1963 on an urban job in Hopewell. About this same time Adams Construction Company was rebuilding Peters Creek Road near Orange Avenue and H & S was doing the curb and gutter work as a sub-contractor to Adams. H & S was trying out a new machine to extrude concrete curb and gutter near Melrose Avenue and also placing curb and gutter by handsetting the forms and placing the concrete. On that day, Louis Hartman said the machine was not doing well and he thought he would stick with the handset forming method. Eventually he did buy a machine to do this type of work.

This company has done the majority of sidewalk and curb and gutter work for the City of Roanoke for over 40 years. They have specialized in incidental concrete work over the years and have been very successful. They continue to bid small bridges, box culverts and miscellaneous items as well as curb and gutter and sidewalks. Bill



Gee Jr. and his brother Jeff now operate the company.

M. (Maxwell) S. Hudgins was born in Winchester, Ky., in 1881. By 1900 his family had moved to Atlanta and he had attended Georgia Tech and was working for the railroad as a civil engineer. In 1918, he was living in Pulaski and working as an engineer and construction superintendent for Harrison Engineering and Construction Company on a job in McDowell County, W.Va. After serving as the town engineer for Pulaski, he decided that he wanted to start his own construction business.

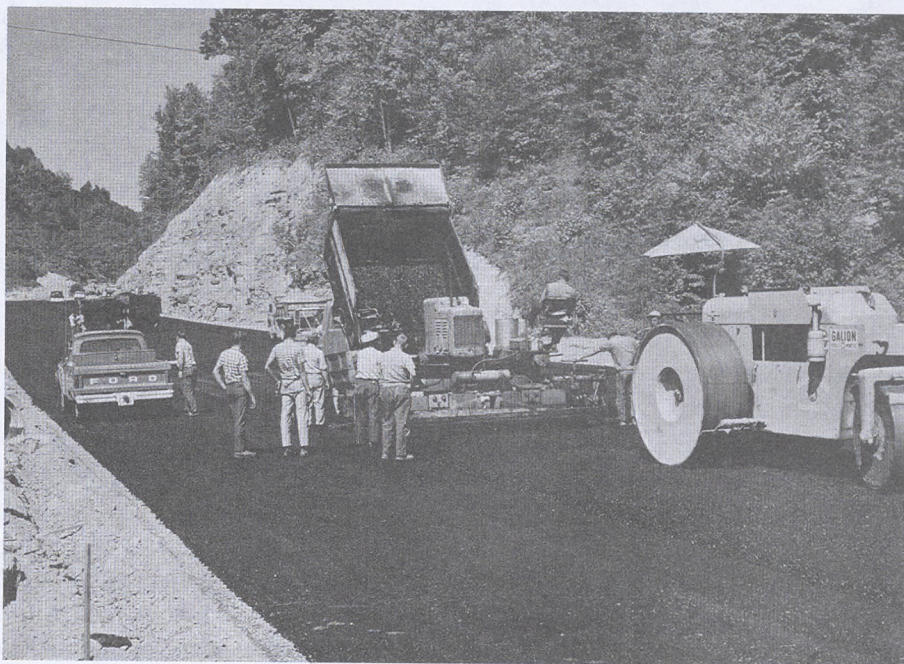
In the earliest record I can find, Hudgins received a contract with VDOT in May 1925. The contract value was \$26,180 and the description of the work was not furnished. In 1926 Hudgins was awarded a contract in Floyd County to build bridges over West Fork, Little River and Dodd's Creek. His last VDOT project was the entrance road to the Viscose Plant in Pulaski, bid in 1945. The company operated under the name of M.S. Hudgins and Company, Roanoke, until his death in 1960. According to Chick Pace, grandson of M.S. Hudgins, the company was not treated fairly by VDOT in the late '30s so it finally decided not to bid any more VDOT projects.

Max Hudgins had a son, Joe, and a daughter, Mary. She married Claude Pace Jr. and they were the parents of E.C. "Chick" Pace III. Joe Hudgins and Claude Pace Jr. bought the company from Max Hudgins in 1956 after working with Hudgins for a number of years. The company's name was changed to Hudgins and Pace in 1960 and this firm was primarily involved in laying water and sewer lines and other construction. In 1976, Chick Pace bought the company from his father and uncle and changed the name to E.C. Pace and Company. Chick is selling the company to his son, Mark, who is the current president. This firm is still active in the Roanoke Valley, across Virginia and North Carolina, installing drainage, water and sewer lines. This is one of the few businesses in the Roanoke Valley that has successfully managed to stay in operation through the fourth generation.

In 1932, a banker in Washington County asked Wiley N. Jackson to take over and complete a road construction project that one of the bank's customers was not able to complete. Jackson was a lumber dealer living in Meadowview, as shown in the 1930 U.S. census. By 1932, times were hard in the Great Depression and he was selling watermelons for a nickel each. Jackson thought road construction was better than selling lumber, watermelons or working on a farm as his father had done. From this humble beginning, the Wiley N. Jackson Company was founded and grew to be one of the largest construction companies in Virginia.

VDOT records show that W.N. Jackson, Meadowview, was awarded his first contract in January 1935. By 1936, the company was working on a VDOT project in Bristol, and had relocated to Roanoke at the urging of another contractor, Jack Cunningham, co-founder of Virginia Asphalt Paving Company. By 1946, the company had changed its name to Wiley N. Jackson Company and was building much larger projects such as the Orange Avenue (U.S. Route 460) job through the city of Roanoke.

In 1938, a young Pennsylvania man came to Virginia Tech to attend college. He met Jackson's daughter, Betty, while at Tech and they were married after he graduated. The young man was Dave Burrows, whose family



*Adams Construction is shown paving a section of U.S. 460 leading to Short Gap. (Virginia Road Builder magazine, Vol. XXIII, No. 18, Sept. 25, 1967)*



operated a hardware store in Pennsylvania. Dave went to work for Jackson in 1946 after serving four years in the Army. Within a few years, Dave was the president of the company. Because of the additional work the company was doing, Dave soon needed another engineer to help manage some of their projects. Curtis Lucado, from Roanoke, a 1955 VMI civil engineering graduate, was hired and ultimately earned the job of president of the Jackson Company.

