



# NEWS AND NOTES

from

## The Fauquier Historical Society

Vol. 8, No. 2

WARRENTON, VIRGINIA

Spring 1986

### The Fauquier Female Institute

The history of The Fauquier Female Institute goes back nearly 130 years. The first mention of the property is in 1834, when 7½ acres on Lee Street were bought by William F. Philipps from Robert and Elizabeth Brent. The red brick house still standing on the corner of Lee and Fifth Streets was already there.

In January 1857, Mr. Philipps rented his house and sold the entire tract to a corporation of citizens under the name of The Fauquier Seminary for the purpose of establishing a school for girls.

The founders of the school decided not to use the red brick house for the Seminary, but built the large white structure on the eastern part of the property. The school was opened in the fall of 1857, and the first principal was Dr. Bacon who was teaching there during the Civil War. He was followed by the Reverend H. H. Wyer of the Warrenton Baptist Church.

The property itself changed hands repeatedly and in 1871, was conveyed by E. M. Spillman, Commissioner, to John A. Spilman and Robert Fraser, who became full owner in 1877.

Following the tenure of Dr. Fraser, the principal was the Reverend J. A. Chambliss who remained two years. A Miss Barnes and her brother were next in charge of the school and they were followed by the Reverend Alexander Fleet.

In the meantime, the property

The charming sketch of the museum on the banner was drawn by staff artist Susan Nelson.



—Courtesy of The Fauquier Democrat

Ladies of the Fauquier Female Institute, at Warrenton Parade, May 1923.

was purchased by Major Robert P. Barry, Clifton Farm, Warrenton, who leased the school to Professor George G. Butler, who with his wife and three daughters conducted a very successful school there for many years.

After his death, his oldest daughter, Miss Nellie V. Butler, became principal. In 1923, the surviving Butlers, Miss Nellie and Miss Edith, gave up the school. Three of the teachers tried to keep it going, but the effort was not successful and the school closed in 1925.

The property was sold by the Barry heirs in 1915 to the Ullman brothers who, in turn, sold it to Mr. Vincent Jacobs. Sometime after 1915, the school building was converted into apartments.

Mr. David L. Ferguson, the developer of Leeds Square, had purchased the property from Mr. Jacobs. In 1985, Mr. Paul Klaaseen, Leesburg, bought The Fauquier Female Institute building from Mr. Ferguson and has converted it into a retirement home.

#### Miss Evans Recalls

M. Louis Evans in her book, *An Old Timer in Warrenton and Fauquier County*, wrote: "I first knew the Institute in the summer of 1899 when we came from North Carolina for the summer and boarded there. The session before had not been too profitable for the Butlers, so they threw open the school for summer

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## Female Institute

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boarders. It was soon filled to overflowing with some truly delightful guests from Baltimore, Washington, Norfolk and other places in the state.

"The lovely grounds were hung here and there with hammocks and swings, and benches were plentiful. There was lots of entertainment for old and young. I can remember to this day the big basement dining room. When my family returned in 1904 to make Warrenton our home, the Institute was in full swing with full capacity of girls, many my own age, and it was my pleasure to meet and know a number of them."

In an interview with Miss Elizabeth Hutton, a life-long resident of Warrenton, I learned many fascinating details about the Institute.

She graduated in 1911 in a class of four girls, one of whom was Miss Lavinia Hamilton, also a Warrenton resident. At that time, there were about fifty students, half of whom were boarders, who came from all over Virginia, Washington, D. C., and nearby states.

A few local boys attended as day students, among them the late Dr. J. O. Hodgkin, Jr., and the late Mr. Hugh Spillman. Miss Hutton said that the boys did not like being at a girls' school and caused a lot of mischief.

The basic fundamentals of educa-

tion were stressed with emphasis on the "Three Rs". A great deal of the time in English class was given to memorizing poems. Miss Hutton remembers that at least one poem a week was assigned, and she said that many times after she knew it by heart, she really didn't understand what the poet had had in mind when he wrote it!

In foreign languages, the students were given the choice of Latin or French. The only science she remembers studying was psychology, which she also found hard to understand. History and Geography were also offered and Miss Hutton said there was great stress laid on Bible study.

In one class, *The History of Christianity*, she remembers that the textbooks had been used by many generations of students and were quite battered with many pages missing!

