



The Historian

Norfolk County Historical Society of Chesapeake, Virginia

Spring

May 2018

Volume 23, Issue 2

Dear Members,

On Sunday, February 18th we had a superb program on Edgar Allan Poe, "Getting to Know Poe" with about 50 people in attendance. Chris Semtner, curator of the Edgar Allan Poe Museum in Richmond, Virginia gave a very interesting and lively presentation on the life of Poe. He covered Poe's years in Richmond, his college days at UVA and his days on the speaking circuit. Mr. Semtner also tied Poe's life to Norfolk, speaking about his family, especially his mother who was a well-known actress who lived in Norfolk and where his only sister Rosalie Poe was born. Mr. Semtner also talked about how many movie directors loved Poe, especially Hitchcock and Spielberg. After his presentation Mr. Semtner sold and signed copies of his book, *The Poe Shrine, Building the World's Finest Edgar Allan Poe Collection*. I would like to thank Elizabeth Mackall for providing our members and guests with a beautiful table of many tasty treats and I would also like to thank Tim Platek, who took charge of raffling off a NCHSC gift basket filled with books to include a volume of Poe's works.

In February, I was notified about a collection of Norfolk County documents that were up for sale. I am so pleased to report that I was able to make a deal and we obtained 54 old documents of the Foreman & Hurst families of Norfolk County, Virginia, dating back to 1814. William Foreman was a large landowner who passed away in 1814. The documents included all the tuition papers of his 5 children being educated in Smithfield, Virginia such as tuition expenses, clothing, pocket money, room and board, etc. Also found in the documents were the Logan Hurst Civil War papers.

Mr. Hurst was a state legislator in Richmond, Virginia and was largely responsible for giving the nickname, "Spoon Butler" to Federal Commander, Benjamin Butler. General Butler had a

Calendar of Events

May 2018

NCHSC Board Meeting
8 May 6:00pm
Library Closed
13 May
NCHSC Membership Meeting
13 May 2:00pm
St. Thomas Episcopal
Library Closed
27 & 28 May

June 2018

Library Closed
17 June

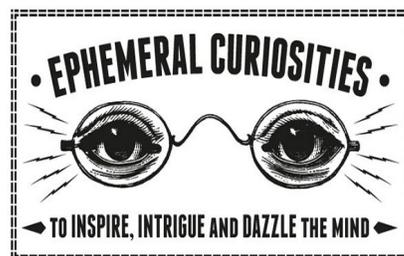
July 2018

Library Closed
4 July

August 2018

September 2018

Library Closed
3 Sept
NCHSC Board Meeting
11 Sept 6:00pm
NCHSC Membership Meeting
16 Sept 2:00pm



Wallace Memorial Room

Continued on page 5

A Revolutionary Mystery in Southern Chesapeake

By Samuel Ferebee Leary, Jr.,
Wallace History Room Volunteer &
Great Bridge Battlefield and Waterways History Foundation Board Member & Docent

Win Culpeper, a former administrator with Chesapeake Public Schools, is looking at his rural homestead off Buskey Road in southern Chesapeake with a new appreciation. Win has always supported the Great Bridge Battlefield and Waterways History Foundation and recognized the important history that happened there 243 years ago but today he is wondering what took place in his own backyard that may have been connected to the time of the revolution.

Win's family is planning on lending a find that just recently came to light for display in the future Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways History museum. Mr. Fleetwood Culpeper, Win's father and prominent farmer in the area, found two spherical iron balls while plowing his fields years ago. They remained in the family, resting on the fireplace hearth or in a closet out of sight. One of them turns out to be a British 4-pound cannon ball almost identical to the ones used at the battle at Great Bridge. The mystery is how did a British cannon ball come to rest in a field so far from where all the "action" supposedly took place? Were we misinformed as to what really happened in our city so long ago? Were there other places where our forefathers fired their muskets toward advancing British redcoats?

A few records speak to engagements that occurred throughout Norfolk County between the British and Patriot forces. Some give a glimpse of how the English soldiers raided farms and disrupted the commerce of the "rebels". The treatment of local farmers who were viewed as traitors was very harsh. The militia of Norfolk County was active in resisting these attacks on the local populace. A review of the pension records of local revolutionary war soldiers reveals a sizeable battle or skirmish that took place at "Logs" or "Bunch of Walnuts". Here at least two companies of patriots fought with the British troops who most likely possessed a small cannon capable of firing a 4-pound solid shot.

