

NEW KENT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



P. O. Box 24 New Kent, VA 23124
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New Kent, VA 23124



Newsletter

April 2014



1862 drawing from Battles and Leaders - The burned jail is on the right next to the courthouse. The Ordinary is on the left looking much as it does today.



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New Kent Historical society*

**Services for Local Historian
Jacquelin G. Pomeroy
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Angel View Baptist Church and Cemetery New Kent County, Virginia

After the Civil War the former slaves, who had previously been forced to attend the church of their owners, started forming their own congregations. Many of these congregations formed in the 1860s, but Angel View was later... in the 1880s. The people originally met in their homes, but in 1887 they built a log cabin for worship services. The founders, and first deacons of the church, were Henderson Meed, Jordon Morris, Walter Morris and Harvey Scott. The church was named "Angel View" after the suggestion of Martha Edmunds and Adaline Metings. The first pastor was Rev. Louis Davis whose council designated Angel View a Baptist church in 1887.

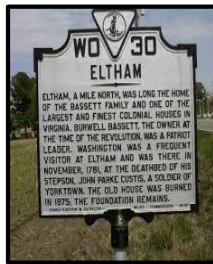
Angel View's congregation grew too large for the log cabin, and in 1893 a new sanctuary was built on land donated by Deacon Taylor. The details of Angel View's early history were unfortunately lost in a fire at the home of a former secretary, Deacon Samuel Morris.

Angel View has continued to thrive. The current sanctuary was built in 1973, and the debt to build it was paid off a short ten years after its completion. Since 1973 the building and the various ministries of the church have been further improved.

These historical notes were abstracted from a history of Angel View church written by Lucy Billups, the church secretary.

Photo and Article
By Hawthorne Davis

Eltham Plantation



If you were to travel westbound on Route 33, you would pass historical marker WO30 that commemorates the home of the Bassett Family, Eltham Plantation. Although the house burned to the ground in May of 1875, it left behind a legacy. Its story began in 1647 when John Broche, French Huguenot surgeon, was granted 1000 acres opposite the mouth of the Mattapony River for transporting immigrants to the New World. The same acreage was granted in 1669 to Capt. William Bassett after John Broche's death (he left no heirs). Thus, the beginning of Eltham Plantation being the seat to the Bassett Family.

The site on the property that Capt. Bassett chose to build his home was on the Pamunkey River side of the property. It was once a deserted Indian village named, Matchot, but was now just an open, empty field. It had been the location of one of Powhatan's homes. In fact, Captain Argall had come ashore at Matchot in 1613. They had previously kidnapped Powhatan's daughter, Pocahontas, as security against the return of English captives and property held by Powhatan. After not hearing from Powhatan, they went ashore at Matchot to settle the dispute. Below is an excerpt from Captain John Smith's Journal on that day:

*Then we went higher, to a house of Powhatan's, called **Matchot**, where we saw about four hundred men well appointed. Here they dared us to come on shore, which we did. No show of fear they made at all, nor demanded to confer with our captain of his coming in that manner, and to have truce till they could but once more send to their king to know his*

pleasure, which if it were not agreeable to their expectation then they would fight with us and defend their own as they could-which was but only to defer the time to carry away their provision. Yet we promised them truce till the next day at noon, and then if they would fight with us they should know when we would begin by our drums and trumpets. Upon this promise, two of Powhatan's sons came unto us to see their sister, at whose sight, seeing her well, thought they heard to the contrary, they much rejoiced, promising they would persuade her father to redeem her and forever be friends with us.

~ The Journals of Captain John Smith: A Jamestown Biography By John Smith).

Eltham was constructed of English red brick in the early 1660's, approximately 50 years after Captain Argall's confrontation with the village of Matchot. It was constructed of English red brick. The mansion was considered to be one of the finest examples of Georgian Architecture in the south and one of the greatest plantations in Virginia during the Colonial Period. Several descriptions of the mansion read:

"There was a central portion of the house two-and-one-half stories high with dormer windows in the well-designed roof. Through passages on each side one reached the low wings to the house."

"The house presented an imposing front, one hundred and fifty feet from wing to wing; the entire building, with peaked roof and gable front, rising above them like the keep of a castle. Over the red English bricks of its walls, time and clinging tribes of lichens had thrown a soft tinting of purple and gray, while a stately avenue of Lombardy poplars led away from the mossy stone steps of the entrance, adding grandeur to the picturesqueness of the place. Many times during the siege of York were the leading spirits of the Revolution gathered at Eltham (which was not far from Yorktown) as guests of Colonel Burwell Bassett, who was a brother-in-law of General Washington and of Governor Harrison, having married the sister of Mrs. Washington [Anna Maria Dandridge; they married on May 2, 1757]."