Music was a favorite subject and many students received individual instruction in piano.

### Mischief in Warrenton

When asked about sports or organized athletics, Miss Hutton said nothing of the kind existed. The only exercise which the boarders got was going for walks uptown, two by two, in a long procession. They were well chaperoned by Miss Alice Butler, and no student was allowed to speak to or even look at a boy on the street.

The boys, in their turn, did everything possible to attract the girls' attention, even one time climbing a tree and hauling up a big bucket of water to a limb hanging over the sidewalk. When Miss Alice passed beneath, she was drenched by a deluge!

As she did not like to wash her hair, many months would go by before she attempted this chore. The girls were much amused as Miss Alice cut the walk short and returned home to shed her wet clothing and give her hair a good soaping and rinsing.

Miss Evans also mentioned in her book "the many indignities suffered by the Butlers at the hands of the local lads, who liked nothing better than to play pranks and annoy the Butlers in any and every way. They did not confine their activities to Halloween, either. I recall one night when the cow was painted green. Of course, it did not survive."

### Commencement

Commencement was the high point of the year. And what a day and evening that was! Miss Evans wrote: "Long before the hour set for the exercises, the schoolroom was packed to its capacity. Large swinging kerosene lamps helped to heat the packed room to more than summer heat...I can close my eyes and smell the honeysuckle and the faint odor from the big lamps...feel the excitement...hear the hum of many voices, the buzz, the violins being tuned...then the long awaited moment...when the hall was silenced...and the first number on the program, generally a well trained chorus would announce...Miss Alice Butler 'riding herd' on the youth, trying to keep order throughout the evening...on the huddle of girls and boys here and there and through the building...for it was one of the few times during the year the girls were allowed to talk with the boys...The Institute Commencements were popular always and always largely attended and long appreciated."

When the Butlers left the Institute, an era closed in Warrenton, though the school continued for a year or so longer. The Butlers—Miss Nellie, Miss Alice, Miss Edith, even Professor Butler ("Pa" to the girls), and his wife were an institution in themselves.

The property was used as a boarding house for a few years and

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## The President Reports:

Compliments are in order to Gary Heath, Chairman, and his committee — Lucy Jones, Bob McGuire, Isabelle Palmer and Harold Spencer — for a tremendous job well done in preparing the prospectus requesting funding for restoration of the Museum.

As a result of this application we have received a letter from Delegate Kenneth Rollins advising us that the Society has received a \$25,000 grant from the Division of Historic Landmarks.

These monies will be used to execute the priorities established by Gary's committee. First on the list will be climate control in the jailer's residence and in one room in the cellblock which will be used for storage of perishable collections.

We are now working with a stonemason who will point up the bricks — some of which are falling — on the jailer's residence. After completion of the brickwork, the building will be painted. The cost of these repairs will be funded by the county.

Six display cases, 81"x84", donated by the National Red Cross in Washington, D. C., are now in place in the museum. They are lined in red velvet, have locks, lights and are wired with sensors which can be connected to the town police.

The original cost of the cases was \$5,000 each. To date the cost to the Society is \$83.00. These cases have



—Photo by John Toler

### J. WILLARD LINEWEAVER

added to our exhibit space and to the professionalism of the museum.

The end of May will bring my retirement as president of the Society.

The past three years have been enjoyable ones, filled with enthusiasm for the accomplishments we have seen develop in the museum. Working with the dedicated group of members who have volunteered their time and talents toward making the museum and the Society what it is today has been extremely rewarding.

Gary Heath, our president-elect, will have my full support in the coming years of his term, as I am sure he will have of all Society members.

—J. Willard Lineweaver



—Photo by Isabelle Palmer

## Museum Opens

More than 750 visitors attended the museum's opening on May 17th.

Out-of-state visitors came from Alabama, California, Canada, Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, North and South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas and West Virginia.

Sixty-four Virginia towns and cities were represented, and five Fauquier school groups have enjoyed tours.

Our attendance has gradually increased, with more than 2,000 visitors in the 1985-86 season.

A great and successful effort was made to clean up the museum after the chimney workers and painters had left. The cellblock doors and railings have been painted and a general sprucing up is continuing.

Many thanks to Gary and Sheila Heath, Bea and Chilton McDonnell and Audrey Jones for their enthusiastic help in preparations for the opening.