From the pension records of Samuel Ferebee and Willoughby West, Sr. we find reference to the engagement:

Samuel Ferebee of Currituck North Carolina states:

He proceeded to a place in Virginia called North West and soon after his arrival they drew rations and were directed to Moyock Mill a place about four miles distance to be stationed as a Guard and as the Company was about starting for the place appointed a firing was heard at a place called the Logs or Bunch of Walnuts to which we immediately repaired and we arrived in time to be engaged in action.

Continued on Page 3

Don't Wait to Get All Your Ducks in a Row . . .



Donate copies of your Chesapeake/Norfolk County family trees, histories or research notes to the NCHSC Family Files. Just drop them off in the Wallace Room.

You never know who might want to follow your footsteps!

Willoughby West also of Currituck, relayed from memory:

*He saith that he entered the service of the militia of the State of Virginia in August or September 1775 a private and volunteer that he was stationed most of the time near the lines of North Carolina & Virginia; that he remained in the service until the British evacuated Norfolk. He was in the battle at the Bunch of Walnuts under **Captn Bradley** and **Lieutenant Porter** and after that Battle he retreated with the army to the Great Swamp where a battery was erected and the British then made attack but were defeated and retreated after which the Americans went back to North West Bridge under **Capt Bradley**;...*

It appears that this battle was fought near present day Bunch Walnuts Road which runs perpendicular to Buskey and Benefit Roads. West recounts the time when the British were controlling Norfolk and sending raiding parties out into the countryside. October of 1780 is a likely date. The company in which Samuel Ferebee served was stationed near Northwest and marched to the battle. On a map, one would notice the line of march would have been toward the North West supposedly along the high ground around the swamp. Also, to hear firing that distance away, it indicates that a cannon was used during the fight. The battle must have gone on for some time for these troops to become engaged with the enemy. Even taking the few good roads that existed, it was a circuitous journey.

It is interesting to note in West's recollections that after falling back, a battery was set up to repel the British. On a line of retreat from Bunch of Walnuts to North West Bridge along the high ground, is Culpeper Farm. Could this cannon ball be one from this encounter of the British raiding troops and our patriot militia that did their best to protect this area? Ferebee mentions in his account that the battle could have been won if not for the cowardly actions of the foreign commander.



Photo courtesy of Brad Reid

As Win looks over the open expanse of the farm today, it does not take much imagination to visualize American shirtmen trudging along in a column on the way to the battle, possibly pulling small cannon with them. He wonders if he would have had the immense courage to stand up to the professional soldiers and their murderous weapons of war as our forefathers did in that field so long ago. This cannon ball brings our struggle for independence and our desire to shape our own future into a sharper focus. It enlightens us to the sacrifices that our patriot forebears made over the six-year period they struggled to throw off the mantle of oppression. Today, for us, it is a tangible reminder of what they faced to gain freedom and a time-worn badge of courage.

I join with Win in proud admiration for those brave soldiers who dared to stand against tyranny and to confront the strongest nation in the world. As Win studies the mottled assemblage of soldiers who tramp by on their way to battle, I wish he could pick out the youthful image of Samuel Ferebee in the group of patriots moving across the field. He was my "too many greats to number" grandfather.

Mr. Jim Bradshaw, Photographer and Author, to Speak at May Meeting

Our May meeting will be May 13, 2018 at St. Thomas Episcopal Church at 2 p.m. Our guest, Mr. Jim Bradshaw, grew up in Great Bridge and as a young man back in the early 1960s, was fascinated by the new development in his home town. This fascination led him to photograph what he saw. Half a century later Mr. Bradshaw decided to put these pictures in a book entitled *My Home Town: A Pictorial History of Great Bridge, 1963-1970*. Mr. Bradshaw will share his photos with us and talk about the changes he witnessed and what these changes meant to him.

Come support the NCHSC and bring a friend! Our meeting will be held at St. Thomas Episcopal Church on May 13th at 2:00 p.m. Light refreshments will be served as always.

Twice Buried: A Family History Mystery (Part 2)

By Amy Williamson Jonak,
Wallace Room Volunteer

I can't say what Evelyn Williamson, my Granny, knew about Everett Williamson that day as she stood among the shattered caskets at the construction site of I-64. I do remember, however, days from my 1960s childhood when she and my Mom (Mary Williamson) sat at our dining room table, heads bowed, reading and typing. Granny slowly read a sentence from a small brown book. Tick, tick, tick, Mom typed loudly on a bulky gray metal typewriter, over and over again.