Several generations of the Bassett Family lived at Eltham and all held high office in the County and State as seen below;

- Captain William Bassett, officer in Rutherford's Regiment at the Battle of Dunkirk, died in 1672 .
- William Bassett the Second, was a member of the Virginia Council and died in 1673.
- William Bassett the Third, inherited Eltham, was a Vestryman in Blisland Parish, elected to the General Assembly and served in the House of Burgesses when he died in 1744.
- Burwell Bassett (son of William Burwell Bassett, the Third), became owner of Eltham and succeeded to the offices and honors held by his father in the County.

Burwell Bassett, son of the heir of William Bassett, the Third, lived at Eltham longer than any other Bassett family member. His first wife passed away in 1754, and his second wife, Anna Maria, was the sister to Martha Washington (George Washington's wife). Burwell Bassett and George Washington were close friends and visited each other often.

"Col. Bassett and General Washington were intimate friends and brothers-in-law, and it is certain that George Washington spent more time at Eltham than at any private home in America outside of Mt. Vernon. He visited Eltham frequently, stopping on his way to Williamsburg to meetings of the General Assembly, and on business trips to the Pamunkey River Estates of which he had charge for the Custis Heirs. He hunted at Eltham, he fished for sturgeon in the Pamunkey, he hauled seine, and visited in the neighborhood. There are many records of his social activities with Col. Bassett in New Kent around Eltham."
~Some Account of the Planters, Vol. 1, Harris

Eltham Plantation was the home that General George Washington galloped to from Yorktown on November 5, 1781, to the bedside of his stepson, John Parke Custis (Jacky), who had contracted camp fever (also called Typhus; caused by the Rickettsia bacteria and transmitted by an infected common louse). during the Yorktown Campaign and died at Eltham.

"sickened while on duty as extra aide to the commander-in-chief in the trenches before Yorktown. Aware that his disease (the camp-fever), would be mortal, the sufferer had yet one last lingering wish to be gratified, and he would die content. It was to behold the surrender of the sword of Cornwallis. He was supported to the ground, and witnessed the admired spectacle, and was then removed to Eltham, a distance of thirty miles from camp."~George Washington Parke Custis

"General Washington, after the surrender of Cornwallis on October 19, 1781, wound up the affairs of the Army at Yorktown and on November 5 left his Headquarters on Jones' Creek, rode into Williamsburg, visited the sick and wounded, then hastened up the Stage Road and arrived at Bird's Ordinary in time for dinner. A few hours later he arrived at Eltham in time to see Mr. Custis breathe his last breath. The General sent his staff on toward Mt. Vernon and remained to comfort his wife and the wife of Mr. Custis, and arrange for the burial of Mr. Custis in the Garden of Eltham. It was one of the saddest days in the history of Eltham and New Kent County. ~Some Account of the Planters, Harris.

"On that day I arrived at Eltham (the seat of Colo. Bassett) in time enough to see poor Mr. Custis breathe his last: this unexpected and affecting event threw Mrs. Washington and Mrs. Custis (who were both present) in such

distress that the circumstances of it and a duty I owed the deceased in assisting in his final rites prevented my reaching this place until the 13th."
Writings of Washington, vol. 23, page 340

Several Generations of the Bassett family continued to live in the mansion (see timeline below).

- Burwell Bassett, the Second, succeeded his father at Eltham. He served the General Assembly, State Senate and Congress during his lifetime. He died in 1841 and left Eltham to his brother John (since he had no children).
- John Bassett attended William and Mary College and became a distinguished lawyer. He represented New Kent in the General Assembly in 1787.
- George Washington Bassett (John Bassett's son), was the last Bassett to own Eltham Plantation. He died in 1878.

Eltham Plantation was also the camp for General Franklin's Union Division during the Battle of Eltham. George Washington Bassett was the owner of the mansion at the time of the battle.

We took possession of the old mansion, and converted it into headquarters for Generals Franklin, Slocum, and Newton. The "young gentlemen" of the staff made themselves comfortable in the upper rooms, which were spacious and airy, and well stocked with feather beds and massive high-post bedsteads. General Franklin ordered that nothing be taken from the house, and the furniture, as far as possible, be preserved from looting. An inquisitive correspondent, however, found means of getting into the bureaus, and brought to light a number of ancient and curious documents, some of them valuable for their connection with the history of the place. There was also a considerable number of valuable old books found in one of the rooms, and which I fear were destroyed after we left.

