



NEWS AND NOTES

from

The Fauquier Historical Society

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WARRENTON, VIRGINIA

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FAIRFAX HARRISON

The most important study of Fauquier, its origins and development, does not bear the name of the county or author. *Landmarks of Old Prince William, A Study in the Origins of Northern Virginia* by Fairfax Harrison is a history of Prince William and the three other counties carved from it, covering a period from the days when Indians roamed its forests down to the present century.

Though not a history in the sense of a text book, it relates the social and political development of that area extending from Tidewater to the Blue Ridge lying between the Rappahannock and Potomac Rivers.

Fauquier, the largest of its four divisions, is treated extensively in its pages. The reader learns of the intertribal conflicts of the aborigine and how they burned off large areas of the upper end of the county between The Plains and Upperville, so the buffalo could graze, and of the first tentative settlements. He reads of the pioneers, sturdy yeomen squeezed out of the Tidewater by the Magnates, of the misfits who put down roots in the hollows and less desirable spots. Stories are told of the Carters, Lees, Hooes and others who patented large acreage for future planting.

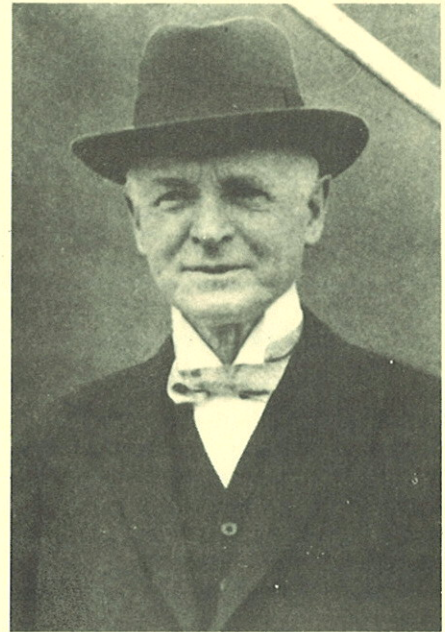
The establishment of the county with its parishes and early political development follows, along with its economic growth. The beginnings of towns, highways and railroads are detailed in its pages and there is a wealth of information concerning the founders for the inquiring genealogist.

Landmarks is written in the clear, concise language of the scholar and, opening it at random, the reader will find something to interest him on any page. However, there is nothing about the Revolution or the Civil War. This has been ably covered by other chroniclers, notably John K. Gott and the County committees whose three volumes have contributed so much to record these events.

Local historians are indebted to Alfred Horner, H. C. Groome, Curtis Chappellear and others whose research resulted in the four priceless bulletins of the Fauquier Historical Society (1921-24) and Groome's *Fauquier During the Proprietorship*.

Those historians owed much to the work done by Fairfax Harrison. When *Landmarks* was printed, anonymously in 1924, in an edition of 150 copies which were presented to selected institutions and favored individuals, the identity of the author was known to everyone. The compiler of what he modestly described as an "exercise in scissors and paste" was a resident of Fauquier, whose roots went deep in old Prince William.

Fairfax Harrison, though born in New York, in 1869, and educated at Yale and Columbia University Law School, sprang from a distinguished Virginia family. His father, Burton N. Harrison, was one of the Harrisons of Skimino in James City County, Virginia, a family of intellectuals and, who, before achieving distinction at the New York bar, had been private secretary to Jefferson Davis,



FAIRFAX HARRISON - 1936

President of the Confederacy. His mother, Constance Cary, a well-known writer of fiction and memoirs, was, on her father's side, descended from one of Virginia's most distinguished families. Her maternal grandfather was Thomas, Ninth Lord Fairfax, whose family had been proprietors of millions of acres comprising the Northern Neck of Virginia.

Thomas, Lord Fairfax, although entitled to sit in the English House of Lords preferred to live on his land in Fairfax County, as had his more recent forebears. From them Fairfax Harrison inherited a love for the rolling countryside of Northern Virginia.

In his youth he had few opportunities for visiting the state of his ancestors, but when occasions arose for rare stays in Virginia he developed a love for the Old Dominion.