In 1954, Jackson wanted to expand his work territory and went to Florida to find new work and to be able to bring in more income in the wintertime. His first low bid was to build a sewer interceptor in Miami. This job was successful, so they bid on some new bridgework near Hollywood, on the Florida Turnpike. When he had completed this work in Florida and was ready to return to Roanoke, his job superintendent said he liked Florida and wanted to stay and work year-round. Jackson decided the company should stay in Florida. With the beginning of the new interstate construction in the late 1950s, the Jackson Company was expanding rapidly across Virginia and in Florida.

In 1969, the Jackson Company joined forces with Moore Brothers Company of Verona, Augusta County, to jointly bid over \$20.4 million to build the first "mixing bowl project" on Interstate 95 in Fairfax County near the Pentagon. At the time it was the largest single highway contract ever awarded in Virginia. This project was completed on time and profitably.

When the adjoining project was advertised for bids, Jackson and Moore added a paving company, Warren Brothers (later known as APAC-VA, and now a part of Old Castle Inc.) and an excavating firm known as Talbott-Marks Company to help construct this huge job. This project carried I-95 (now I-395) on to the 14th Street Bridge over the Potomac River into Washington. The second contract was valued at over \$33 million and again was the largest contract ever let in Virginia. Several large projects, including roadwork, subways, and very large bridges were completed successfully. This group branched into building stations for the Washington Metro system and after losing money in a couple of jobs, the joint venture was disbanded.

Dave's sons, Dave Jr., Jack Burrows, and son-in-law, Bob Burleson, also became part of the management team in the '60s. The latter two men were Virginia Tech graduates and Dave Jr. received his degree at the University of Florida. Each brought management skills the company needed to grow and expand. Dave Jr. was in charge of the Florida work until he died in a tragic accident. Jack went to Memphis, Tenn., to manage a large bridge project in 1977. Jack recalls that Curtis Lucado was the mentor for many of the Jackson Company's managers. Burleson was overseeing the office administration and setting up the company's cost control system on computers. In 1982, the company acquired an asphalt business in Florida under Burleson's leadership as the company was expanding its Florida operations.

Even as the company continued to build many bridges and road projects throughout the southeastern United States, Jackson had expanded into dam construction with projects constructing a gated spillway for the John W. Flanagan Reservoir near Haysi in Dickenson County. They worked with Robertson-Fowler Company to construct the large earth and rock-fill dam for Lake Moomaw near Covington. Another large dam project was successfully completed by a joint venture between Jackson and the J.F. Allen Company of Clarksburg, W.Va.. This project was the Stonewall Jackson Dam, located near Roanoke, W.Va.

The Jackson Company decided to close down its operation in 1987. Some of the company stockholders and managers became dissatisfied with the risk/reward ratio in the construction business. A final factor came when the firm could not purchase adequate liability insurance at a reasonable cost for the work it was doing. At this time the casualty insurance companies had an aversion to writing policies for companies that constructed large bridges. Wiley N. Jackson Company was working on such structures in Florida as the Sunshine Parkway Bridge in Tampa.

Not finding an adequate liability insurance plan to protect the company, the owners decided to close it down and sell the assets. Most of their equipment was sold at auctions in Florida and Virginia. English Construction Company hired some of the Jackson employees who lived in Virginia. Curtis Lucado went on to be the executive vice president of the Williams Company of Baltimore, Md., for several years before he retired.

Wiley Jackson was a very generous man. He and his family have donated much to the Roanoke Valley. The Jackson Company built Wiley Drive along the Roanoke River in the 1960s for the City of Roanoke at little or no cost to the city. Jackson supported Ferrum College and other worthy causes in addition to helping several other road contractors get started. Among these were Jim Bennett, Paul Slusher, Jack Hall and Leonard Hill. Jackson also supported the industry by holding the position of president of the Virginia Road Builders Association in 1951. He also





*Robertson, Fowler and Co.'s big scrapers are working on U.S. 460 at the top of Brush Mountain north-west of Blacksburg. (Virginia Road Builder magazine, Volume XXIII, No. 11, June 12, 1967)*

encouraged Dave Burrows to be active in the industry associations.

Dave Burrows is an acknowledged leader of the transportation construction industry, serving as president of the Virginia Road Builders Association in 1962, and in 1981 Dave became the first Virginia-based contractor ever to be the chairman of the American Road and Transportation Builders Association. Dave and his family funded the David H. Burrows Professor of Construction Engineering and Management at Virginia Tech and have supported many other Virginia Tech and other worthwhile causes in the Roanoke area.

Clarence Wood and William D. McDowall started the firm of McDowall and Wood in 1937. McDowall married Wood's sister, Ruth, in 1924. Wood was living in Roanoke and his occupation in the 1930 census was shown as an engineer for the railroad. In the 1920 census, Wood was living in Roanoke and listed as a foreman on concrete work. McDowall was working as a buyer for a wholesale grocer and living at Keystone, W.Va., in 1930 and had some cash to invest. With McDowall acting as his financial partner, Wood started bidding construction projects, building small concrete structures, light grading and placing pipe. McDowall and Wood bid jointly with M.S. Hudgins on a project to construct a bridge over the N & W in south Norfolk in July 1937. That was the first record of McDowall and Wood being a prime contractor for VDOT.

The firm had survived the shortage of work during World War II by doing maintenance jobs for Roanoke, Salem, and the railroad. After World War II, the firm was low bidder on several bridge projects in Virginia. By the



early 1950s, William McDowall's son, Doug, was working with Clarence Wood. The company was successful in getting quite a few bridge contracts through the 1950s until the interstate construction program began.

