

LORE and LEGENDS

INSIDE:

The Haunted Hudgins House and haunted Ordinary, 4C, 7C;
Confederate veterans teach law to former slave, 21C;
Guinea's fish camps, 26C;
Growing up at Callis Wharf, 29C;
and much more

GLOUCESTER-MATHEWS GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Section C
Thursday, October 3, 2024

Moonlight over Rosewell's ruins...more on this historic landmark, page 2C.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN T. BASS

Rosewell: Gloucester's legendary ruin

BY SARA E. LEWIS, DEVELOPMENT OFFICER,
FAIRFIELD FOUNDATION
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE-JOURNAL

There is no other place in Gloucester as fabled as the Rosewell Ruins, with tales passed from generation to generation. Twelve-thousand-square feet, three stories over a tall English basement, with 17 fireplaces vented into four massive chimneys, the ruins are all that remain of an early colonial plantation. Gloucester's largest dwelling, the manor was occupied into the early years of the twentieth century. Two hundred years earlier, it was the dream house of Mann Page I, inheritor of great wealth built up from tobacco and slavery. Born in colonial Virginia, he was English educated and knowledgeable in the ways of landed gentry.

So why, you may wonder, did Rosewell end up in ruins?

Rosewell was built on land Page's ancestors settled a century earlier, taken from the Powhatan people. It was in the heartland of Tsenacommacah, whose primary village was six miles upriver at Werowocomoco. More English settlers arrived and native people moved west. Soon, Englishmen discovered a cash crop: tobacco. Like settlers in the Caribbean, they bought people who had been captured in Africa or their children born in the Caribbean or English colonies, to cultivate fields, build homes, tend horses, cook and clean. The exquisite manor and lifestyle became a burden for later generations of the family, who struggled with debt.



FILE PHOTO

Rosewell before its destruction by fire in 1916

In the 19th century, other families owned the manor and continued to enslave people. After the Civil War, Rosewell's owners, like those at other plantations, lost much of their wealth, made up of the value of the people they enslaved. Gloucester, like other Southern communities, was dev-

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Lore and Legends

Like wreaths of fog on a humid morning, the stories of our past weave around the buildings and people of the present: this house is haunted; these Confederate officers taught law to a former slave; there are remnants of fishing camps.

In this "Lore and Legends" section, we try to penetrate the mists of time to bring some of the past back into the present.

This work would be impossible without generous support from our friends and neighbors, whose research and knowledge built the foundation. We gratefully acknowledge their help.





ROSEWELL: *Gloucester's legendary ruin*

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2C)

astated by losses sustained during the war, including crops and livestock that were stolen, given away, or sold at low prices to feed the troops. Many men died and others returned home wounded. Extended families moved in together. At Rosewell, a widowed daughter and her children moved home. It took many years for families and farms to heal from the war. Quiet years would pass slowly.

Soon, former children and grandchildren from the plantation South began to write legends about the past and their fond memories of better times. Lucy Burwell Page Saunders was the last child of Governor John Page, born in 1808, the year of his death. She wrote a fictional Christmas story, "Lenora and the Ghost," when she was 68 and lived in a Washington, D.C., home for genteel yet impoverished ladies. The tale is possibly at the root of many ghost stories told about the ruin. In the tale, the supposed ghost is discovered to be an African American man, a racist trope used in other Southern stories of the era. Despite the misrepresentations and legends the novel spawned, her memories of the interior of Rosewell have been an important source of information for historians.

Many memories of Gloucester and Rosewell found their way into early local history publications about Tidewater plantations, which began to appear in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A 1907 publication, "Life in Old Virginia," included with great surety that Captain John Smith was rescued "upon what is now known as 'Rosewell' plantation, the former home of Governor John Page …" It was then believed that Rosewell was the site of Werowocomoco, which archaeologists have since proved to be farther to the northwest.

The author continued to relate Rosewell to Werowocomoco by describing two great stones located in nearby Carter's Creek, believed to be the ones on which Smith's head was placed and where Pocahontas ran to rescue him from being executed by her father's men. He mentions the English house, which John Smith had built for Powhatan nearby, and a rushing spring in Carter's Creek being the source for Pocahontas's secret name, Matoaka.

