

# The New Kent Historical Society Newsletter

New Kent County Jail

November 2012



Second Liberty Baptist Church's congregation began in 1866, two years before the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution legally abolished slavery. Black people in the St. Peters' District of New Kent had been required to worship at Emmaus Baptist Church. They were restricted to the balcony, which was common at that time. In 1865 some of the black members on Emmaus' roll and others from Charles City County, started a house to house prayer band under the leadership of William Harvey Patterson. The prayer band grew large, and one of the members, Fielding Lewis, donated some property where a brush arbor was built and used for worship. Later, William Crump, a member of Emmaus and owner of Crumps' Mill donated the timber from which logs were hewn to build the first church. The people, recently freed from slavery, liked the name "Liberty" for their church and named it Second Liberty because there was already a "Liberty Baptist Church" at Diascund. The current building, shown above, was built around 1925. Second Liberty has had many distinguished pastors, including the Rev. George Watkins who served from 1928 until 1972. The current pastor, Rev. Lewis R. Yancey II who was called in 2006, is now presiding over construction of Second Liberty's fourth facility. *Information from the Church's web site and from LaVonne Allen*

**An Interesting, true story from Meredith Winn which the very oldest New Kent residents might remember.**

It was a rather sleepy day back in the mid-1920's as rural mail carrier Albert Williams approached a railroad crossing near Dispatch Station. It was a standard issue mail wagon drawn by a single horse (about the size of an Amish buggy). This section of the Southern Railway was formerly known as the York River Railroad and yet today follows the same course from its crossing into New Kent from Henrico at the Chickahominy, then down Black Creek to Tunstalls. This meandering line was built before the Civil War and never supported fast trains.



This day the locomotive slowly steamed its way along Black Creek. Albert brought his wagon to a stop and listened for a whistle or bell, and hearing none, urged the horse forward. Almost immediately a locomotive rounded the bend and bore down on the hapless mail buggy. Albert slapped the horse with the reins and hollered some form of giddy-up and the horse bolted forward but not in time to avoid the locomotive's cowcatcher to smash the buggy into a thousand pieces. The horse was unscathed but Albert's leg was broken. Albert survived the wreck but wondered why he had not heard the whistle. A lawsuit ensued. This was not just a run of the mill suit between a farmer and the powerful railroad. Albert was a Federal employee on Federal business.

We grandchildren of Albert and Lizzie Williams always had mused over how our grandfather, an unassuming rural mailman, had managed to be so well off. By 1926 Albert and Lizzie and their children had moved into a spacious home on several acres of land on what is now South

Quaker Road. While the typical home of New Kent in the 1920's was tiny in comparison, this home was a two story, large house with wrap-around porch, turret, running water, garage, and a formal parlor with a pump organ. Albert always had a newish car, beginning with one of the first cars in New Kent, a 1916 Model T. Later on he had one of the first televisions and even a gas-powered lawn mower. He was noted to have flaunted his "wealth" by buying a whole pack of cigarettes at once, rather than a couple at a time. One answer to his wealth was the simple fact that he had a job, which, during the depression was quite a feat. It wasn't much pay, but it came every week. Nice, but still did not explain the grand house.

Some research finally answered the question. Albert had won his suit and was awarded somewhere between \$4000 and \$8,000, a fortune in that period. A large new home could be had for about \$2000 - \$4000. A new car was about \$500.

The house still stands, still with its majestic turret, at 2121 South Quaker Road. Local lore says the house was a house of ill repute before bought by the Williams, but that is a story for another time. The house went out of the family in 1954 after the untimely passing of Albert (1952) and Lizzie (1954). A little shard of the mail wagon remains in family care.