Wayne Hall came to work with McDowall and Wood in 1961 after working for about four years with VDOT as an inspector. His first job with VDOT was a steep mountain road-grading project in Patrick County, where Lanford & Slater was the prime contractor. Wayne stayed with McDowall and Wood for almost 30 years. He was a vice president and general superintendent when McDowall and Wood closed down. Wayne worked the rest of his career helping Branch Highways set up a bridge division.

The firm's ownership moved to the second generation when Doug McDowall and his mother purchased stock owned by Clarence Wood in 1963. McDowall and Wood built over 60 projects in Virginia from 1937 to about 1990. They were constructing the bridges on the U.S. 29 bypass of Amherst in 1969 when Hurricane Camille dumped over 30 inches of rain on the area. Their bridge project over a small stream was completely underwater from the flooding that occurred.

Bill McDowall, Doug's son, joined the company around 1974 and by 1981 was listed as an engineer for the company. Bill remembers that one of the hardest jobs they had was building a series of bridges on I-95 in Prince William County during the early 1960s. This was the first large project for the company. Another challenge was the Hale's Ford Bridge over Smith Mountain Lake. This bridge had piers about 90 feet tall. Tall bridges and deep water were problems that McDowall and Wood was not afraid to tackle.

McDowall and Wood built two bridges over Claytor Lake. One was on a secondary road leading to Boy Scout Camp Powatan and the other was rebuilding the I-81 bridge over the New River and Claytor Lake in 1985-86. These difficult jobs were in deep water and they used barges, a specialty for McDowall and Wood, to access part of the work. The firm purchased the new structural steel for the I-81 project from Roanoke Iron and Bridge Works Inc (RIBW). RIBW was having some financial problems, but managed to fabricate and deliver the steel. Doug McDowall told me he was concerned that RIBW had not paid the steel company that supplied the steel to the fabricator and sought legal assistance from the courts to avoid the liability for the cost of the steel. The money to pay for the steel was put in an escrow account by McDowall and Wood.

A federal law (Miller Act) places liability for any material furnished for a highway construction project on the prime contractor who is on the project. Also, the contractor is required to furnish a payment and performance bond for the value of the contract. If a steel manufacturer furnishes the steel to a fabricator such as Roanoke Iron and Bridge Works and is not paid for the steel by RIBW, the contractor will have to pay the steel manufacturer. When RIBW had not paid Bethlehem Steel for the raw material, Bethlehem came to McDowall and Wood seeking payment. Fortunately, the escrow account and the interest it had earned was enough to pay most of the final bill for the steel.

McDowall and Wood's last job was in Suffolk. Wayne Hall was tired of traveling and told Doug this was his last job that he would try to manage so far from Roanoke. As the job progressed, Doug decided to sell the business, as his health was not good. They sold the business to English Construction Company of Altavista in 1990. Doug McDowall passed away in 2004.

Doug was a respected leader in the highway construction industry. He served a term as president of the Virginia Road and Transportation Builders Association in 1970. He was an original organizer and long-time chair of the Joint Highway Cooperative Committee, consisting of ad-hoc members for about five years and in the mid-1960s permanent members were appointed by the VRTBA Board and the top management at VDOT. This committee attempted to resolve issues regarding specification changes and construction-related problems for the industry. Doug followed Roanoke's Bill Adams and a contractor from Norfolk as chair of this group, and held the job for more than 10 years. Doug was called on to fill another term as president of the VRTBA in 1984 when the incoming officer was not able to perform due to a serious illness.

In 1971, a young native of Roanoke and 1970 Virginia Tech graduate came to work for McDowall and Wood. He was Barry Bryant and he wanted to build things. His father, Wallace "Dick" Bryant, had a small grading outfit in Roanoke and Barry was a truck driver before he was 16 years old. After working for over 12 years as an engineer and superintendent with Doug McDowall, Barry came home one day and announced that he "was doing all the work, and the company was making all the money." This idea has occurred to many young construction workers and so Barry started Bryant Contracting Inc. located in Salem. McDowall and Wood rented Barry the equipment for the first couple of jobs he had for his new company. Bryant Contracting got its first contracts build-



ing bridges.

After a couple of years working out of Salem on jobs located far from his office, Barry had decided to move his company to an area where he could live close to the jobs he was building. He chose Toano, a small town just west of Williamsburg, because it would allow him to seek work in the Richmond and Tidewater areas. His first job with VDOT was in 1984. As Bryant Contracting has grown, it has taken on a wide variety of large and small jobs, working for VDOT, federal and local governments and private entities.

Following the example of Doug McDowall, Barry joined the VRTBA by 1987. Barry was interested in supporting his chosen industry and by 1995 had been elected as a director of the VRTBA and moved to the president's chair in 2000.

Another young engineer who got some early experience with McDowall and Wood was Wade Douthat. Wade received his engineering degree from VMI in 1957 and went on to MIT for his master's degree in engineering. He then served three years in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. After working with McDowall and Wood for a short time he started his own firm, Alleghany Construction Company, in 1961. Alleghany does road and bridge construction for VDOT, but also diversified into other areas of work such as construction in the coal fields of southwest Virginia and construction of concrete dams, industrial site work, landfills and historic renovations. In 2006, Alleghany was presented the Ecological Excellence Award for the Robinson River Restoration Project. Wade Douthat is currently the chairman of the board and his two sons, Andy and John, are in place to continue the company's operations in the future.

Roanoke Iron and Bridge Works was an important structural steel supplier that was operating in Roanoke as early as 1923 when it was awarded a project by VDOT. At this time it was a common practice to fabricate and erect the bridge by the same company. RIBW had a large fabricating shop along the Roanoke River just east of the Walnut Avenue Bridge. By 1970, they had opened a much larger facility at Troutville and seemed to be moving into the future very well. As the interstate highways were completed many steel fabricating companies fell on hard times and went out of business by bankruptcy or merger. RIBW was forced into bankruptcy in 1986. The bankruptcy court sold the fabricating plant in Troutville and the jail business was purchased and continued by the John Hancock Company of Salem.

