

CHARLOTTE COUNTY, VIRGINIA CONTINUED

By: Cora V. St. John

Due to the large number of historic properties in Charlotte County, we found it necessary to devote two newsletters to this county. As before, the information is gleaned from the applications presented to the Department of Historic resources for inclusion in their listings. You may access those by visiting:

www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/charlotte-county

RANDOLPH PLANTATION was the home of orator and statesman, John Randolph. John Randolph was known as “John Randolph of Randolph” (in Charlotte County) which distinguished him from his other relatives. Randolph was born 2 June 1773 and died 24 May 1853, having never married and leaving no descendants. Randolph became a leading member of the House of Representatives and later the U. S. Senate. Randolph Plantation today consists of only a small portion of the more than 8000 acres it consisted of when it was patented by Randolph’s grandfather Richard Randolph of Curles. It was here on this plantation that Randolph raised his famous stud of blooded horses. He produced the Eastern Quarter horse, the most famous of which was named “Roanoke.” Many of today’s Kentucky Derby winners can trace their lineage back to this horse.

Randolph’s home was destroyed by fire in 1879. (Listed 1973)

SALEM SCHOOL is the only known survivor of seven Rosenwald schools built in Charlotte County. The Julius Rosenwald Fund provided funds for African-American schools throughout the South. Salem School was built in 1924 in the Red Oak area of the county. It served as an elementary school until 1959 when it closed due to desegregation. It survives today and serves as the fellowship hall for Salem Baptist Church which sits directly across the street. (Listed 1998)

STAUNTON HILL PLANTATION is located on spacious grounds overlooking the Staunton River. It was built for Charles Bruce, son of James Bruce who was known as one of the richest men in America in his day. It was designed by architect John E. Johnson in 1848 and is a castle-like, Gothic-style mansion. While under construction, Charles Bruce married Sarah Seldon whose brother would later

become the Confederate Secretary of War. Completed in 1850, Staunton Hill is considered one of the finest and best preserved Gothic Revival houses in America.

Staunton Hill would eventually become the home of another of Charlotte County's most famous residents, noted diplomat, David K.E. Bruce, who served as U.S. ambassador to Great Britain and France and as America's first envoy to China.

Today, the home remains in the hands of Bruce descendants. (Listed 1969)

STAUNTON RIVER BRIDGE FORTIFICATION is located in the Randolph area of Charlotte County and is now part of the Staunton River Battlefield Park. This fortification, consisting of trenches and an artillery battery, was built by Confederate soldiers, slaves, and other local citizens in preparation of the June 25, 1864 Battle of Staunton River Bridge. It is a well-preserved Civil War-era star fort. At that time, the bridge was a covered wooden structure which was of great importance to the Confederates who relied on it for supplies. The present steel-truss bridge was built in 1902 on the original stone pillars.

In June 1864, Lee's Army of Northern Virginia was desperately defending the city of Petersburg and Grant was determined to destroy the railroads forcing Lee to abandon Petersburg. Over 5000 Union troops were dispatched and over 60 miles of track were destroyed along with two trains and several railroad stations...thus destroying supply routes.

On June 23, with a battalion of only 296 reserves, Capt. Benjamin Farinholt received word from Gen. Robert E. Lee that the Union troops were heading to destroy the bridge. He made a plea for help that resulted in assistance from a ragtag band of 492 convalescing Confederate soldiers, regular troops, and local "old men and boys." On June 25, the Union Cavalry arrived at Roanoke Station. Despite the disparity in numbers, the Confederates were able to repel the enemy and save the bridge. (Listed 2014)

TOOMBS TOBACCO FARM is considered an exceptionally complete example of a 19th and 20th century tobacco farm. Located in the Red Oak area of Charlotte County, it contains a total of thirteen structures including the main residence, a mid-19th century dwelling, tobacco barns, packing shed, smokehouse, servant's quarters, barn, corncrib, chicken coop, animal pens, and family cemetery, as well as other tobacco and agricultural related structures.

The farm was owned by the Toombs family from the 1830s until 1981. They were a prominent name in the tobacco growing community of the county with many of their descendants still living in the area. (Listed 2000)

THE WADE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE is a well preserved site probably occupied by the Saponi Indians between 1000 and 1450 A.D. Many artifacts have been uncovered that have added to the knowledge of the Saponi. Some of their finds include stone triangular points, pendants, an axe; ceramic pottery, pipes, bone awls, fish hooks, and various shell beads. More recently, a burial ground has revealed much more about their customs and way of life. This site is also a part of the Staunton River Battlefield Park. Many of their finds can be seen at the Visitor Center.

