

SCHS News



The Newsletter of the Stafford County Historical Society

VOLUME XXXVIX, NUMBER 2, APRIL 2018

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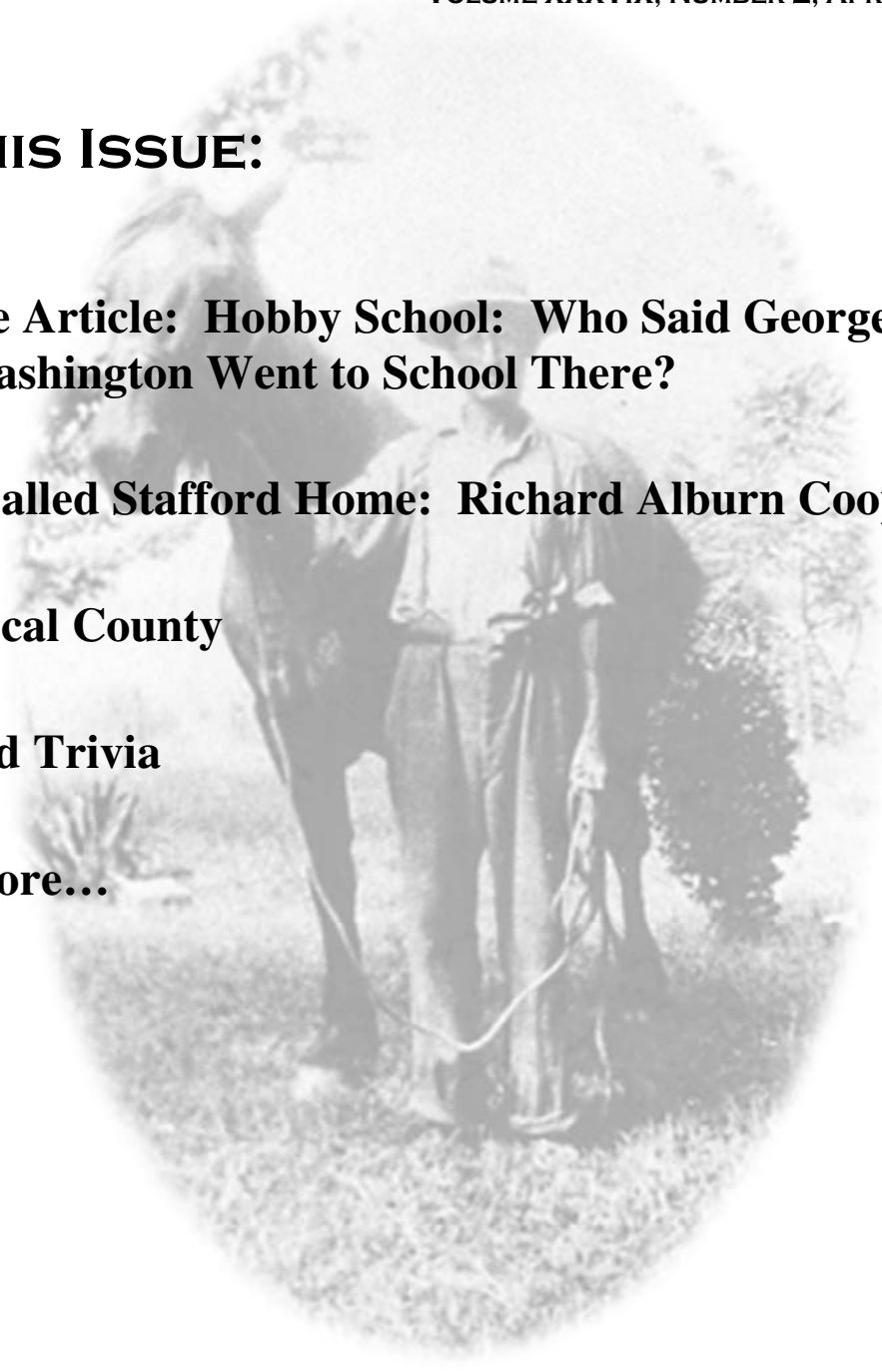
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PRESIDENT'S PEN

Dear Friends,

On Feb. 4, the SCHS lost one of our dedicated life members, Mrs. Barbara J. Kirby. Born in Oklahoma and the wife of a Navy serviceman, she was not “local” to Stafford County, but was certainly a “Staffordian” at heart.