Another bridge company was founded in Roanoke in 1895 as the Virginia Bridge and Iron Company (VBI). The following information is from a document "Historic American Engineering Report, Clarkton Bridge (Bridge no. 6902)," prepared by Louis Berger and Associates Inc.: "By 1904, VBI was the largest steel fabricating company in the south, with a capacity of 12,000 tons annually. The company's product line consisted of bridges, turntables, warehouse factory building, and general structural iron and steel work. The company employed 175 men in the shops and 150 men in the erecting department. The plant covered 10.5 acres and included a bridge shop 300 feet by 80 feet, a large girder shop, and several small buildings. The principals of VBI at the time: W.E. Robertson, President; C.E. Michael, Secretary; T.T. Fishburn, Treasurer; and C.E. Hamlin, Contracting Engineer."

VBI continued to grow and opened new facilities in many southern states. In 1934, VBI was acquired by the Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company, the largest producer of steel in the south. In 1952, VBI merged into the American Bridge Company, a subsidiary of US Steel and the largest bridge company in the United States at that time. The American Bridge office and shop in Roanoke, until it closed in 1965, was located on the property now serving as the Roanoke Valley's trash transfer station, just off Orange Avenue. VDOT's records indicate that by 1932 VBI had constructed 65 truss bridges in the state of Virginia.

Pace Construction Company of Roanoke was awarded its first contract by VDOT in 1921 and the last one in 1931. Gordon Pace was listed as a general contractor in the Roanoke City directory for many years. Gordon Pace was an uncle to Chick Pace but there was no connection to their businesses.

Rockydale Quarries has been a supplier of agricultural lime and crushed aggregates for construction since the 1920s. I did not find that Rockydale ever had a construction contract with VDOT. I did find an interesting item in the minutes of the CTB meeting of September 1928: "Senator Holman Willis appeared before the Commission in regard to sale of the Rockydale Stone Quarry. He made three propositions to the State: first, that the State pay \$10,000 cash and \$8,000 per year for eight years, for all the equipment, machinery, except the land would go back to the company after the State had finished with the quarry; second, that if the Commission pays cash on the above proposition that the \$64,000 be discounted; and third, the flat cash price for everything, land included, would be \$100,000. He submitted a statement showing his value of equipment on hand and the value of the real estate,





*S. F. Lanford Sr., worked on a channel change excavation project in West Virginia in 1928.*

amounting to a total of \$117,150.10." The Commission voted not to accept any of these offers. Gordon Willis Sr. told me that the business was in poor condition at that time.

Today, Rockydale is a major supplier of lime and aggregates from quarries at three locations in the western part of Virginia. The Willis family is recognized as leaders in many philanthropic efforts in the Roanoke Valley, especially those having to do with education. Gordon Willis Sr. served on the state Board for Community Colleges.

There was another connection between the Willis family, who founded and continue to operate Rockydale Quarries, and the Robertson family mentioned earlier. Frank P. Robertson was the father of former U.S. Senator A. Willis, Frank D., Harold G. and Churchill J. Robertson and was married to Josephine Willis from the family of Larkin Willis of Culpeper and Orange counties. Larkin had 24 children and they have a multitude of cousins in Virginia. Rockydale's Gordon Willis had a cousin also named Gordon Willis who owned and operated Culpeper Stone Company in Culpeper for many years. Both men were well known and respected in the road building industry.

The company now called Lanford Brothers had its beginnings from a partnership between Enrico Vecellio and Lit Coleman that was formed in 1923 to build roads in West Virginia. The name of that organization was Gilbert Construction Company. Gilbert survived the Great Depression and with the beginning of World War II and high corporate income taxes, the corporation was dissolved into a series of partnerships.

One of the partnerships was named R.B. Gay & Company. The partners were Dick Gay, Stanard Lanford and Lit Coleman (Stanard's uncle). By 1946, R.B. Gay & Co. had moved to Roanoke and was working primarily on railroad construction. Gay had health problems and in 1953 sold the company to Stanard Lanford Sr., his son John C. (Jack) Lanford and Ted Slater and the name was changed to Lanford and Slater. Stanard (Stan) Lanford Jr., author of this article, became a partner in 1955.

Lanford and Slater's first project was a joint venture with three other companies to build a two-mile segment of the West Virginia Turnpike in 1953. This contract was bid in at about a million dollars and due to a large earth slide the final contract totaled \$1,350,000. The company was awarded its first project for VDOT in the spring of 1954 to construct a secondary road in Bath County.

After the death of Stanard Lanford in 1955, his interest in Lanford and Slater was purchased by Jack and



Stan Lanford. By 1960, Slater wanted to leave the company and Jack and Stan chartered Lanford Brothers Company (LBC). LBC was changing from a grading and excavating business to a company that built bridges and box culverts. For the next 20 years they built literally hundreds of box culverts and quite a few small to medium-sized bridges. In the 1980s, the markets were changing and LBC began to obtain more projects to rehabilitate and repair bridges.

In 1984, Lanford Brothers started the process to become an employee-owned business, generally referred to as an Employee Stock Ownership Plan or ESOP company. Over the last 20 years the ESOP has purchased 100 percent of the company stock and all employees who have worked for the company for a full year are now stockholders in the company. At least several other well-known local construction companies are ESOP companies: Branch Highways, Branch and Associates, and New River Electrical Corporation.

LBC currently has over 200 employees and specializes in roadway and bridge rehabilitation, patching and repairs. The company works in surrounding states as well as for some municipalities and private companies.

The company officers in Lanford Brothers have held many positions of leadership in the construction industry such as the Virginia Road and Transportation Builders Association, now known as the Virginia Transportation Construction Association (VTCA). Jack and Stan Lanford both served as president of the VRTBA as has company vice president Al Soltis. Jack and Stan are the only brothers ever to serve as chairman of the American Road and Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA), Jack in 1991 and Stan in 1999. ARTBA is a national association representing over 5,000 transportation-related companies.