While Eltham was Union Headquarters, it was described as being in a state of deterioration.

The old Eltham mansion was a large, high, double-storied brick house, with tall chimneys at each end, a spacious hall in the centre, quaint gable windows on the steep roof, and large airy rooms, filled with substantial, but old-fashioned furniture. But little pains had been taken to keep the building in repair, and there was a dingy, antiquated air about it, inside as well as out. Several buildings used

for servants' quarters, and which bore evidence of having been spacious and comfortable, were now tumbling down in decay. A large brick building, a few yards from the house, was used promiscuously for a kitchen, a chicken loft, a carriage house, and the quarters of several old and infirm negroes. But the whole more nearly resembled the shop of a blacksmith, who had taken a rag-seller and sooty cook into partnership.

A short distance in the rear of the old mansion, near the bank of the river, and shaded by some fine old trees, was an ancient cemetery, surrounded by a high brick wall, and entered through an arched gateway, with stone lintels. In the centre of this cemetery stood a moss-covered tomb, with the slab broken in the centre, and otherwise defaced.

In 1874, R. T. Lacy was charged with the 2275 acres belonging to the Eltham Plantation.

In 1875 the plantation home was destroyed by fire and there was never an effort made to rebuild it. Mr. Lacy continued to own the land until 1896 when it was sold in small parcels to various individuals. The Taylor family owned it years later and lived in the kitchen house to the original mansion. The bricks from that kitchen were sold to Colonial Williamsburg for restoration work and all that is left of the mansion is rubble. The graves were re-interred to Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond on August 14, 1879. The land is now used for commodity farming.

The fine residence of Mr. R. T. Lacy, Sr., on the Eltham estate, in New Kent County, was, together with nearly all its contents, destroyed by fire on Saturday, 8th instant. Mr. Lacy, we understand, succeeded in saving his papers, &c. The house was insured for \$3,000.—*West Point Star.*

[The above-named mansion was erected of English bricks, and had been occupied as a dwelling for more than a century and a half. It was in possession of Colonel Bassett at the time of the surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, and was the first place that General George Washington stopped at after that important event. He arrived there from Yorktown on the 5th of November, 1781, just in time to witness the death of his step-son (John Parke Custis), and remained for a week or more as the guest of Colonel Bassett.—*Dispatch.*]

(Article from The Fredericksburg News, May 20, 1875. Library of Virginia)

By Kelly Johnson

“OCEANFRONT PROPERTY FOR SALE ... NEW KENT COUNTY, VA”

The above sign might have been common in New Kent County millions of years ago if there had been people around. We know today that New Kent County and the surrounding areas were, in fact, the ocean floor. How do we know this?

There is a great deal of supporting evidence. Local residents, prior to and into the twenty-first century, recall finding whale vertebrae and shark teeth in New Kent creeks and streams when erosion caused by spring runoff and heavy rains revealed them. Local contractors for years have reported unearthing whale vertebrae as they have dug basement holes. Archeologists at Colonial Williamsburg have unearthed at least three whale vertebrae in the James City County area. One of those unearthed bones appears to have been used as a tool centuries ago, while another shows evidence of having been close to, or in a fire. Further north, at Stratford Hall, the entire skull of an extinct type of baleen whale was unearthed last summer three feet above the water line. The Calvert Marine Museum, based on the size of the skull, estimates the whale was approximately twenty-five feet long and weighed upwards of a thousand pounds. It is believed to be fifteen million years old.

Another clue that New Kent County was the floor of the ocean is found at Marl Hill, located in rural New Kent County just to the east of St. Peter’s Church. Marl Hill was a tract of land settled in the late 1600’s. Its first owner was Thomas Jackson who lived there before 1700. The fields surrounding Marl Hill were then the scene of marl mining – marl being defined as a mixture of clays, carbonates of calcium and magnesium, and remnants of shells forming a loam used as fertilizer. Did early New Kent settlers unearth an ancient oyster bed? As the ocean receded the oysters and other shellfish could have been the source of the calcium needed to form marl.

Geologists know that about thirty-five million years ago, the Chesapeake Bay was formed when an enormous meteorite hit the earth, forming an equally enormous crater which displaced the earth, caused tidal waves, and changed the landscape forever. As the ocean receded, other natural events took place, and are still taking place today. The spine of the peninsula causes the runoff from rain and melting snow to create streams that flow north and south. These streams become the Pamunkey and Chickahominy Rivers, which merge, respectively, with the York and the James Rivers, and eventually flow into the Chesapeake Bay.