Barbara lived in Prince William County for a number of years where she helped to acquire and organize records for the Historic Dumfries Museum.

Upon moving to Stafford, she brought her passion for historical records to the Clerk of Court’s office where bags and boxes of loose papers were in desperate need of organization and preservation. Barbara spent several years sorting thousands of pieces of paper and reorganizing them back into case files. She developed the technical skills of an archivist and was very knowledgeable about the preservation of old documents. Barbara’s distinctive handwriting may still be seen on the files in that office. During that time, she made copies of documents she thought might be of interest to local families and those researching Stafford’s history. These she eagerly shared with anyone who expressed an interest. In honor of her years of work with the county’s records, the SCHS designated Barbara one of the Keepers of the Knowledge. For a number of years, Barbara volunteered with the Stafford Cemetery Committee and thoroughly enjoyed doing field work recording burials in the county’s many family cemeteries. She also served on the Stafford County Historical Commission.

Barbara’s cheerful disposition and passion for Stafford County’s families and history will be sadly missed, but her contributions to historic preservation here will be evident for many years to come.

With best regards,

Rick MacGregor

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Cover Illustration: Richard Alburn Cooper (c.1886-1972) of Stafford.

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FEATURE ARTICLE:

HOBBY SCHOOL: WHO SAID GEORGE WASHINGTON WENT TO SCHOOL THERE?

Oral history can be a valuable component of historical research. Ideally, when working with local history, one commences with the oral tradition and then searches for primary source materials to confirm or refute it. In so doing, one often discovers that the core of the oral story may be substantiated while some details may have been corrupted through years of retelling. It's important to remember that most oral history is based on at least some truth. In some instances, the only history about a site is oral and one is left to decide the credibility.

The small log building in Falmouth that we know as Hobby School is one such place where little documented history exists, but a wealth of oral tradition abounds. For decades, locals have claimed that, as a lad, George Washington attended school in this building and was taught by John Hobby. In truth, Mr. Hobby served as sexton at the Brunswick Parish church that originally stood behind the present Union Church. It is quite plausible that he also taught school.

One long-forgotten but important detail about this little building is its original location; it has only been on the present site since 1930. Wherever it stood, at some point, the structure was dismantled and the logs were safely stored in Dr. Elliott B. Jett's barn in Falmouth. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, log structures were common in Stafford and it's unlikely that anyone would have taken up space in his barn to store a disassembled one. Given the number of logs and the amount of space this would have required in the barn, it seems reasonable to assume that someone had a very good reason for preserving it.

In 1929, Dr. Jett's heirs sold a parcel of his real estate to the Citizen's Guild of Washington's Boyhood Home, Inc. This group was one of the early contributors to the Wakefield project. The Guild paid \$2,000 for a strip of property that was bounded by Carter Street, Butler Road, and the Falmouth Cemetery. Included in this was the present site of Hobby School. The deed specified that the Guild had the right to tear down the four buildings then standing on the property. One of these was Dr. Jett's barn that stood on the corner of Carter Street and Butler Road. A brick thrift shop now occupies this space. One wonders why a group involved with Washington's boyhood home would want the Jett property unless it was to obtain the logs stored in his barn. It may not be a coincidence that the little log building was reassembled the following year.

The acquisition of the purported school coincided with the fundraising efforts to rebuild the Washington home at Wakefield and with the Colonial Revival Movement that influenced architecture, interior design, and landscaping for the next fifty years. Work on the little building was overseen by the noted Colonial Revival architect, Edward Donn.