Ralph E. Mills, born in Lexington, Ky., started contracting in Kentucky by 1917 when he listed road contractor as his occupation on his World War I draft registration. He acquired his first work in Virginia on the Skyline Drive in 1932 near Luray. The Mills firm built about 20 miles of the Skyline Drive from Thornton Gap to Big Meadows Mills by the end of 1934. The Norfolk and Western Railway awarded a contract to Mills to build the freight classification yard in Roanoke, said to be the largest in America in 1960. This company was awarded its first of many VDOT projects in 1936. Mills was listed in the Roanoke city directory as having an office located on 10th Street Extension in Roanoke and a residence on Grandin Road in 1939.

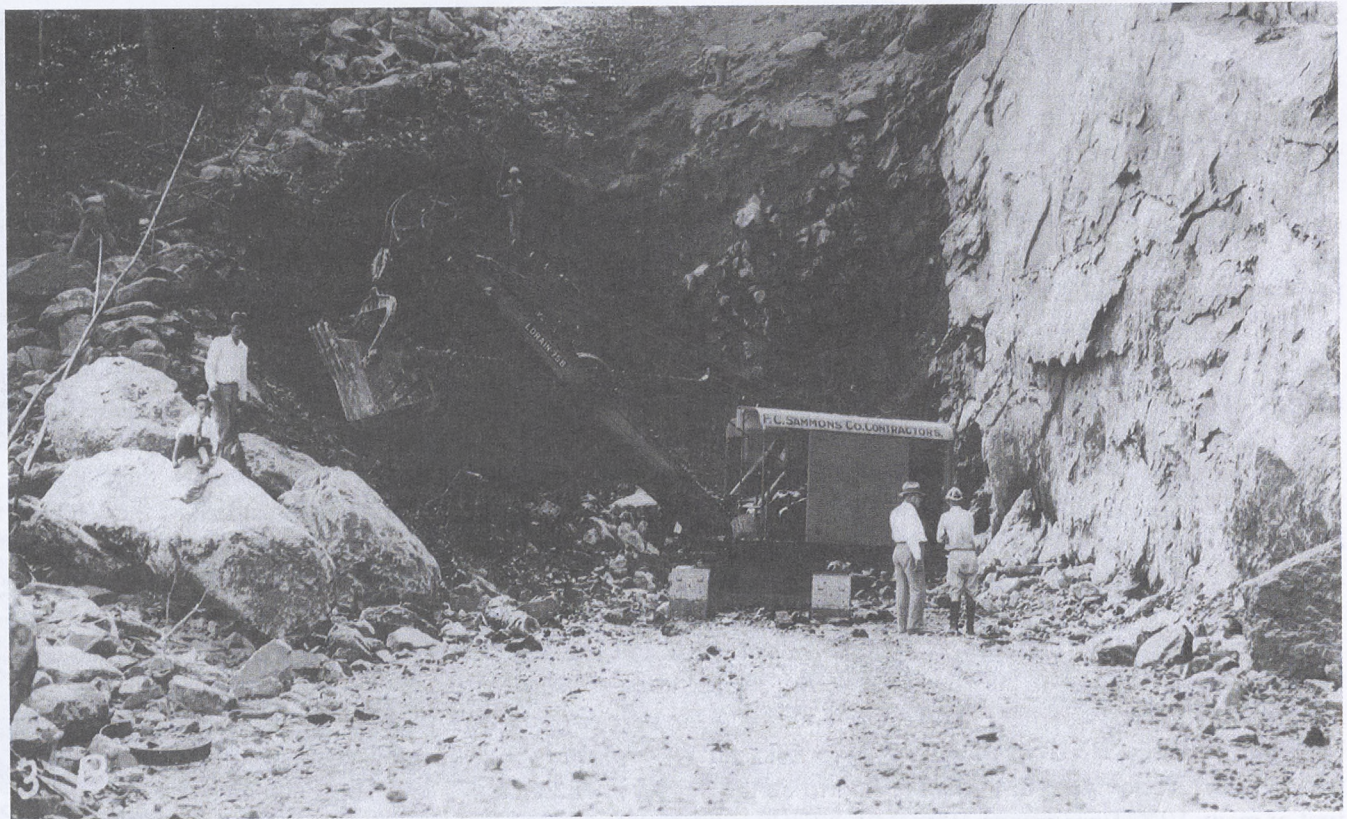
By 1940, the Mills Company was listed in the city directory as having an office in Salem, although his home office remained in Frankfort, Ky. In 1940, Mills was helping prepare the site for the Radford Arsenal and worked on this project for most of the time during World War II. He also built a large portion of the water distribution system from the Carvins Cove treatment plant to downtown Roanoke. Mills was the contractor on the \$8 million cement factory owned by Lone Star Cement near Daleville in 1951. The Salem office stayed open after Ralph Mills Company and several rock quarries in Tennessee were merged in 1957 to form Vulcan Materials Company, a major national stone supplier still in business today. Chester Fraim ran the Mills Company office in Salem until it was closed.

Ralph Mills was a major contractor from 1932 to 1960. The Mills Company was involved in a joint venture to build U.S. Air Force bases in Africa and other foreign countries after World War II. Mills also built many miles of turnpikes and major roadways and airports. His last major project for VDOT was building a seven-mile stretch of U.S. 220 from Boones Mill south toward Rocky Mount. Vulcan made the decision in 1960 to cease construction activities and concentrate on being a crushed stone supplier.

Ralph Mills set up a foundation in 1940 to help poor young men get college engineering training. Mills had a reputation for helping out other contractors who were in trouble. Mills died in 1991 at age 96 at his farm in Kentucky.