The author visited Rosewell before the 1916 fire that hollowed its walls and left it a ruin. He said, "Rosewell mansion is substantially built of brick, three story and basement. The foundation walls are three and one-half feet thick. The reception hall is large, the ceilings lofty, and the whole mansion is indicative of refined taste and wealth. From the upper windows, a magnificent view is had of the surrounding level lands and the waters of the creeks and the York River."

He follows his architectural sketch with a rumor that can be found in subsequent publications to this day: "During the life of Governor Page, Thomas Jefferson was a frequent and welcome visitor there. While on one of his visits he wrote the rough draft of the Declaration of Independence in what is now known as the 'Blue Room,' situated on the northwest corner of the second story of this house." Since a committee of the Second Continental Congress, which included Jefferson, was tasked with writing the Declaration on June 11, 1776, the founding father could scarce have traveled from Philadelphia to Gloucester and back and written a draft for completion by the committee before it was signed on July 4, 1776. Nevertheless, it is true that Jefferson was a frequent guest of his William and Mary pal John Page and many of their letters still exist.

The Fairfield Foundation, an organization with a mission of involving the public in hands-on archaeology, looks for clues in the soil, the ruins, and the records room to confirm or negate such legends and lore. Every carefully scraped trowel-full of dirt, fragment of brick, or tattered old document contributes to the story of our county and our country. The Fairfield Foundation has conducted archaeology at Rosewell for nearly 25 years and last year, took over management and preservation responsibilities for Gloucester's treasured ruin. You can be among the first to learn about Rosewell's true history and distinguish between it and our beloved legends by becoming an annual member. Join Fairfield in the evolving and exciting discovery of our nation's history when visiting them online at fairfieldfoundation.org.





The Haunting of the Hudgins House

BY RUBY WILLIAMS

The Haunting of Hudgins House in Mathews is an eerie tale that dates back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Hudgins House is a Mathews County Historical Landmark and is now known as Hummock Hall.

Located off Tabernacle Road, the home was built in the 1800s making the house about 200 years old. The home was bought nearly a century after its construction by Capt. Augustine (Gus) F. Hudgins, who was well known to the community as the "Light House Keeper."

During his duties as a lighthouse keeper, he took a leave of absence to address disturbances that were occurring within his home. It is said that a spirit began to haunt his home as well as torment his wife, Molly, and their children.

The current owner, Robert Petersen, was warned by the real estate agent that the house was haunted prior to his buying the home in 2003.

"When I bought it, I was told that it was haunted and I thought that was rather interesting, " said Petersen.

Mildred Sadler Hudgins, who lived in the house next door, told him about the history of the house and she also gave him a copy of an excerpt written about the house. The excerpt was called The Haunted Hudgins House: Excerpts from Folklore of Mathews, Virginia: Ghostlore and Witchcraft. It was written by Dr. Rosalind Hammond, a Mathews native. The excerpt was written in 1973 while Dr. Hammond was a graduate student at the University of Virginia. Petersen owns those excerpts to this day.



RUBY WILLIAMS / GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Robert Petersen stands in front of Hummock Hall, which is also known for the haunted Hudgins House tales. Petersen currently owns the home and has lived there since 2003.



"It's an excerpt from a research paper that was done at the University of Virginia that tells the story of all the things that went on in this house at the turn of the 20th century. It's kind of amazing. Fortunately, I have not had anything like that (the things in the book) happen in my own experience," said Petersen.

Petersen read some of the tales about the house. One of the tales was from the WPA Federal Writers Project from the 1930s.

"We children were also interested in the Old Hudgins House, which was haunted. Mr. Gus Hudgins was at the lighthouse and would only get home once in a while, but his family lived in the haunted house. Any

SEE **HAUNTED HOUSE,** PAGE **5C**

What's happening?

Fun fall events in our neighborhood

THURSDAY, OCT. 3

BATTLE OF THE HOOK: The 243rd anniversary of Gloucester's Battle of the Hook will be commemorated today at Abingdon Park.