Originally, the spaces between the logs would likely have been chinked with wood scores and clay. Falmouth mason, St. Clair Brooks, worked on the building and added the bricks between the logs. He also built the stone chimney on the end. The squatty stone piers or posts placed along the front and north side were moved from a little park that had occupied a lot across U S. Route 1 from the Cotton Warehouse, now Simpson's Realty. The park area was later utilized by the Noble car dealership and is now the vacant area on the southeast side of the reconfigured Falmouth intersection. The large freestone (sandstone) step with curved corners that now rests at Hobby School's only door may have been moved from the front of Union Church. The two sets of steps in front of the façade are now of poured concrete, but were originally of freestone.

The Citizen's Guild held the property until 1938 when they sold a 45-foot by 145-foot parcel, including the log school, to the Civic Improvement Club of Falmouth. This group paid \$300 for the

property. In November 1984, the Club conveyed it in a deed of gift to Historic Falmouth Towne and Stafford County, Incorporated.

For the 1985 dedication of Hobby School, two HFT & SCI members built a few student desks from wood salvaged after the collapse of Union Church. They planned on building a replica of a typical early teacher desk, also.

While it's impossible at this time to prove that George Washington attended school in this building, it's also impossible to disprove it. Architecturally, many early school buildings would have been of log construction. The ends of the Hobby School logs are notched in an early style unlike those in later log buildings. Having a dendrochronology done on the logs would help determine the year they were cut, but this is expensive and has not been done.

In 1991, Historic Falmouth Towne and Stafford County, Incorporated became the Stafford County Historical Society and this entity is the current owner of Hobby School. The building has been open to the public only sporadically since its acquisition in 1984. From time to time, HFT & SCI sponsored walking tours of Falmouth and these included opening this interesting little building to visitors. The Stafford County Historical Society has done several of these tours under its own name.

Last year, the SCHS contracted with Habalis Construction to repair the roof on Hobby School. Some of the concrete shingles, which had been in place for about 85 years, had broken and fallen off. This allowed water to enter the building, which threatened to damage the rafters and other wooden elements. To raise funds for the work, the Society participated in the Community Give fundraising program and put out a call to our members to make donations. Work on the building consisted of removing all the shingles from the roof, taking care not to break any more than necessary. Habalis had some new concrete shingles made to replace those that had been damaged or lost. These are nearly identical to the old ones. After repairing some damaged rafters and other elements, old shingles that were still usable were reinstalled on the front side of the roof and new ones were applied to the rear. Workmen repaired/replaced some rotted wood trim and painted the gable ends. The work was completed in December 2017. The SCHS Board of Directors extends their grateful thanks to those who donated toward this project. We hope Hobby School is prepared for the next 85 years, whether or not George Washington studied there.



THEY CALLED STAFFORD HOME

Richard Alburn Cooper (c.1886-1972) was a farmer, store keeper, and lumberman in Stafford County. For a number of years, he operated a store at the junction of Mountain View and Kellogg's Mill Roads. This was a little frame building that predated the current concrete block store now standing on the site. Richard later had a small store right on the edge of the road at the junction of Eskimo Hill and State Shop Roads. He also cut timber on land now occupied by the Camp 21 prison on Eskimo Hill Road. Richard married Lillie Mae Groves (1892-1978) and both are buried at Ramoth Baptist Church. They have numerous descendants living in the county today.