The topographic map of New Kent County illustrates the contours of the area. Based on TopoZone (Demand Media, Inc.), Ware Creek in Toano is reported to be 108 feet above sea level. The Crump Swamp at Roxbury is thirty-three feet above sea level. The Diascund Creek at Walkers, The White House Creek at Tunstall, and Ferry Creek at West Point are all only three feet above sea level. The limited gravitational pull causes both the Pamunkey and Chickahominy, which are close to sea level, to meander very slowly toward the Chesapeake. They are known as “oxbow” rivers. Over time, the serpentine shape of oxbow rivers causes erosion on one side of the riverbanks until the riverbank is cut through, changing the course of the river and sometimes causing new islands to be formed.

The terrain of the New Kent County has impacted wildlife as well as our human history. While there are no longer whales, we see beaver dams affecting waterflow, and blue herons fishing in the marshes. We hear peepers in shallow, slow-moving water. We observe turtles sunning themselves after wintering in the mud. We watch eagles and hawks soaring effortlessly as they hunt, while wild turkeys search for kernels in cornfields.

Regarding human history, there are many examples of how the topography of the county affected everyday life. In colonial times wells were hand-dug and brick-lined. The lower the elevation of the home, the shallower the well could be, which made it easier and less dangerous to dig and clean. There is a record of George Washington writing to one of his plantation managers to have the wells cleaned while he was away from Mt. Vernon. He made it clear how dangerous the job was, by instructing the manager to hire someone to do the job -- not to use plantation help.

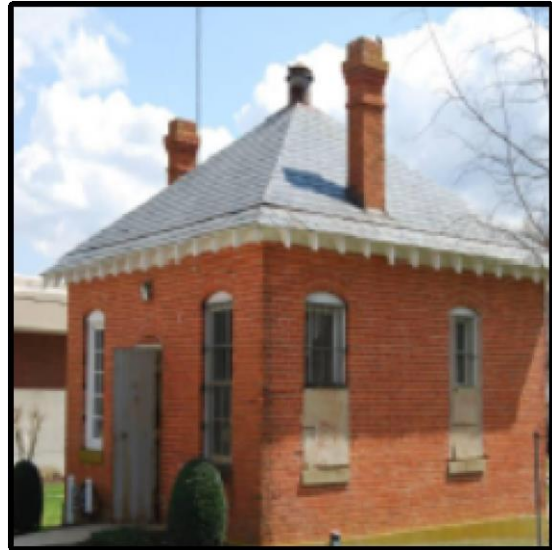
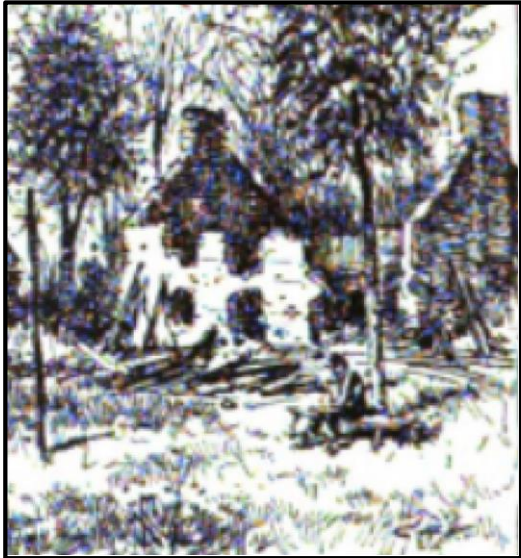
Rivers proved to be both a source of transportation and power. It was difficult on the ever-changing, shallow Pamunkey and Chickahominy. Therefore, only smaller ships and boats could navigate up the rivers to export crops and goods. Today if you travel south on Route 155, after crossing the railroad tracks you cross two small bridges. One goes over the natural course of the Chickahominy; the other goes over a canal dug to make transporting goods from Providence Forge out to the James easier than following the oxbow bends in the Chickahominy. The use of ferries made north and south travel efficient. As grains and corn became the most viable crops to grow in New Kent County, the river flow was used as power to drive the waterwheels needed to mill the crops into flour and cornmeal. Cooks Mill and the mill at Providence Forge are but two of the many mills located in the county.

Unlike the rivers, swamps and marshlands created difficulties. A good example were the problems encountered during the Civil War. Imagine the difficulties of moving soldiers and supplies. You'll recall there was no refrigeration, so fresh meat for the soldiers involved the herding of cattle. At one point, the union army had to herd 2,500 cattle from White House on the Pamunkey to Harrison's Landing on the James. Locating land on which livestock could be herded was especially difficult in spring and early summer when swamps were at their wettest.