SMART MONEY SKILLS: The Gloucester County Public Library, Main Street Center, will hold its Smart Money Skills program for students in sixth through twelfth grades today, beginning at 4:30 p.m. Learn how to take control of your finances and achieve your goals with Reggie Rossignol of Chesapeake Bank. Registration is now open.

DUCKS UNLIMITED BANQUET: The Piankatank River Chapter of Virginia Ducks Unlimited will hold its 4th annual Wetlands Conservation Banquet at the Piankatank Ruritan Club, Hudgins, beginning at 6 o'clock tonight. Proceeds are used to support wetlands con-

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HAUNTED HOUSE: *The Hudgins place in Mathews*

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4C)

time of day, you could be sitting in the house and there would be the sound of something whizzing by your head and at other times you would feel as though someone had slapped your face and you could see the red marks that were left."

He further read that it did not happen to just anyone in the house. Anyone who visited the house would be treated the same way. He also read that they would also experience their bed folding would be jerked at night. He read that the family felt as though this was done because someone else wanted Mr. Hudgins's place in the lighthouse.

Petersen, who is a retired skilled joiner and cabinet maker, made upgrades to the home. He also made almost everything that resides within the home upgraded into a federal style (approximately 1780-1830).

"I have done extensive renovations on this house," said Petersen. "Basically, certain sections of this house I tore it down to the foundation and then rebuilt it, because it was in really bad shape and needed help," said Petersen.

Petersen to this day is renovating the home, and it is unknown when it will be completed.

"It has been quite a project and it is not finished. I sometimes wonder if it ever

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RUBY WILLIAMS / GAZETTE-JOURNAL

A door located in the home of Robert Petersen covered in hex marks that were made centuries ago.

What's happening?

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4C)

servation in Mathews, and across the United States. Tickets can be purchased at piankatankriverdu.org. Single tickets start at $85.

STATE FAIR: The State Fair of Virginia is ongoing from now through Sunday at The Meadow Event Park in Doswell.

FRIDAY, OCT. 4

JURIED SHOW: Arts on Main, Gloucester, will have its annual Juried Show opening reception and awards

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HAUNTED HOUSE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5C)



Lighthouse keeper Capt. Augustine (Gus) F. Hudgins and his wife, Molly Hudgins.

will be finished, because it is really expensive to do this," said Petersen.

During the renovation process, he made an interesting discovery.

"There are hex marks in this house all over the place," said Petersen.

Petersen found them as he was removing the paint from the woodwork. He found it on the window frames and around the fireplace. He initially just thought they were marks that a kid made.

"Later on, I found out that those X's weren't just X's. They are witchcraft things to keep evil spirits and witches out," said Petersen.

Although Petersen did not experience any of the things that occurred in the excerpts, he spoke briefly of strange occurrences in the home such as the bed shaking slightly, but does not believe that the home is still haunted. He recalled a few instances of items being moved from its original locations.

"One of the strangest things that ever happened and very upsetting to me, was I lost my billfold and I mean losing your billfold is a very bad thing to happen," said Petersen.

Petersen looked all over for his wallet. His cousin and his housekeeper at the time also were looking. He checked the local grocery store and looked throughout the entire house.

"I was at the bank about to cancel things and have things changed and the phone at the bank rang," said Petersen. "They said that it was for me. Glenda (his housekeeper) said you are not gonna believe this. Your billfold is in a drawer in the front hall."

Petersen explained that there was no explanation as to how it got there. He then talked about the disappearance of his sterling silver spoon.

"I had a sterling silver spoon just vanish and then about a month later, it reappeared in the kitchen just sitting on the counter," said Petersen. "I personally have not witnessed anything that I would consider particularly strange except that things do tend to disappear in this house and then they will reappear and sometimes when they reappear, they reappear right in front of you … That's about the only thing in this house that I find annoying every now and then is that things just vanish and maybe a week later, it may be a month later, that they will reappear."

What's happening?