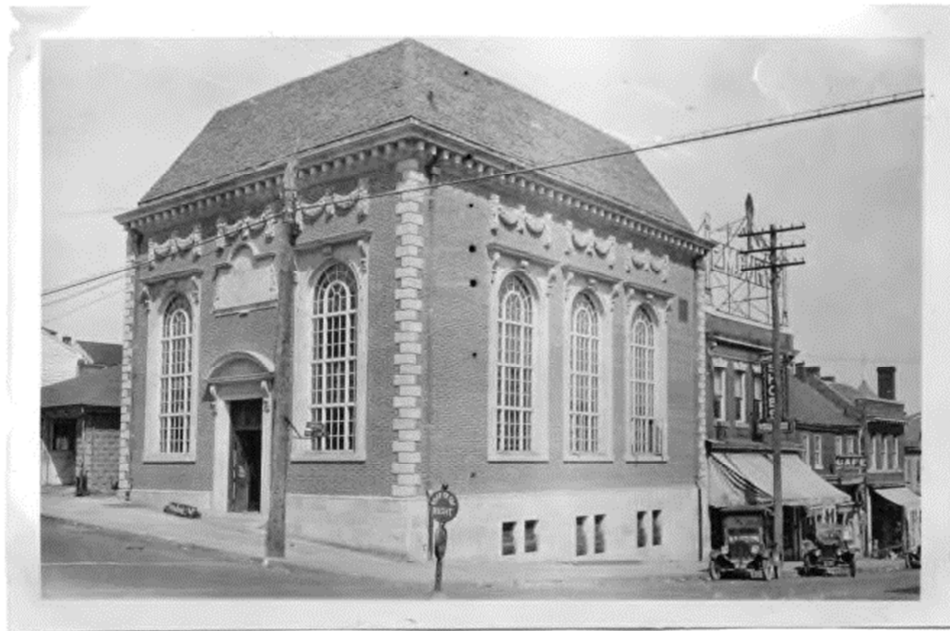
STAFFORD TRIVIA

During the early twentieth century, the flat area on the north side of Aquia Run where now stands the Crucifix on U. S. Route 1 was known as the Barley Patch. It was then part of Wayside farm, which now includes Stafford Marketplace shopping center.

MINERALS BENEATH OUR FEET

Around 1781 a large gold nugget was discovered on the bank of the Rappahannock River near Little Falls. Thomas Jefferson wrote about this in his book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Commercial mining was conducted in southwestern Stafford from about 1830 until around 1861. Some gold mining resumed after the Civil War and continued until the early 1900s. Silver was discovered in Stafford prior to 1742. Near Boswell's Corner is a stream still known today as Silver Mine Branch. Unlike gold and pyrite, this mineral was never mined commercially here.

STAFFORD'S FREESTONE IN AN UNEXPECTED LOCATION



The building many people know today as part of the Fredericksburg Museum and Cultural Center was completed in 1927. Construction had commenced the previous year with Philip N. Stern as architect. This gentleman also designed the Princess Anne Hotel and Lafayette Elementary School (now the Central Rappahannock Regional Library Headquarters) in Fredericksburg as well as the present Stafford Courthouse and the old Peoples Bank building that used to stand nearby. The structure known by locals today as Peoples Bank was actually built in the 1960s after the old building was razed.

The Planters Bank of Fredericksburg was in the Georgian Revival/Federal Revival style. It was built of Virginia-made bricks with a liberal application of Aquia freestone trim provided by the George Washington Stone Corporation. This includes the quoins, the freestone base, cornice, molded stone watercourse, corbels at the door, door and window surrounds, decorative swags, and a large panel that once held a plaque with the bank's name. The large, handsomely carved swags of Aquia stone above the windows and doors on both street facades are similar to those above the entrance to the White House. The bank was known for much of the twentieth century as the Farmers and Merchants Bank. For a brief period, it was utilized by the Fredericksburg Museum and Cultural Center.

In 1922, the George Washington Stone Corporation re-opened the old Rock Rimmon and Mount Pleasant freestone quarries on Aquia Creek and quarried hundreds of thousands of tons of stone from here before closing around 1930.