Though he was never ready to

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Fairfax Harrison

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cry "Hallelujah" at the mention of Virginia's name he loved her traditions and, most of all, he loved her soil. As soon as he could, he established his family in a choice part of Virginia's piedmont.

A few years after beginning law practice in New York he gravitated to railroading. At first he was president of Monon, a prosperous if impractically small midwestern line. From 1912 until 1937 he guided the destinies of the Southern Railway Company, achieving presidency of the line.

During this time he had returned to the land of his ancestors and, in 1906, had bought property near The Plains. Here he built a handsome house which he named Belvoir, in honor of the old Fairfax estate on the Potomac near Mt. Vernon. At Belvoir, in his free time, he led the life of a country gentleman for the remainder of his days. It was at Belvoir that he produced the series of books and essays that could have made him famous had he so desired. An intensely private man, he was obsessed with anonymity. He refused honorary degrees and anything with a trace of publicity. A keen observer of men and events, while avoiding the public gaze, he nevertheless had many friends at home and abroad.

In the words of John Jennings, the distinguished former Director of the Virginia Historical Society, Fairfax Harrison "was reared in the Elizabethan ideal of the complete gentleman." He was an able railroad executive, scholar, historian and a facile writer. But despite his distinction in varied disciplines he preferred to be a farmer. His supreme happiness was to be at Belvoir with his family, superintending the tilling of his acres and the breeding of his horses.

In his full and busy life, however, he found time to write and the output of his pen was amazing. He did translations from Cato and Varro, Brumus of the Heroic Age, and of the charming memoirs of a French Huguenot in Virginia in 1686. He described the Latin translations as "done into English by a Virginia farmer."

Then, in succession, came a series of books on early American thoroughbreds: *Equine F.F.V.s*, *The Roanoke Stud*, *The Belair Stud* and others. His versatility knew no limits and a list of his writings would require several pages. Everything he wrote was printed in small editions, lacking the name of the author and presented to friends and libraries. One inscription in a presentation copy of *Landmarks* reads: "That it be given shelf room at Woodbourne,

so that it may be available to any member of your family who wishes to read it." That copy is a prized possession of the family today.

When Fairfax Harrison settled at Belvoir, looking to the east at the wooded slopes of the Pignut range and westward to the Blue Ridge, in the midst of what had been the Fairfax proprietary, his interest was aroused in the people who had settled the gentle eminences and rolling fields. He began the research which, after many years, resulted in *Landmarks of Old Prince William*. Though its small printing was available to only a few, its fame spread throughout the Commonwealth, and, in 1964, when the copyright expired, his family agreed to a second printing. Unfortunately, this volume is no longer available.

Fairfax Harrison died in 1938 and lies with his Fairfax forbears in Ivy Hill Cemetery at Alexandria. Belvoir, where the Virginia farmer entertained his friends and Mrs. Harrison created an enchanting garden, has changed hands, but for those in Fauquier, who value his contribution to our history, his memory is still green.

—J.A.C. Keith

BATIK EXHIBIT

On exhibit at the Loudoun Museum, 16 West Loudoun St., Leesburg, are works by Loudoun batik artists. Also included are examples of traditional batik from Indonesia, Africa and Southeast Asia.

A batik of Oatlands Plantation is one of the highlights of the exhibit. Also on display are several pre-war pieces from Indonesia, and a pair of sarongs designed for the Chuck Robbs.

The exhibit explains technique, displays tools and discusses the history of this popular wax-resist method of dyeing cloth.

The exhibit will continue through May 2. Museum hours are: 10-5 Monday through Saturday; 1-5 p.m. on Sunday.

Reader's Corner

Can You Help?

Mr. Fairfax Harrison was an ardent scholar of Virginia history and a willing benefactor of many worthwhile historical publications. The late Dr. Earl Gregg Swem, Librarian of the College of William and Mary, compiled for the *William and Mary Quarterly*, April 1938, a bibliography of Mr. Harrison's works. The list is indicative of his scholarship, his brilliance as a lawyer and his devotion to Virginia history.