Author's note:

I would like to thank my sisters Bonnie Winn, and Eleanor Rose, and my cousins Nancy Hoffman, and Charles Williams, and my aunt, Ila Williams for their contributions to this story. B. Meredith Winn, Jr. (grandson of Albert and Lizzie Williams)

### **Some old Items uncovered by Pam Radwani**

1776 Run away in New Kent Co. on Sunday the 18<sup>th</sup> instant February. Indentured servant man named John Sole, 19 years of age, by Trade a Shoemaker, is a short well fit young man, fair complexion, full face, black hair generally tied behind, and talks very broad. Deliver to me in any public goal or in the County near Providence Forge shall have 40 shillings reward.  
--John Apperson

1792 Delegates from New Kent are Richard Terrell and William Clarke

Slatersville, New Kent County, Virginia –  
September 10, 1903

Mr. John Douglas Odell died last night at his residence, Slatersville. Mr. Odell was paralyzed last Monday. He was born in New Kent County some sixty years ago and was a most valued and highly respected citizen. He was Democratic county chairman for many years. Up to the time of his death, he was successfully engaged in the mercantile business. He was twice married, his first wife being Dr. L.A. Slater's sister, Emily and his present wife, Miss Floye Belle Bland of King and Queen, and three bright and intelligent little boys survive him. The funeral will take place from his residence tomorrow evening at 4 p.m. and the interment will be in the old family burying ground

#### A House Blown Down in New Kent

Richmond Dispatch, March 28, 2890.

Chestnut Grove. It has been very stormy here today. About 11 o'clock a flow of wind struck a house occupied by James Dandridge, a colored man, and turned it completely over, utterly demolishing it. Dandridge, his wife, and six of his children were in the house, but all got out unhurt except the wife, who received a slight injury on one hand. One child was abed sick with pneumonia, but was dragged out by her sister while the house was falling. The house was high from the ground, but the doors were so situated as to make escape comparatively easy.

A letter written by Octavia Atkinson, resident of New Kent attending school in Richmond, Virginia to her cousins in New Kent.  
Richmond, March 7, 1861

My ever-dear Cousin,  
I once more attempt to address you a few lines, but they will no doubt prove to be very uninteresting. You will be indebted to me two epistles, when you receive this, as you have not answered my last as yet. But I hope it will not be long ere I shall have the supreme pleasure of reading as dear sweet epistle from my dear cousin, from one I love as fondly as your dear self, but I know that you have not much time to spare, as you are now busily engaged in housekeeping. I, of course, excuse you. I certain am desirous to see you presiding over your house.

Dear Cousin, we had a very serious accident to happen in the city last Friday. It was the explosion of the Confederate States Laboratory. There were 31 women and children killed instantly and a great many has died from the effects of the explosion. I have forgotten how many men and boys. There were between 70 and 80 in the room, when the explosion happened. Some of the ladies were refugees, who were drive from their homes, and were at one time wealthy, but were deprived of everything and so had to get employment, then to help support their families. Oh, it is terrible. On Saturday and Sunday, we could see the solemn processions carrying the dead to their last resting places. Death is awful at any time, and it is heartrending to see loved ones depart after you have had the pleasure of attending to their needs and watching over their beds of suffering, but it must be much worse, to be deprived of our loved ones in such a way. No one knows what it is to give up a loved one, but those who have had to face the ordeal.  
Your devoted cousin, Octavia

#### **Note from the Editor:**

We all know that before the Civil War, slaves had a miserable existence. I have often wondered what the life of free Black people in New Kent was like, so I asked LaVonne Allen to write an article on that subject. Here is is on the next page.

## Free Blacks and Mulattoes in pre-Civil-War New Kent

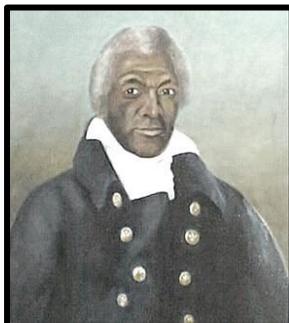
In 1793 the Virginia General Assembly passed a law that required all free blacks and mulattos to visit their local courthouse and register. The courthouse gave them a registration number and a certificate that was carried with them at all times. The full original register of the New Kent County free blacks and mulattos no longer exists, however fragments of the register can be found. Most of the New Kent County free blacks and mulattos were land owners. Despite many obstacles they worked hard and made their living as blacksmith, carpenter, farmer, minister, teacher, wheelwright and other occupations. The free blacks and mulattos of New Kent County left a positive impact and a proud legacy for their families, and the county.