(Listed 2003)

THE WATKINS HOUSE is located in the northeastern part of Charlotte County, three miles from Keysville. It was constructed in the 1840's, with an addition built around 1851. Situated on property just off of Briery Road, it was the home of William B. Watkins (1780-1850), the son of Benjamin Watkins, planter and owner of extensive acreage. Watkins was an attorney, an active church member, an officer in the army and owned considerable property in the county. He served in the War of 1812 and in 1814 was an Ensign and rose to Lieutenant Colonel by 1822. Though serving in the Virginia General Assembly for only one session, it was during this time he would return home and initiate the formation of the first School Board.

In 1810, at the age of 30, he married Susan Spencer, a neighbor and daughter of a close friend, Thomas Spencer, Jr., a prominent resident of Charlotte County. Her mother was a Watkins and one of two sisters from Dinwiddie County that Thomas Spencer, Jr. married. Upon Spencer's death in 1806, Watkins acquired a parcel of his land.

Watkins died in 1850, giving to all his children, land, slaves and goods, as well as making provisions for grandchildren. In 1866, his oldest son, Robert was forced to sell the estate due to the downturn after the War. However, through an intermarriage, the property remained in the family through acquisition of the Crymes family who owned it for 82 years.

Though shrinking in size from over 3000 acres in 1820 to 15.53 acres in 1998, the house remains essentially as built, with few major alterations. It is now known as "Bonis Est Farm" meaning "It is for good." (Listed 2004)

WESTVIEW is a brick dwelling built between 1831 and 1833 by John Elam when tax records show “new building added” at a value of \$1000. The property was part of a 240 acre parcel purchased by Elam (from Mecklenburg County) on October 9, 1829. (The property once adjoined Red Hill, home of Patrick Henry). He continued to purchase property increasing his acreage to 413 acres. Residing at the home with John Elam were his second wife, Martha J. (Davis) Elam, daughters, Ann Elizabeth, Isabella Davis and Susan Jane. In 1841, son John Wesley would join them. John was a church trustee on a deed for Mt. Carmel Church. After his death in 1847, his wife Martha owned and ran the plantation with help from her daughters and sisters as their son, John Wesley Elam was only six when his father died. John’s will left Martha a life interest in the house and the bulk of the estate. Upon her death, the property was to pass to son, John Wesley. The 1850 census lists Martha as age 59 and head of household along with Ann E. Elam, Susan J. Elam, Rody Davis, Ann Davis, and John W Elam as residing there. Son John Wesley Elam served in the Civil War as a member of the Charlotte Greys, Co. I, 56th infantry.

Martha would run the estate until her death in 1874 when John Wesley Elam would inherit. He would continue to run the estate and increase the property until his death in 1916 leaving it to his wife, Elizabeth Nowlin and after her death to her niece Kathryn Nowlin Terrell. However, after John’s death, his wife moved to Lynchburg to live with relatives. For the next 56 years the house was used only occasionally by family and finally by tenants for 23 of those years. In his will, John also requested that ¼ acre of the “old Elam homestead” be permanently set aside for a burial ground. His wife Elizabeth is not buried in the family cemetery, but at Spring Hill Cemetery in Lynchburg, VA.

Kathryn Nowlin Terrell, widow of Judge William Ervin Terrell, died 21 June 1975 leaving almost a thousand acres to her daughters, Kathryn Terrell Hare and Elizabeth Terrell Henry. Elizabeth Henry died in 1966 and her son, James Marshall Henry inherited her portion. (He descends from patriot Patrick Henry’s youngest son.) In 1984, he and Kathryn Hare partitioned to divide the property with her half to include the house. She immediately gave the house and 242 acres to her daughter, Susan with the provision that Marshall Henry and up to 20 of his lineal descendants could be buried in the family plot.

In 1998, Susan sold the property to timber investors who in turn sold it again. Later that year, the current owners purchased the house and 82 acres. There are several remaining historic log structures (with the exception of the milk

house) on the property which include a shed, log schoolhouse, smokehouse, milk house, slave cabin and barns.

The current owners have lovingly restored the home and property.
(Listed 2000)

Burials in the Westview Family Cemetery

John Elam	b. 1769 d. June 11, 1847
Martha J. Elam	b. 1796 d. Nov. 29, 1873
Ann C. Davis	b. 1793 d. Nov., 1836
Ann Elizabeth Elam	b. Nov. 13, 1828 d. Sept 20, 1858
Isabella D. Williams	b. Sept. 9, 1830 d. June 12, 1901
F(rancis) S. Williams	b. March 4, 1823 d. July 13, 1882
Susan J. Elam	b. Dec. 22, 1832 d. Sept. 14, 1890
John W(esly) Elam	b. Aug. 24, 1841 d. March 19, 1916
Elizabeth Terrell Henry	b. Jan, 7, 1913 d. July 27, 1966
James M(arshall) Henry	b. 1905 d. 1970
Kathryn Ann Henry	b. April 25, 1939 d. May 28, 1955

WOODFORK is an 1829 brick Federal-style house, located on Woodfork Road between Charlotte Court House and Cullen and built by Henry Anderson Watkins, a master builder. The property was given to Henry by his father, Joel Watkins by deeds dated 20 June 1795 and 1 May 1814.