The cornerstone of any collection of Northern Virginia, *Landmarks of Old Prince William*, has been mentioned. Of particular interest to Fauquier Countians also should be his works on horses and farming. Dr. Swem said, "There is nothing quite like his books on horses; in the preparation of these several volumes he exhausted all the manuscript and printed resources on the subject."

From his vast literary out-put, only his works of history, genealogy, horses and agriculture are listed here, in short-title form.

Aris sonis focusque; being a memoir of an American family, the Harrisons of Skimino and particularly of Jesse Burton Harrison and Burton Norvell Harrison. Privately printed, 1910. 413 p.

The Background of the American Stud Book. Richmond, 1933. 121 p.

The Belair Stud, 1747-1761. Richmond, 1929, 102 p.

Cato's Farm Management ... by a Virginia Farmer. Privately printed, Chicago, 1910. 60 p.

Early American Turf Stock, 1730-1830. Richmond, 1934-35. 2 vols.

The Devon Carys. New York, 1920. 2 vols.

The Equine F.F.V.s, a study of the evidence for the English horses imported into Virginia before the Revolution. Richmond, 1928. 2 vols.

A Frenchman in Virginia; ... Richmond, 1923. 146 p.

The John's Island Stud (South Carolina) 1750-1788. Richmond, 1931. 236 p.

Virginia Land Grants, ... Richmond, 1925. 184 p.

The Proprietors of the Northern Neck, Chapters of Culpeper Genealogy. Richmond, 1926, 178 p.

The Roanoke Stud, 1795-1833. Richmond, 1930. 244 p.

Roman Farm Management; the treatises of Cato and Varro done into English, with notes of modern instances, by a Virginia farmer [Fairfax Harrison]. New York, 1913. 365 p.

Sally Cary; a Long Hidden Romance of Washington's Life. New York, 1916. 104 p.

The Virginia Carys; an Essay in Genealogy. New York, 1919. 194 p.

Mr. Harrison's contributions to the literature of industry and railroading would fill several pages. He was truly a "Renaissance man" and one of Virginia's last classical scholars.

— John K. Gott

Editor's Note: A xerox edition of *Virginia Land Grants* can be purchased from Virginia Book Co., P. O. Box 431, Berryville, VA 22611.

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How would you be willing to help the Society this year?

News and Notes will contain in each issue a list of as many persons as possible who are conducting genealogical or historical research on persons or places related to Fauquier County. To be included in this column write The Fauquier Historical Society, P. O. Box 675, Warrenton, VA 22186. Please enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope.

DAVENPORT. Donna D. Warren, P. O. Box 11, Pungoteague, VA 23422 seeks info. on the following: Manzel Davenport, b. 18 Mar 1882 in Fredericksburg; Crismond, last known address Warrenton. Also Johnny, Ira and Rose, whose father was Walter Daniel Davenport.

ETHERTON/ETHERINGTON/ETHINGTON/EDRINGTON. Mrs. Jacqueline E. Lee, P. O. Box 1036, St. Johns, AZ 85936 is searching for a journal writer by the above. First name probably James, John or Joseph. His children were born between 1775 and 1792 in VA. According to tradition he was a cobbler and died in VA.

GROVES/PRITCHETT. Mrs. Elsie W. Snorgrass, Tipton, MO 65081 is seeking information on the parents of William T. Groves, a farmer near Warrenton. Also info. on Sallie Pritchett of VA.

HITE/O'BANNON. Ruben Bates, Jr., 361 W. Tremont, Waverly, IL 62692 is researching the O'Bannon and Hite families. Specifically Jacob Hite who married Catherine, dau. of Bryan O'Bannon. Mr. Bates is also searching for a photo of "Privado" the O'Bannon home which burned in 1958.

MARYE. Mrs. A. M. Robertson, 902 So. Buchanan St., Arlington, VA 22204 would like the names of the parents of Lucy M. Marye, b. May 10, 1834; d. Jan. 27, 1909. Buried at Mt. Holly Cemetery, Remington; death is listed in Rappahannock cemetery listings.