In 1668 John Harris a free black bought 50 acres of land in New Kent County.

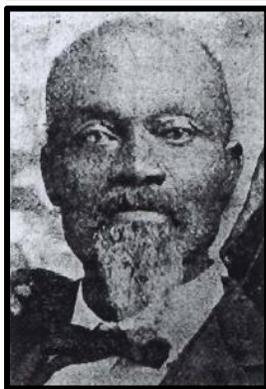
Several families of free Blacks and mulattos had the births and deaths of their children recorded in the St. Peter's Parish registers. Among the free families who registered the births and deaths of their children at the St. Peter's Parish were the Meekins and the Patterson family. Other free families also registered the births and deaths of their children.

Some slaves were freed before the 1723 Virginia law which required the legislative approval for manumissions.

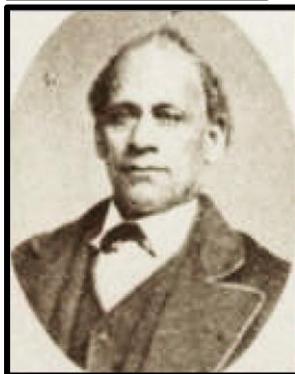
Other surnames of free blacks and mulattos in New Kent County included the surnames names of: Allen, Armstead, Bailey, Baker, Binns, Bosman, Breeding, Brisby, Brooks, Brown, Chandler, Cooper, Cumber, Dandridge, Dungey, Ellyson, Fayette, Fox, Holt, Lafayette, Lewis, Lucas, Mickins, Morris, Moss, Osbourne, Page, Pearman, Pugh, Ragland, Rainbow, Scott, Smith, Wallace, Willis. Other surnames of free blacks can be found in the land tax records and the personal property tax records for New Kent County.



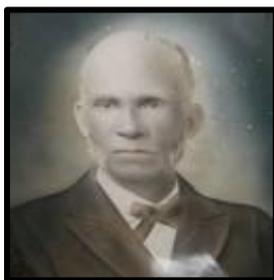
**James Lafayette** was born a slave in New Kent County around 1748. He was the first African American double spy who served in the American Revolutionary War and was instrumental in helping to win the war. Because of his outstanding service he received his freedom in 1787. As a free black he owned several acres of land in New Kent County.



**William Henry Brisby** was born free in New Kent County in 1831. He lived on 32 acres of land that he inherited from his father and later purchased additional acres and owned 179 acres. He was a blacksmith and wheelwright, served in the House of Delegates and served on the Board of Supervisors and was Justice of the Peace.



**Rev. William Harvey Patterson** was a mulatto born free in New Kent County in 1810. He was born into a family that had been free for generations. He was a minister, a teacher and served in the House of Delegates and helped to establish the Second Liberty Baptist Church in New Kent. He became a land owner in 1843 and owned over a 100 acres of land by 1882.



**Rev. Andrew Harvey Cumber** was a mulatto born free in New Kent County in 1848. He was born into a family that had been free for generations. He was a minister and a teacher. He pastored the Second Liberty Baptist Church for 38 years.

# Poplar Springs



According to a sign on its mail box, this beautifully kept example of luxury Colonial housing, which is easily seen from Rt. 30 in Barhamsville, was built about the same time that the U. S. Constitution was ratified.

According to Dr. Harris' book Polar Springs was originally the home of John Richardson, who, was a merchant in the Barhamsville area. The Richardson family cemetery is located a short distance behind the house. A later occupant of the property was Mrs. Mabel Richardson Curtis who was active in the welfare of New Kent County. Mrs. Curtis was the daughter of John

Avery Richardson (b. 1826), who was a Baptist minister in New Kent county and was also pastor of Antioch church in Henrico. We are sure this lovely building has much more history which we do not know about.