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5C)

ceremony on Oct. 4 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. The exhibition will run from Oct. 4-26.

CRAB CARNIVAL: The 42nd annual West Point Crab Carnival will be held on Oct. 4 and Oct. 5. Beginning at 5 p.m. on Oct. 4 is the Tour de Crab Kids bike race, followed by live music, food and fireworks. Oct. 5, activities begin at 10 a.m. with vendors, kids activities (bounce houses, face painting, balloon animals, yard and carnival games), followed by the parade at 1 p.m. and live music throughout the day.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 5

OKTOBERFEST: Sanders, a retirement community in Gloucester Court House, will hold its Oktoberfest Festival on Oct. 5 from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. on Heron Cove Way. There will be fun, food, music, vendors and beer. Entry is free.

TOUCH A TRUCK: Gloucester Parks, Recreation & Tourism will be holding its Touch a Truck event on Oct. 5 at Woodville Park from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m.

KICKBALL TOURNAMENT: Mathews Outdoor Club will hold its Coastal Virginia (COVA) Kickball Tournament on Oct. 5 at the Mathews Little League fields.

BUTTON ART: The Gloucester County Public Library, Main Street Center, will hold a Framed Candy Corn Button Art program on Oct. 5, beginning at 11 a.m., for students in grades sixth through twelfth. Registration is now open.

CONCERT: Flat Iron Crossroads, Ware Neck, will be holding its 2024 Blues Fest on Oct. 5. Doors and food truck open at 3:30 p.m. BluzHammer, Kurt Crandall & True Story and The Nighthawks with Bob Margolin will perform. The show is intended to be outdoors, weather permitting. There will be fire pits and fall activities to enjoy. Bring a lawn chair and a light jacket. Tickets are $30 apiece.

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 9

LET'S DRAW HALLOWEEN: The Gloucester County Public Library, Main Street Center, will hold its Let's Draw Hal-loween program on Oct. 9, beginning at 6 p.m. for children K-5. Draw a spider, haunted house, jack-o-lantern and more. Registration is now open.

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What's happening?

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6C)

THURSDAY, OCT. 10

UNDERSIDE OF HISTORY: The Gloucester County Public Library, Main Street Center, will hold a program on the Underside of History on Oct. 10, beginning at 6 p.m. The Ladies Victorian will present on the underpinnings of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. For ages 18 and older. Registration is now open.

FRIDAY, OCT. 11

NIGHTMARE WEEKEND: Galaxy-Con's Nightmare Weekend will be held at the Richmond Convention Center Oct. 11-13. Enjoy all things spooky.

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Spooky goings on at the Auto Max dealership's historic HQ

BY RUBY WILLIAMS

Auto Max of Gloucester is not just your ordinary car dealership in Gloucester County. Its location in Ordinary holds a lot of history, including several eerie stories and tales.

Joe Volpe and Jeff Finch, who are salesmen at Auto Max, spoke about the strange experiences that Jeff has had there as well as some history of the ancient building, Seawell's Ordinary, where the dealership is located.

One of the tales is from 2005 when the building was still a restaurant.

Jeff said that one of the waitresses at the restaurant was walking down the hallway after tending to one of her tables. One of the windows shut as she went by. She then shouted "Stop it, Joseph," which is what those in the building would say when weird instances would happen. After she said that, all of the windows opened and shut repeatedly all at once. The waitress quit that very same day and never ever returned to Seawell's Ordinary.

Jeff also had his own experiences while working

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SPOOKINESS

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7C)

at Auto Max of Gloucester.

Jeff spoke about how he forgot to drop off keys at the dealership after tending to a prior obligation. He said he was still recovering from a stroke he had a week prior. When he got to the dealership to drop the keys off, no one was at the dealership and he fell asleep in his chair in his office.

"When I woke up I decided to ask if anyone was there and I heard the bathroom door above me slam," said Jeff.

Jeff said he jumped up from his chair and struggled to unlock the door from shaking so much. He finally was able to unlock the door and he headed back home.

Another occurrence that happened was in the kitchen.