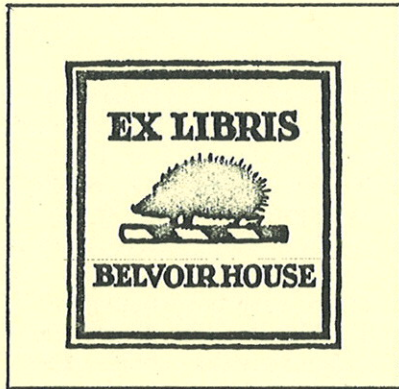
OSBURN/CHEW. Mrs. Jean Herron Smith, 301 South School St., Fairhope, AL 36532 is looking

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Auction and Flea Market

Our Auction and Flea Market will be held on Old Town Day, May 15th at the Old Gaol Museum. The Auction will begin at 11:00 a.m. and will be conducted by Wilbur Shumate of Warrenton. The Flea Market will continue throughout the day.

Odds and ends suitable for auction or sale will be welcomed. All contributions are tax deductible. Articles can be picked up and stored if necessary. Call Jennings Flathers at 347-7386.



Fairfax Harrison's Bookplate.
Black ink on dark blue paper.

Can You Help?

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for info. on a school in New Baltimore, Fauquier Co. about 1810. Balaam Osburn and his brother-in-law Richard Chew, went to school there. Richard practiced as a physician in Fauquier.

RITCHIE. Mrs. Virginia Heine-Geldern, 12 Douglas Mowbray Rd., Peekskill, NY 10566 is seeking the surname of Mary, wife of John Ritchie who lived in Fauquier ca. 1776-77.

SIDNEY. Mrs. Philip H. Sydney, 71 Hillcrest Dr., Penfield, NY 14526 is seeking proof that Pvt. Joseph Sidney (SIDNER, SIDMER) b. 29 Sept. 1757, Northumberland, England d. 6 Dec 1815, Ithaca, NY is a descendant of Algernon Sidney b England 1622, d. 1683.

Eleanor Kaine Neilson

With the death of Mrs. Robert K. Neilson, on February 14th, the Historical Society lost a charter member, a faithful supporter, and a devoted and loyal leader. She was one of its founders who never slackened her interest in its aims or her activities in its behalf.

The minutes of the August 9, 1964 meeting, of persons hoping to save the old jail building, lists Eleanor Neilson as one of three representatives of the Antiquarian Society, and one of two representatives of the Warrenton Garden Club. One of the actions of that meeting was the selection of a work committee of five persons, one of whom was Mrs. Neilson. Out of the activities of that committee came the creation of the Fauquier Historical Foundation and the agreement with the Board of Supervisors providing for the use of the old jail

as a museum under the care of the Foundation (later changed to Society).

When the restoration of the old jail buildings was made a major project for the celebration of the country's bicentennial, Eleanor Neilson worked on the Fund Raising Committee and then on the small Building Committee that watched over the restoration as it moved to the reopening as the Old Gaol Museum on July 4th, 1976. At the time of her death, she was a member of the Board of Directors and attended meetings as long as it was possible for her to do so.

Eleanor Kaine Neilson was born in Uniontown, Pa., in 1895. She married Robert K. Neilson and moved to Fauquier in 1930. She is survived by a son, Robert of Warrenton and a daughter, Mrs. George Dodge of San Francisco.

- W. W. Parkinson

Annual Meeting

The Fauquier Historical Society will hold its annual meeting at Airlie on Wednesday, June 2nd. Cash bar at 6 p.m. Dinner at 7:00 will be followed by a short business meeting. John K. Gott, Historian, will speak on Life in Fauquier County Before the Revolution.

Call Kathy Bowling - 347-5579- for reservations.

Museum Opens

The Old Gaol Museum will open for the 1982 season on Wednesday, April 21. Museum hours are Wednesday and Saturday from 1:00 to 5:00. Museum phone: (703) 347-5525.

Mrs. Frances Ritter will continue in charge and will arrange special tours upon request.

The Fauquier Historical Society

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