Mr. and Mrs. Philip Page Nelson have donated the Black Horse Cavalry's Guide-on staff and pike which was in the possession of Alex D. Payne, after 1865, and remained in his home, *Mecca*, in Warrenton. Also given was a pie safe, used in the family from 1823 to 1966.

Until further notice, the museum hours will be 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Wednesdays and Saturdays. Special tours will be conducted upon request. Museum phone is 347-5525. If there is no answer call: 347-1273 or 347-5980.

—Lucy B. Jones

## Exhibit

A major exhibit, which examines the life of Confederate president Jefferson Davis and the post-war Lost Cause movement, opened at the White House of the Confederacy, last fall.

Funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the permanent exhibit is installed on the ground-floor level of the former home of the Jefferson Davis family.

Built in 1818 for Dr. John Brockebrough, a prominent Richmond

## Profile:

# Blind Tom, Pianist

Blind Tom, a piano prodigy, lived for many years in Fauquier County.

This musical genius was born of slave parents in Georgia, in 1845. The mother and boy were owned by General Joseph D. Bethune.

When he was little, Tom's mother would put the blind child in a box or basket under the window of the Bethune home, where he would keep quiet for hours if someone were playing the piano. Occasionally, he would crawl out of this box, creep into the parlor, and climb up on the stool and begin to reproduce the music he had heard.

This attracted the attention of the family, who had Tom coached each day. He had great talent, and from his little fingers came the sweet strains of music.

As he grew older, he became more proficient at fingering the keys.

After completing the selection assigned to him, his hands would have to be held to prevent him from drifting off into another, and still another composition, without the slightest pause. While at the piano, he seemed to be oblivious to anything save the instrument under his hands.

During the Civil War, John Bethune, the General's son, had marched through Fauquier while attached to a company of Confederate soldiers, and was so pleased with the land around Warrenton that, when he returned home, he implored his father to come to this area and buy a tract of land.

The son's request was met with favor and, in 1865, the senior Bethune moved to Fauquier County with his family and established himself on a farm on the White Sulphur Springs Road, three miles from Warrenton.

Upon coming to Virginia he brought Blind Tom, then twenty years old.

A house was built for Tom in the yard of the Bethune home, and he was provided with a piano. Here he lived for several years, doing such chores as a blind child could do, and practicing on his piano.

It was from Warrenton that John Bethune started out on his many tours with his ward, who was otherwise half-witted. Not only did Blind Tom give concerts in all of the principal

cities in the United States, but he was taken abroad, and in foreign countries was looked upon as a marvel of the age.

He played to great audiences all over Europe. After he became world famous, and while on one of the tours, John Bethune was killed in a railroad accident. His brother James assumed charge of Blind Tom, and continued to tour the country.

In the meantime, John's widow instituted suit to gain custody of Tom. This action was resented by the Bethune family, and court suits resulted.

In every city in which Blind Tom was engaged to play, John Bethune's widow would file suit against the Bethune family through some local attorney, and Blind Tom would be forced to remain in the town until the case was decided.

The widow Bethune finally won her case, after spending large sums of money. The Bethune family, contesting her right of custody, also spent thousands of dollars, which bankrupted them.

By a very strange coincidence, after Mrs. Bethune legally gained custody of Blind Tom, he refused to touch the piano, and no persuasion could induce him to continue his concerts.

It is thought that Blind Tom's mother was behind the lawsuits, as a good portion of the money from the concerts was paid to her.

Blind Tom was characterized as an extremely temperamental individual. He would play only when he felt like it, and could not be induced to give a concert if he did not want to.

He died soon after the law suit was decided.

— Edited from *Old Homes and Families of Fauquier County, Virginia, The W.P.A. Records, 1937, by Isabelle S. Palmer.*

**REMINDER!!!**

**Dues Are Due!**

## Female Institute

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had many tenants. During the ownership of the Ullmans, it was improved and modernized and finally converted into apartments during Mr. Jacobs' time.

### Now a Retirement Home

Now the Sunrise Retirement Home of Warrenton is open, and has room for about 34 people who might need some supervision, but are not ready for a nursing home.

The exterior of the building still has the details of the beautiful Italianate style architecture so popular in the 1850s when the Fauquier Institute was built. The National Park Service considers the stately building a "certified historic structure."