"I was talking to my wife on the phone in the kitchen when the glass pepper shaker fell to the ground next to the trash can," said Jeff.

Jeff explained that there was no way he knocked it over or that it just fell. He also said that the dust around it was undisturbed, meaning that it had to have been picked up.

Another occurrence was more recent.

Jeff and Joe were talking about a car that they had just sold in January. In the photo with Jeff and the customer with the car, near the Seawell's Ordinary sign, were orbs. Jeff said that he

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What's happening?

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7C)

SATURDAY, OCT. 12

SMITHFIELD MARKET: Gloucester Parks, Recreation and Tourism is sponsoring a Best Years Trip (for ages 55 and older) to Smithfield Pickers Market on Oct. 12 from 7:30 a.m. until 2:15 p.m. After shopping through tables of antiques, take a walk down Main Street to check out the shops and enjoy lunch on your own. Dress for the weather and wear comfy shoes. The cost is $30. Deadline to register is Oct. 5.

CLEAN GLOUCESTER DAY: Clean Gloucester Day will be held on Oct. 12 from 8 a.m. until noon. Gather a group, pick a spot and pick up litter. Sign up for supplies supplies through Gloucester Clean Community. Register by calling 804-693-5370.

SEE **HAPPENING,** PAGE **9C**

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What's happening?

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8C)

RABIES CLINIC: Gloucester County Animal Control is partnering with Three Rivers Health District and Gloucester Veterinary Hospital to hold a rabies clinic on Oct. 12 from 1-3 p.m. at the Gloucester High School parking lot. Dogs and cats are both welcome. All dogs must be leashed and aggressive dogs must be muzzled. All cats must be in a crate/carrier. Three-year rabies vaccines will be available with proof of a prior rabies vaccine. The cost is $10. Cash only. Proceeds will benefit Friends of Animal Control.

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 16

FALL CRAFT: The Gloucester County Public Library, Main Street Center, will hold a fall craft program on Oct. 16, beginning at 2 p.m. Make a decoupage pumpkin for your fall decor. For ages 18 and older. Registration is now open.

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SPOOKINESS: *Strange things at Auto Max HQ*

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8C)

did not notice until he really looked at the photo after it was taken.

There are also stories about how multiple people have died within the building, but none of those were able to be confirmed as true.

Renovations have been done to the property as the building went from owner to owner, but Jeff said that it hadn't been renovated much since Diane Niblett obtained ownership and they do not intend on changing anything either. They also barely moved any of the furniture that was in the building.

"We have not changed much here, because we have noticed that the spirits don't like change," said Jeff.

The history of Seawell's Ordinary

Seawell's Ordinary, currently known as Auto Max, was built in 1712 as a residence for Mr. Joseph Seawell and his family. Around 1757, Mr. Seawell announced the opening of his ordinary. Chiefly British, the term refers to a tavern or eating house serving regular meals. Seawell also opened his very own race track for horses on the property, and it was one of the very first in the Virginia colony.

George Washington would visit the property frequently after visiting Warner Hall, where his grandparents the Warners lived. It is also said that Marquis de Lafayette was at the location at some particular point and dropped his cigar on the floor; the burn mark is still in the floor to this day.

The restaurant stayed in the Seawell family until 1871 when the property was purchased by Richard Henry Hogg. He ran the restaurant

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What's happening?

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9C)

FAFSA: The Gloucester County Public Library, Main Street Center, will hold a FAFSA seminar on Oct. 16, beginning at 6:30 p.m. Learn how to complete the FAFSA form to apply for federal student aid, such as federal grants, work-study funds and loans. This program is for all ages. No registration is required.

THURSDAY, OCT. 17

COLLEGE & CAREER FAIR: The Gloucester NAACP, Gloucester High School and the W.E.B. Dubois Honor Society are hosting a College and Career Fair on Oct. 17 from 5-7 p.m. at GHS. This event is free and open to sophomores, juniors and seniors from the Hampton Roads, Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck areas. Light refreshments will be provided.