As you travel throughout the Chesapeake, be aware natural events and humans have, and always will, continue to transform our area.

By Dave Whiting

John Price Posey Burns the Jail at Brickhouse



On Sunday night, July 12, 1787, John Price Posey, with the help of Thomas Green, escaped from the New Kent County jail. Three days later Posey and Green, accompanied by two slaves, Hercules and Sawney, returned to the jail; inside they placed fence rails and shingles, which they set ablaze using steel, a tinderbox and flint. Going two miles up the main road the arsonists ignited the county clerk's office, which burned to the ground, destroying all the county's records.

Posey did not leave the area, and Green let it be known immediately who the culprits were. Posey was arrested and placed under a strong guard. On August 15 he was brought before eight justices of the New Kent County Court, acting as an examining court. After deliberations during the whole afternoon, Posey was remanded to stand trial for arson in the general court in Richmond. The next day, in chains, he was sent to the Richmond jail.



Early 20th Century History of New Kent

A lovely scene for people traveling east on Quaker Road is the house/farm shown in the picture above. This beautiful house was built in 1914 by Stefan (Joseph S.) Figuly who came, with his wife Mary Kreynus Figuly, in 1901 and somehow found his way to a farm in New Kent County. Around this same time other immigrants from Eastern Europe also came to New Kent. For example, John Janosov (and his wife, Mary) arrived around the same time and had a farm on Quaker Road. John's son, Paul (now) Johnson was the proprietor of Johnson's Store, an important convenience in the western part of the County for years. There were, of course, others who arrived here in this same time frame.

These immigrants were not necessarily widely accepted by the local inhabitants, at least not immediately. However their families now are integral parts of our County. These immigrant families had to overcome hardships that we can hardly imagine, and they are part of our history that is not widely known. Perhaps descendants of these "pioneers" will come forward with these stories so we can all benefit from them.

Photo and Article
By Hawthorne Davis



ANNOUNCEMENTS

The New Kent Historical Society lost a dedicated member and friend when local historian **Jacquelin G. Pomeroy** passed away in in Bentonville, Arkansas. There will be a gravesite service for Jackie Pomeroy at 2:00 p.m. on Wednesday April 16, 2014 at Olivet Church Cemetery on Olivet Church Road in Providence Forge, Virginia.



The deadline for submitting applications for the Hunter W. Martin Scholarship is May 16, 2014. Applicant must be a graduating high school senior and a member of the New Kent Historical Society. Applicant should submit the completed application form along with a five hundred to one thousand word essay or a video that is no more than fifteen minutes on the history of New Kent County. For more information contact the New Kent Historical Society.
info@newkenthistoricalsoc.com



The Old St. John's Church Chapter of the NSDAR is forming the Children of the American Revolution Chapter for young people in the area. They have asked to be named the James Armistead Lafayette Chapter NSDAR. If you know any children who would like to join this group e-mail lavonne@newkenthistoricalsoc.com.

THE JAILOR'S CORNER



The Jail has reopened and is now operating on a regular schedule. We are open every Monday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Visitors are coming in and researchers are busy, and so is our voice mail system which is generating numerous research inquiries. We are still in the process of reorganizing our records; however we have made great progress.

We have had some very interesting visitors and inquiries. We have an author who has written several books on George Washington and she is now doing research for her book on Martha Washington. One of our visitors is an author who writes articles for the Bottles Extras magazine. This magazine is the official publication of the Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors. He is doing research for an article on the Belmont Lithia Water that was sold at the Baltimore Store. The Belmont Lithia Water was sold in cases of one dozen half-gallon bottles, and also for sale by the single bottle. Pamphlets advertising the wondrous medicinal properties of Belmont Lithia Water are in the jail.

We are certainly gearing up for another busy year. Our Most Wanted List is growing, surnames that are now being researched are: Jackson, Poulter, Massie/Massey, Johnson, Strange, Lafayette, Christian, Hatcher, Douglas, Parks, Richardson, and Lacy.

It is time to take out the old key and lock up. I will be back in the next newsletter to keep you informed of what's new, who comes, who stays, and who is on our *Most Wanted List*. Come by and see us, sit and chat for a while, check to see if your name is on our *Most Wanted List*.

LaVonne Patterson Allen,
The Jailor

New Members



Barbara Lukes
Kelly Johnson
Ruth DeWilde-Major

Join Us Today!

Yearly: \$15.00 _____ Lifetime: \$200.00 _____
Children under Age 18 / College Students to Age 25: \$5.00 _____
Businesses: \$100.00/Yr - \$500.00 _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Date _____