Pages from the Williamson Family Bible

Ten years later it became clear what had captivated the women. A folder of hand-typed pages, copied from a diary, surfaced at Granny's house: the *Diary of Everett Williamson, May 1864-August 1865 and April 1882- April 1888*. Everett's words from the 1860s, now neatly typed, told of the weather, Confederate camp activities, deprivations and troop movements:

June 4, 1864, Fair.... about 8 o'clock at night a very severe shelling occurred in which my wagon & myself was very much exposed, but by the interposition of a mercifull & kind providence, I Came out unhurt. Human skeletons & bones lay strowed around thick in the woods in which we are encamped.... the immortal spot where Genl Jackson made the Celebrated flank attack upon the enemy....

Everett's life began to take shape. On April 22, 1861, he mustered into the 41st Virginia Infantry, Company F. Company F, known earlier as the Norfolk County Rifle Patriots, was led by William H. Etheredge of Norfolk County. The company served at the Portsmouth shipyard, and saw action in the Battle of the Wilderness, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and the Battle of the Crater in Petersburg, among others.¹ April 8, 1865, Everett was captured near Farmville, Virginia – the day before General Lee surrendered. Everett made it home to Norfolk County April 20, 1865:

...although every thing upon the road was in a very dilapidated Condition yet they look natural & when...in view of my own dear home it Seem quit[e] homely although it had been three long years since I had seen it when I arrived at home there I met my beloved wife, my dear mother & sisters it was a happy meeting. I felt that I was once more by the help of God Safely ensconced at home....

In addition to leaving a diary, Everett also recorded family milestones in a Bible. There he wrote of his marriage to Phelia McCoy Etheredge July 15, 1847, and of their three children. Little Bettie only lived five months. George Caleb made it to five-and-a-half, until he died in 1862. Mary, the oldest, also died in 1862 at eleven-and-a-half. None of his children survived to welcome him home from the war.

Reconstruction took a heavy toll on Everett and Phelia. Debts piled up. In 1881, Phelia died, leaving Everett alone, except for his sisters. By October 1886, Everett was forced to sell his farm and other property to pay his creditors. He gathered enough money to build a small house in Berkley in 1887, where he passed his last days.

The final item in the diary was a newspaper clipping that read, "WILLIAMSON - This morning at 7 o'clock, after a short illness, at his residence in Berkley, EVERETT WILLIAMSON, aged 65 years. Funeral will take place from the Chestnut Street M.E. Church, Berkley, Tomorrow at 2:30 P.M. Friends and acquaintances invited." No date was included. Who "finished" Everett's diary for him? Where are his original diaries now? And, where *are* his final remains?

Read Part 3 in the September edition of NCHSC's The Historian.

1 William D. Henderson, *The Virginia Regimental Histories Series: 41st Virginia Infantry* (Lynchburg, Virginia: H.E. Howard, Inc., 1986), 2-17, 39-70, 148.

President's Message -- *Continued*

reputation of playing, "sticky fingers" when it came to sterling silver spoons! These historical papers are an outstanding find and interestingly, they were found in an antique shop in Springfield, Virginia. Apparently, they had been bought from an estate sale in Northern Virginia. It is amazing how many old photographs and historical documents can show up in the most unusual places. We are happy these historical documents have been brought back home to add to our ever-growing collection at the Wallace History Room. Special thanks to all the individuals who stepped forward and made donations to help make this happen.

I am very pleased to report we are doing very well in obtaining old photographs of Chesapeake, Virginia. I am also so proud and pleased to report that Raymond Harper, author and local historian, has generously donated to our library's photographic collection 94 rare photographs of our area. These old photographs cover many areas of Chesapeake. Many thanks to Raymond Harper for his generous gift to our Wallace Memorial History Room.

Robert B. Hitchings,
NCHSC President



Norfolk County Historical Society of Chesapeake
298 Cedar Road
Chesapeake, VA 23322

Please check the date on your mailing label above to make sure your membership is current. Membership dues are due by May 31st.

Questions or suggestions? Email us at nchs.wallaceroom@gmail.com, call us at (757) 410-7152, or visit our site NorfolkCountyVAHistory.org. Date submitted (for your records) _____

BRING A FRIEND to our membership meeting on May 13th at St. Thomas Episcopal Church at 2:00 pm!

Our guest speaker will be Mr. Jim Bradshaw, photographer and author of the book *My Home Town: A Pictorial History of Great Bridge 1963-1970.*