Ralph Mills' daughter Katherine married Robert T. (Bob) Main. In 1939, Bob Main and his wife were living in Roanoke; Bob was working as a superintendent for the Mills Company and his wife as a stenographer. By 1946 Bob Main had set up his own firm, Robert T. Main Company in Salem. He was awarded work by VDOT in 1947 through 1959. The last job he worked as a contractor was the grading and excavating of I-66 in Prince William County. This project had a large percentage of solid rock and many shallow cuts. The rock was extremely hard and cut the tires of the hauling equipment, increasing costs considerably. The shallow cuts made the rock difficult to blast, also adding to his cost. The bonding company had to step in and finish the job for Main. He operated for a period of time at various jobs including attempting to crush stone in Central America and barge it back to the USA. Robert T. Main Company did not bid any more highway jobs and eventually ceased to operate. Bob Main passed away in 1989.





*F.C. Sammons Co. (later Robertson-Fowler Company) equipment dug out St. Mary's Tunnel on the Skyline Drive in 1935.*

Another Mills employee was William H. "Willie" Robertson. Willie was raised in Salem and went to Hampden-Sydney College, thinking he wanted to be a doctor. By the time he was taking his third life science course he decided that civil engineering would be a better career. After finishing Hampden-Sydney, Willie went to Georgia Tech and earned a civil engineering degree. He obtained a job as field engineer with Ralph Mills and Claude McAlister, working a large excavating contract on the West Virginia Turnpike in 1953.

Willie's father was Harold Robertson, president of Colonial American National Bank in Roanoke. One of Willie's uncles was Frank Robertson, who was the co-founder of Sammons-Robertson, Robertson-Henry, and Robertson-Fowler companies. Another uncle was A. Willis Robertson, U.S. senator from Virginia for many years. Willie has a brother, Frank, who has worked his career for the Morrison-Knutson Company, one of the larger civil works constructors in the U.S. at one time. Construction seems to run in the blood of many families.

After Mills got out of the construction business in 1960, Willie Robertson decided to start his own company called Robertson Construction Company in the spring of 1961. His first VDOT award came in 1961 to construct a bridge in Henry County, and the last work awarded to Robertson was in 1995. Willie sold his business to English Construction Company where he continues to work as a trouble-shooter and consultant.

The well-known local firm of Robertson-Fowler Company sprang from Frank Robertson (Willie's uncle) and Forest C. Sammons' firm, the Sammons-Robertson Company, incorporated in 1926 in Huntington, W.Va.. By 1940, the name had changed to Robertson-Henry Co. Robertson-Fowler Company was incorporated in West Virginia in 1947. M.O. "Buck" Fowler was Frank Robertson's partner in this company.

Buck was born in Randolph County, W.Va., near the Rich Mountain Civil War battlefield, in 1902. In the 1930 census for Randolph County, he was still living with his parents and was working as an ironworker in construction. Buck had worked with Sammons-Robertson for many years in states as far away as Maine. By 1952, Buck Fowler was working on VDOT projects bid by Robertson-Henry Company to re-build U.S. Route 11 north of Lexington.

By 1957, Robertson-Fowler Company was operating out of Buchanan, and bidding VDOT projects in its



own name. This may be the year that Buck Fowler purchased the interest of Frank Robertson in the Robertson-Fowler Company. Buck continued to manage his company until he was nearly 80 years old.

Under the management of Buck Fowler, the company built over 70 projects for VDOT, including a large number of interstate highways in the '60s and '70s. They also entered into a joint venture with Wiley N. Jackson to construct the Gathright Dam in Alleghany County. Buck managed and worked his way to become a well-known and respected contractor and builder in Virginia. Buck's sons continue to operate the company today, although they have changed their type of work from new construction to successfully performing contract maintenance for VDOT in the Salem District.

Another contractor who started in the mid '40s was Pioneer Construction Company, founded by Robert "Bob" Churchill. Pioneer was awarded its first job for VDOT in 1947. His last job for VDOT was for the grading, excavating and stone base on I-81, constructing the Harrisonburg bypass. Bob planned to windrow the rock in the center of the roadway and use a traveling crusher, which he was trying to invent, to crush the rock into a usable aggregate for the road base material. He could never perfect the process and eventually the bonding company had to finish the project.

Bob Churchill was able to bring another new idea to Roanoke as he started a business called Port-O-John, renting portable toilets to a variety of groups, including the highway construction contractors. Prior to this time, portable toilets had not been available for outdoors events. Highway contractors generally did not have good sanitary facilities for their employees until the 1960s and later.

Paul Slusher was raised on a farm south of the town of Floyd. One of his contemporaries said, "Paul walked out of Floyd County barefoot with no money in his pocket." Nevertheless, he found employment in the road building industry. Slusher was awarded his first VDOT project in 1952. By 1956 he had a connection with Virginia Stone and Construction Company of Roanoke. He had moved to Roanoke.

In the winter of 1956, Slusher went to Jacksonville, Fla., and worked as a subcontractor with Wiley N. Jackson Company. This job turned out well for him and by 1962 Slusher bid jointly with Sam Finley Inc and Lanford Brothers Company to construct the first section of I-64 in western Virginia, located at Low Moor in Alleghany County. At the same time, Slusher had a contract in Florida to build about 15 miles of Interstate I-4 through a swamp from Daytona Beach west toward Orlando. This job was very difficult to build as there was no access to this work from any crossroads. Slusher had a job he did not know how to build and could not complete his work. The bonding company had to take over the project and finish it.

Meanwhile, the I-64 project Slusher had in Virginia was doing very well. He was taking money from his good job in Virginia and using it to try to stave off bankruptcy in Florida. By doing this, he was not able to pay his bills for materials, equipment and supplies on the I-64 project. Finley and Lanford had to complete the work on I-64 for Slusher and pay off his debts on the Virginia work. This cost was a great burden on the joint venture partners and especially for the Lanford Brothers as they were undercapitalized and it took several years for them to pay off their share of the cost to complete Slusher's work. Lanford Brothers learned a valuable lesson from this project about the dangers of joint ventures and the necessity of knowing who you should take as a partner on a job.