“JUDGE FINES SELF AND COLLECTS FOR NEGLECTING DOG TAX”

Ernest Ellsworth Fisher (1880-1969) was a Baptist minister who came to Stafford in 1922. He was highly involved in the court system, serving as a federal commissioner for the U. S. courts, as an associate judge for Stafford, and was also the county's juvenile court judge. He served as a magistrate in Stafford from 1923 until about 1961. According to his obituary, “For a long time he had sat in a courtroom at Cambridge and King streets near the old Falmouth bridge.” This was the tiny brick structure near the junction of Cambridge and Washington Streets now known as the Magistrate's Office. A humorous newspaper notice regarding him was published in the May 29, 1925 issue of the *Evening Star* (Washington, DC). It read, “Justice E. E. Fisher of Falmouth forgot to pay the tax on his dog May 1, as prescribed by law. Accordingly he issued a warrant against himself, tried himself, imposed a fine of \$5, with costs of \$1.25, and collected from himself. Later on he turned the fine over to the clerk of the Stafford County Court and also paid the license tax on his dog. Justice Fisher says that hereafter he will try to keep his memory in better working order.”

A MUSICAL COUNTY

Tucked onto a lower shelf in a back room of the Clerk of Court's office is a dingy bound volume of records that the writer failed to notice for some thirty years. Titled *Contracts for Personal Property, 1897 – 1923*, it is a record of items purchased by county residents “on time.” These include farm implements, furniture, logging equipment, an “electric bicycle,” computing grocery scales, and a surprising number of pianos, organs, and phonographs. Someone, possibly door-to-door salesman, sold these musical items throughout the county. Recorded in this volume are the sales of no less than 56 pianos, 18 organs, and 113 phonographs. Of course, this doesn't include those that were sold for cash as there was no need to record those purchases. Stafford's black community bought quite a few phonographs with model names such as Edison, Columbia, Polkaphone, Honest Quaker, Charmophone, Play Boy, Quaker Tone, Mellowtone, Sol-O-Art, and Star Talking Machine. Purchasers included Mamie E. Boxley, Lewis L. Butler, Fannie Gray, Liddie Greenhow, J. S. Harris, John Johnson, Mattie Johnson, John C. Minor, Louis W. Nelson, Mildred Nickens, Nelsie Queen, Irene Scroggins, Mary Scroggins, Joseph Speed, Emily Strother, Otis Thompson, Earl Toles, John S. Tuell, James A. Vaughn, Silas Washington, and Rosia White. Some of the purchases were made shortly prior to Christmas and one can imagine how exciting it was for the family to have a phonograph or piano at that special time of year. On June 24, 1927, Nelsie Queen purchased a Mellowtone phonograph for \$18. Six days later, she exchanged it for a Star Talking Machine that cost \$35. Mamie Boxley purchased a Putnam organ and Mary Queen bought a Remington piano for the substantial price of \$220. Joe Speed worked for the George Washington Stone Corporation as did some of the Scroggins family.

BULLETIN BOARD

UPCOMING MEETINGS: Please mark your calendars to attend the upcoming SCHS meetings and programs:

April 19—The Patawomeck Heritage Foundation's Gordon Silver will present a talk about the Patawomeck Indians in our area.

May 17—Glenn Trimmer will discuss “Civil War Fortifications” in Stafford

June 21—Annual SCHS Picnic at Belmont—**Members Only**

NEWSLETTER DISSEMINATION: Successful dissemination of our newsletter requires that we have your current email address or that we are made aware of your specific lack of access to a computer. Please contact Doris McAdams at (dmac200592@msn.com) or 540-720-1321.

DUES WERE DUE IN JANUARY!

Dues for 2018 were due January 1st. Membership benefits include a subscription to the newsletter, access to the Members Only section of our web site and participation at special events. Renew today so you'll be sure not to miss out on any of our 2018 activities. Mail your check or money order made payable to Stafford County Historical Society (SCHS) to:

Treasurer
Stafford County Historical Society
P. O. Box 1664
Stafford, VA 22555

NOT A MEMBER? JOIN TODAY! WE OFFER THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP:

\$15	Individual Annual Dues	\$5	Student
\$25	Family Annual Dues	\$200	Individual Life Member

Please make checks payable to Stafford County Historical Society and mail them and the completed form (below) to the **Treasurer** at:

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P. O. Box 1664
Stafford, VA 22555

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