The interior of the building has been completely renovated with new plumbing and electrical systems, ramps, a sprinkler system and an elevator installed.

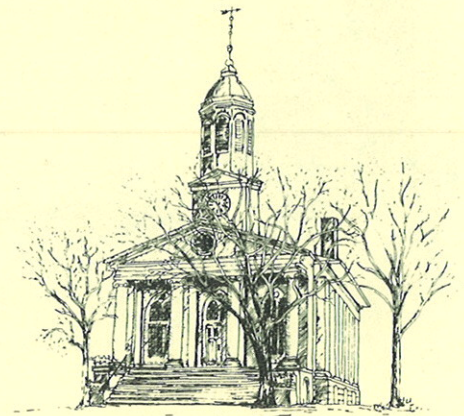
Many of the original rooms such as the library, dining room and parlor are used for the same purpose. Period furniture, oriental rugs and blending wallpaper accent the original architecture with its high ceilings and winding staircase.

Outside, newly planted shrubs and trees surround the freshly painted exterior.

So the 130 years from the construction of The Fauquier Female Institute to the present time covers a varied career for this stately building.

School, boarding house, apartments, and now a retirement home. Many lives in the past have been touched by this building and many more will continue to enjoy its lovely facilities.

—Anne Brooke Smith



OLD COURTHOUSE

# Museum Chimney Restored

The Society, implementing a long planned restoration program, had the four flues in the museum's east-wall chimney relined and dampers added last fall.

The exterior wall of the fireplace, which served the original 1808 structure, had been opened and a cooking fireplace built for the kitchen when it was added in 1824.

A third small fireplace, in the east room above the kitchen, was served by the same chimney. On further examination, a fourth fireplace was discovered to have been boarded up on the opposite wall.

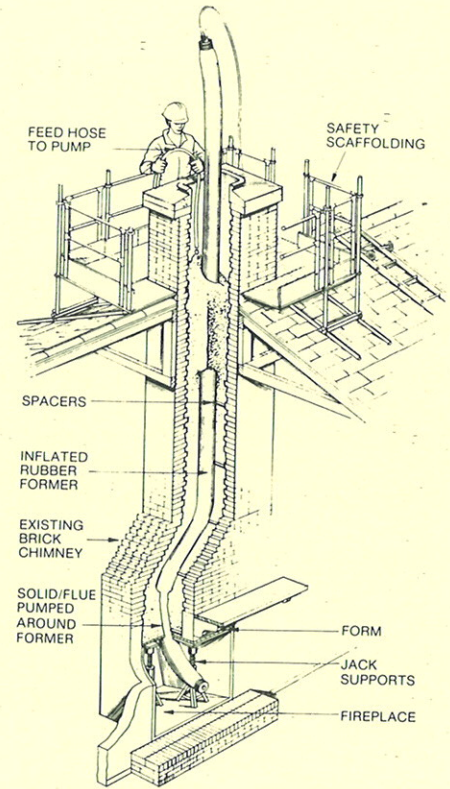
Since the flues lacked masonry liners, the first order in the restoration, undertaken by Firemaster of Manassas, began with a complete chimney sweep that removed soot, cake and any loose material, providing a solid base for the lining.

Inflatable rubberized tubes, one for each flue, were inserted so they protruded from the top and the bottom of the chimney. Spacers were used to center the tubes, which were then inflated to create the properly

sized opening for each flue.

A special mix of cement and perlite was pumped into the chimney and left to cure overnight. The tubes were then removed, leaving a smooth, hard finished, properly sized lining. Finally, the dampers were installed.

The museum committee later held a "fireplace-warming," and all four fireplaces burned merrily.



Courtesy Firemaster

How the work is done.



—Democrat Staff Photo/Mike Hickey

Herman Hanger removes part of a wall to renovate the second-floor fireplace.

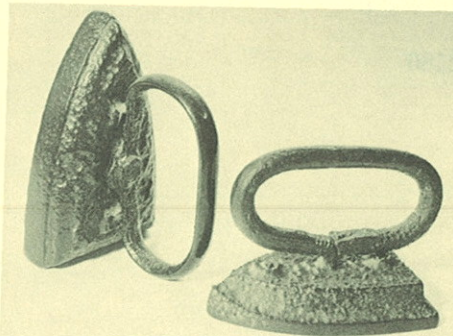


—Democrat Staff Photo/Mike Hickey

Workmen from Firemaster of Manassas insert inflatable, tubular bladders into flues.