After failing to complete his Florida project, Slusher moved to Wise County, and worked in the coalfields, eventually setting up a coal tippie for loading coal on the railroad. Slusher bid a few jobs for VDOT under the name of Alleghany Stone and Construction Corporation from 1967 to 1970. Having been in trouble with the bonding company earlier, he had difficulty getting bonds. Paul Slusher died in 1990.

In 1950, the Brown family of Roanoke owned the remnants of the Virginia Iron, Coal & Coke Company (VICC) that existed from the 1800s through the middle 1960s. VICC had extensive land mineral operations throughout western Virginia including Roanoke County at various times. The library archives at Radford University contain a large number of VICC documents. One file states that VICC owned Virginia Stone and Construction Corp. from 1957 to 1961 when the construction company was sold to Louis Tufano. VDOT records show that Virginia Stone and Construction was awarded only three projects while owned by VICC. The largest of the jobs was the first section of I-66 built in Virginia in Fauquier County near Paris. Virginia Stone and Construction had a claim against VDOT on this project that took several years to settle. Tufano entered troubled financial times in 1962-1967 and did not receive any VDOT prime contracts while he owned the company, which apparently ended up bankrupt.

Joe Thomas and his brothers, Lewis and Frank, started Thomas Brothers Inc. in Salem by 1955. The firm's



name was listed in the Roanoke-Salem telephone book for 1955-56. Frank was killed in an accident when he was operating a crawler loader in the early days of the company. Lewis Thomas later started Salem Ready Mix that remains in business today. Joe Thomas continued grading school sites, shopping centers and a lot of private site grading work. In 1974, Thomas Brothers had been awarded its first project by VDOT. They picked up a few more VDOT projects over the years, but private, commercial and municipal site work seemed to suit them better. Thomas Brothers continues to work today even though ownership changed in 2000 when English Construction Company acquired the company. Joe Thomas Jr. continues to manage the company.

Harry Turner was in business in Salem as a building contractor by 1940. Harry and his brothers, Curtis and Morris, were raised in Franklin County. During World War II, they started working on coal stripping projects in Southwest Virginia. By 1953, the brothers had founded Turner Brothers Contractors located in Salem and called themselves road contractors. This firm was very successful in the grading business. For over 20 years they bid on road jobs and seemed to have a knack for making the tough jobs appear easy to complete. When Turner Brothers built U.S. 60 from I-81 east to Buena Vista most of the bidding contractors thought the project would have a high percentage of rock to excavate. Turner Brothers moved a large power shovel to the job, but never used it as the cuts were all dirt and shale and could be moved with scrapers. Little or no drilling or blasting was required.

Before the firm decided to close down its business, Harry Turner left his brothers and bought a small bank in Lexington, but found the government's regulations on banks to be too stifling, so he sold it.

VDOT awarded at least 22 projects to Turner Brothers from 1953 to 1977. This firm had a reputation for high quality work and finished most projects promptly. Curtis and Morris were excellent mechanics and they took great care of their equipment. They were the only contractors I knew who regularly washed, waxed and polished the paint on their construction equipment. This paid off very well when they called Forke Brothers Auctioneers to dispose of their equipment. All the machinery looked very much like new and brought outstanding prices.

James M. "Jimmy" Turner was the founder of J.M. Turner & Company in 1939 when he started as a small residential contractor. Turner became a well-known building contractor after World War II when he expanded into commercial and industrial projects. Around 1959, Turner expanded to include road construction on the new interstate system. He completed over 25 projects for VDOT, most of them on the interstate and primary routes. Jimmy had help with his highway division from Bill Boyd and Bill Talbott. The company performed both grading and bridge construction. The first VDOT job was awarded in 1959 and the last job in 1976. Jimmy passed away in 1978 and his son, Jay Turner, currently is chairman of the board of the company. It continues to construct a variety of building projects in the Roanoke area.

In the 1960s, Carter Machinery Company invited a small group of contractors to a supper meeting at the then popular Archie's Restaurant. When the waitress took our order, Turner's vice president Bill Boyd said he wanted his steak raw. The waitress said he surely wanted it seared on the outside, but he said that he only ate his steak raw. He got his steak raw and ate it all. When I asked him about this, he told me he had found the chef always picked the very best and most tender steak he had when it was to be served without cooking. Bill Boyd was a strong-willed person who was used to getting his way. He had many battles with the VDOT engineers, but did not win all of them.

"Vecellio is a name as common in Italy as Jones or Smith in America" was a statement made to me by David Vecellio Jr. when I asked him if his family was any kin to the Leo Vecellio family in Beckley, W.Va., or the Oscar Vecellio family in Princeton, W.Va. Many Italian stonemasons and other workers immigrated to the U.S. for better job opportunities. In the early years of the twentieth century many of our bridges were being made with stone masonry. David Vecellio Sr. built quite a few bridges on the Blue Ridge Parkway, all of which had stone masonry facing at all the exposed surfaces. By 1951 Dave's company, Vecellio Construction Company, had been awarded its first VDOT job. Dave's last job was the Blue Ridge Parkway bridge across Virginia Route 116. As the project was nearing completion in 1974, Dave was setting kerosene flares as road markers at dusk one evening and he was struck and killed by an automobile.

David Vecellio Jr. took over and operated the company for a number of years as Vecellio and Associates before he shut the operation down and went to work for another contractor. Vecellio and Associates was awarded at least 10 projects by VDOT from 1969 to 1976.

The firm of Sisson and Ryan was founded in 1953 by Clyde Sisson who had worked for several different contractors as an equipment operator and a job superintendent and his friend and neighbor White Ryan, both of



whom were raised and still lived in Shawsville. Clyde Sisson had an opportunity to seed a highway grading job on Route 11 in Pulaski County in 1953. His early days on a farm convinced him he could do this seeding work and he enlisted White Ryan as a business and financial partner. Their first prime contract was to construct waterlines for the town of Shawsville.