Henry served in the War of 1812 and also served as a trustee of Hampden-Sydney College. Henry and his wife, Nancy Edmunds, raised six children at Woodfork.

The Watkins family was actively engaged in both business and government in Charlotte County since Joel Watkins arrived in the 1780s. He moved from Henrico County, home of his father Thomas Watkins of Chickahomony, at the urging of his brother-in-law William H. Morton who sold him property along Wallace Creek. Joel was married to Morton's sister Agnes. Joel and Agnes eventually purchased 1253 acres on both sides of Wardsfork from Paschal and Anne Greenhill in 1786 where Woodfork would be built.

Joel served during the Revolutionary War earning the title of Colonel in the Charlotte Militia and fought at Guilford Court House. He was a Justice of County Court, sheriff, a member of the House of Delegates, and a trustee of Hampden-Sydney College. Joel fathered five children before his death in 1820.

Henry and his brother, William Morton Watkins have been credited with the construction of other historic brick homes in Charlotte County similar to Woodfork. These include Villeview, Giff-Gaff, Broomland, Do-Well, Do-Better, and Winston. Watkins also built Smith's (or Tucker's) Store in Charlotte Court House. Prior to its construction, he reportedly consulted Thomas Jefferson and the columns that support the front portico reflect the Jeffersonian influence. The bricks for many of these homes were fired in kilns at Woodfork.

Do-Well, home of William Morton Watkins, was built in the early 1800's from bricks kilned at Woodfork. The interior and exterior woodwork of Do-Well is also very similar to that of Woodfork. The land on which Do-Well sits was built on part of the Bushy Forest grant belonging to Col. Clement Read whose great-granddaughter, Elizabeth Woodson Venable married William Morton Watkins in 1799. William served as a member of the House of Delegates and a trustee of Hampden-Sydney College. The home known as Do-Better, also constructed in the early 1800's is another home built by Watkins and very similar to Woodfork.

Villeview, in Charlotte Court House, was the home of James Pulliam Marshall and wife, Elizabeth Edmunds Watkins, daughter of Henry and Nancy Watkins. They married 4 July 1815, two years prior to the building of the first part of Villeview. Built on a lot purchased from Elizabeth's uncle, William M. Watkins, the rear portion was built between 1817 and 1827 and the front around 1825. Like the other Watkins homes, the style is very similar.

Two other very similar homes are Ridgeway and Wardsfork. Ridgeway, built in 1828 was the home of Paul S. Carrington (a cousin through the Read family) and his wife Emma Cabell. Wardsfork is located near Woodfork and was built in the 1830's.

When Henry A. Watkins died in 1848, his property was inherited by sons, Dr. Joel Watkins and Thomas E. Watkins. Thomas resided at Giff-Gaff, a two-story brick residence that was built around 1830 and burned in the early 1900's. Dr. Joe Watkins, a respected physician and successful farmer, inherited the Woodfork property. However, like many who invested heavily in the Confederate cause, he was forced to sell Woodfork as well as other family plantations to settle debts.

Located at the edge of the woods are two overgrown cemeteries which are very difficult to access...a family cemetery and a slave cemetery. The family cemetery does contain some engraved tombstones. Graves in the slave cemetery are marked only by river stones. A full inventory of the graves has not been completed.

The legacy of beautiful brick homes left by the Watkins family is still apparent in Charlotte County. Though Woodfork has passed through a number of owners since the Watkins family ownership, it has retained a high degree of integrity. The present owners have completed a major rehabilitation of the house. (Listed 2002)

Former Wacoan Dies in Alabama

Mrs. Kathryn Terrell, 89, of Selma, Ala., and formerly of Waco died Saturday in Selma.

Graveside services will be at 10 a.m. Wednesday in Oakwood Cemetery, Rev. Ervin Gathings officiating.

Mrs. Terrell was the widow of Judge W. E. Terrell, a prominent Waco attorney who died in November, 1958. He was associated with the law firm of Witt, Terrell and Witt here.

Mrs. Terrell was active in Austin Avenue Methodist Church until moving to Selma in 1965. She was a lifetime member of Women's Society of Christian Service and was a patron of Waco Art League.

Two daughters, Mrs. Virginia Wright and Mrs. Elizabeth Henry died before Mr. Terrell.

Survivors include a daughter, Mrs. James Hare of Selma, Ala.; six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.



Elizabeth *Nowlin* Elam

Birth 18 May 1838

Death 16 Oct 1917 (aged 79)

Burial [Spring Hill Cemetery](#)
Lynchburg, Lynchburg City, Virginia, USA

Source: Find-A-Grave