**Memberships  
Are Due !**



—Photo by Isabelle Palmer

Two flatirons were a recent gift from Crilly M. Lunsford of Marshall.

These irons were made (or repaired) by Robert Ross a former slave who was a prominent wheelright/blacksmith in Marshall. They were used in his family until given to Mr. Lunsford.

Rosstown, a black community which adjoins Marshall, was named for him after he divided his plot of land for several families.

Robert Ross and his wife, Ellen, came to Fauquier after the Civil War from Southside, Virginia, where he had been a farrier in the Confederate Army.



# Can You Help?

**BARKER, HARRISON.** Mrs. Willittie Wonser, 1103 W. Main, Puyallup, WA 98371, needs info on Susannah Harrison, b. 1731, d. 1807; m. William Barker. Lived on Pignut Ridge. Had 10 children. Daus. Betsy and Hannah m. O'Bannons. Sally m. a Lampken. John was member of Va. Legislature. From where did Wm. and Susannah come and did they have family elsewhere in the Colonies?

**JACKSON.** Mrs. Herman Siefkes, 1425 South 15th, Lincoln, NE 68502, seeks info on Jacob and Ruth Jackson. Eldest son Wm. H., b. 1 Mar 1804. William's son Nathaniel b. Warrenton, 13 Oct 1834. Some of the Jacksons still in Warrenton at that date.

**JEFFRIES.** Steven Jeffries, 4800 Erie St., College Park, MD 20740, wants info on Jeffries family living in Fauquier 1758-1800. Especially Anderson Jeffries, b. 1763, his siblings and parents.

**HALEY/HEALY/HAILEY.** Mrs. Nancy Haley, 4475 Hutchinson Rd., Batavia, OH 45103, seeks any info on Haley family. Came from Kentucky. Abner b. Fauquier 4 Jun 1780, d. Brachen Co. KY, 24 May 1844, m. Mary (Molly) Jett, 5 Jan 1803, Fauquier.

**KING.** Mrs. Alice Jones, P.O. Box 101, Lake George, CO 80827, needs info on Robert King family. Robert b. 15 Mar 1755. Married

twice; second wife Elizabeth Bennett. Wants name of first wife and children, if any.

**SILCOTT.** Mrs. M. Inez Silcott, Rt 2, Box 58 DD, Seafood, DE 19973, wants info on Peyton and Norval Silcott. Both were constables in Fauquier 1830-1836, Dist. 8. Norval m. Margaret Glascock 1836, possibly Upperville area. Lived Delaplane. Who were their parents?

## Petition for the Division of Fauquier County, 1795

James W. Emmons, 5435 Newell Road, Meridan, MI 39305, is searching for a facsimile of the original document of Petition for the Division of Fauquier County.

This document accompanied the survey which divided Fauquier into two parishes, Hamilton and Leeds, dated November 1795.

This Petition, addressed to the Hon'ble, the Senate and Gentlemen of the House of Representatives of the State of Virginia, is signed by Linefield Sharpe, Lewis Duncan, Joshua King, Daniel Merdy Turner, William King, Thomas Primm(?), William Kerns, Thornton Morgain, Austin Bradford, James Williams, Robt Kerns and many others.

# Exhibit

(Continued from Page 3)

physician and banker, and altered in the 1850s with the addition of a third floor, the design of the house has been attributed to America's first native born professional architect, Robert Mills, designer of the Washington Monument.

In 1861, when Richmond became the capital of the Confederacy, the city rented the house to the Confederate government for the use of the Davis family.

Today, the White House is undergoing restoration to its wartime appearance as the official and family residence.

The Confederate States of America existed for four years in the anguish of devastating total war, but, even in defeat, it has survived as the Lost Cause—a response of Southern people to themselves and their failure.

This permanent exhibition *Jefferson Davis and the Lost Cause*, displays and emphasizes what many people believed about the Confederate experience and focuses on objects associated with the major events in Davis' life. It commemorates the popular movement and the Confederacy in the late nineteenth century.

The White House is located in historic Court End in downtown Richmond, next door to the Museum of the Confederacy.

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## *The Fauquier Historical Society*

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