When the interstate highways construction program started in 1956 they realized that there would be a lot of seeding and top soil work to be done on the many contracts to be let in Virginia. They were certainly one of the leading specialty contractors for the next 20 years in seeding and top soiling work. By the late sixties the company was providing road construction, landscaping, asphalt paving and installation of sewer and water lines. They opened a rock quarry on property located adjacent to Route 11 at the foot of Christiansburg Mountain and began to discontinue their other lines of work to concentrate on the production of crushed stone for concrete, asphalt and road bases purposes. The Sisson and Ryan families continue to work together operating the quarry and meeting the needs of their many customers.

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# Thirty-two Roanokes bear the same name

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by Mathew J. Bowyer

Settlers from Roanoke, Virginia, have traveled across this nation to found 32 communities or places, giving them the name of their hometown, and five are still in existence.

The first Roanoke, named long before our part of the world was settled, was Roanoke Island, N.C., started by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1585.

The word "Roanoke" comes from the Indian term for shell money, of course. This Roanoke post office research led to many sources – publications and organizations like Linn's Stamp News and the Author's Guild. The American Philatelic Society mentioned this project and several people responded to the search for other Roanokes.

In all, 27 Roanoke post offices have been discontinued. In 1971, six Roanoke post offices were operating in Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, West Virginia and Texas. (Roanoke, W.Va., closed in 1998.)

Some people said Roanoke, W. Va., was settled by Roanoke, Va., settlers who were lost. The place name still exists locally but residents receive their mail at Walkersville, W. Va.

Roanoke, Ill., was settled in 1847 by people who came from our Roanoke County. They found virgin soil and picturesque home settings.

Roanoke Park in Seattle is a wooded area developed by David Denny, who came from our Roanoke. The city of Seattle purchased the park at a sheriff's sale in 1896. In North Carolina, rapids, falls and bridges draw their name from the river. The Roanoke River becomes the Staunton River below the Smith Mountain Dam and then reverts to Roanoke down about the state line.

The Roanoke, Texas, post office was established under the name of Elizabeth in 1870. When the railroad came through in 1881, it was located three miles away so Elizabeth was abandoned and the new station was called Roanoke by a railroad worker who came from the Virginia Roanoke.

Roanoke, Ala., was settled in 1832 in what was once Creek Indian Territory. The Alabama General Assembly named the county Randolph for John Randolph of Virginia, whose plantation is on the Roanoke River some 150 miles downstream. The Alabama town was once known as High Pine.

Roanoke, La., once called Esterly, was established as a post office in 1895. The name was changed to Roanoke by two brothers, G.W. and J.M. Booze, in honor of their Virginia home, a plantation near Springwood.

Roanoke, Indiana, was named by a riverboat captain who operated river locks, a highly respected position. He was originally from Roanoke, Va.

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*Mathew J. Bowyer, is a retired Postal Service supervisor who once worked at Dulles International Airport Mail Facility. A Covington native and a Roanoke resident, he is the author of a survey of postal history and other manuscripts and is working on a book about the Roanoke River.*



Roanoke, N.Y., in Genesee County once was known as Orangeburg. Maj. John Ganson from Virginia moved to New York in 1834 and changed the name to Roanoke in honor of John Randolph of Roanoke. The post office was closed in 1888 and mail went to LeRoy. Today, mail for the village of Roanoke, N.Y., comes through the Stafford post office.

Two Roanokes in Randolph and Howard counties, Missouri – actually one town in two counties – were founded in 1829 in honor of John Randolph. “Its very name, its high-class citizenry, its natural surroundings, its location on a much traveled stage road, advertised it widely and caused other most excellent families to come and occupy the territory contiguous to it,” according to a Missouri history.

A computer search found an advertisement, “Welcome to Roanoke,” from the United Kingdom – in Grange Hill Industrial Estate, Bratton Fleming, Barnstaple, Devon – a maker of model steam and diesel train engines. It was given the name because the owners recognized Roanoke, Va., to be “the world’s leader in railroading.” An executive of the model railroad firm wrote, “We named our company Roanoke after the Roanoke locomotive workshops at Roanoke, Virginia as we are Norfolk & Western fans and consider these to be the Rolls Royce of locomotives.”

A Roanoke reporter, on assignment in Cleveland, Ohio, many years ago, happened to see a Roanoke office building, tucked away on a busy downtown square.

Other discontinued Roanoke post offices: Georgia, two; Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, New Mexico, South Carolina and South Dakota, one each.

Two current North Carolina post offices have variant Roanoke names. Falls of Roanoke was established in 1815 and Roanoke Rapids in 1895. Both are on the Roanoke River in Halifax County.



*Map of Chesapeake Bay to Cape Lookout, N.C., by John White, circa 1584, depicts location of first Roanoke Colony. (Source: Wikipedia)*





# Support our History

Spring 2009

Dear Friends:

Although these are difficult financial times, there are many exciting programs and exhibitions at the History Museum of Western Virginia and the O. Winston Link Museum. We have completed the Watts Library and the new Education Gallery and are hard at work on the Virtual Museum digitization project. "White Liquor – Blue Ridge Style" is on exhibit until September 2009 at the History Museum, and "Ted Rose – The Artist's Early Photography" was at the Link Museum until April.

The latest endeavor from Kegley Publications is a reprint of *A Narrative of the Incidents Attending the Capture, Detention, and Ransom of Charles Johnston* (1827). This book, believed to be the first book ever published about a Roanoke Valley resident, has been printed in partnership with the Salem Historical Society and Historic Sandusky Foundation.

Unfortunately, as we strive to produce meaningful and educational programs, we are faced with significant financial obstacles. We are challenged to sustain our day-to-day operations without funding from the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the economic crisis has dramatically reduced grant funding for museums across the state.

Because you are a longtime friend of the Society, we are reaching out to you for your financial assistance to see us through this difficult period. With your annual support, you can help preserve the investment we have made in promoting the rich heritage of this region. Your support will not only sustain our achievements to date, but will also allow us to continue to expand our rotating exhibits, educational programs and publications.

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Sincerely,

Jeanne M. Bollendorf

Executive Director

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