ESTATE PLANNING: The Gloucester County Public Library, Main Street Center, will hold an estate planning program on Oct. 17, beginning at 6 p.m. Carlos Britos, financial advisor at Edward Jones, will address the issues of wills, trusts, advanced medical directives and more.

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SPOOKINESS: *Stories out of the Ordinary*

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9C)

for about two years. The property then was bought by Maggie Emerson in 1957, and she reopened the restaurant. When Emerson closed the restaurant in 1973, she and her husband lived there until it was leased to Jerry Shepard. He opened the restaurant in the summer of 1978, and it was then leased by H.B Corporation a few years later in 1980. The property was then bought by Carlton Cox in 1984, where it was still operated as a restaurant. In 1991, the restaurant was bought by the Evans Family of Mathews and the name was changed to Seawell's Ordinary Restaurant, Tavern, and Courtyard.



FILE PHOTO

Seawell's Ordinary, shown in 1973.

Anniversary and Halloween

The business continued to switch hands from owner to owner until 2011, when it became Auto Max of Gloucester and is currently owned by Dianne Niblett. The business will celebrate its 20th anniversary in November and they will have their Trunk or Treat event on Friday, Oct. 25 at 5:30 p.m.

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What's happening?

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10C)

HISTORY PROGRAM: Mathews County VA250 will present, "Life, Death and Victory in Revolutionary Virginia: George Washington, Henry Knox and the Yorktown Campaign," on Oct. 17 at the Cobbs Creek Art Center, beginning at 7 p.m. Phillip Hamilton, professor of history at Christopher Newport University, will be the speaker. This talk is free and open to the public.

FRIDAY, OCT. 18

MEMORIAL DEDICATION: The American Society of Le Souvenir Français Inc. will hold a memorial dedication ceremony to honor the French soldiers who sacrificed their lives during the 1781 Battle of the Hook at Abingdon Elementary School from 1:30-2 p.m. on Oct. 18.

PARK AFTER DARK: Park After Dark will be at Beaverdam Park on Oct. 18 from 6-10 p.m. Take a self-guided hike or hit the lake for boating, kayaking or canoeing. All activities require head lamps. The cost is $5. For ages 16 and older. Registration required. Repeats Nov. 15.

SATURDAY, OCT. 19

MATHEWS MARATHON: The Mathews Marathon will be held on Oct. 19, beginning at 7 a.m. Marathon, Half Marathon and virtual options. Costs vary. Registration will close Oct. 10.

HARMFUL WASTE COLLECTION: Gloucester Clean Community will hold a Household Harmful Waste Collection day on Oct. 19 at Hayes Convenience Center from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m.

FULL HIKE: Complete the Full Hike at Beaverdam Park on Oct. 19. Hike from Beaverdam Park's Main Entrance to the Fary's Mill Road Entrance. Participants will be shuttled from the Fary's Mill Road Entrance back to the Main Entrance after completing the approximately nine-mile hike. Arrive at the Main Entrance by 8:45 a.m. The cost is $5. The Full Hike will be available again on Nov. 16. Registration required.

BASKET WEAVING: The Gloucester County Public Library, Main Street Center, will hold a basket weaving program on Oct. 19, beginning at 10:30 a.m. Weave a market basket with Master Weaver Tamme Durant. Space is limited. For adults 18 and older. Registration begins Oct. 5.

FALL FOLIAGE PADDLE: Paddle around Beaverdam Lake with park rangers to learn about native foliage and experience the autumn color changes seen from the reservoir on Oct. 19 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Bring your camera and binoculars. Bring water, snacks and a towel. The cost is $15. Another Fall Foliage Paddle will take place on Nov. 10. Registration required.

SECOND SURRENDER: The 243rd anniversary of the Second Surrender in Gloucester will be held at Tyndall's Point Park on Oct. 19.

SEE **HAPPENING,** PAGE **13C**

Britt's Inc. Coloring Contest



1. This contest is open to all ages.
2. All entries must be received no later than 4 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 30
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1938 recordings capture hymns of Emmaus Baptist

BY LORI JACKSON BLACK
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE-JOURNAL

In 2014 the Gloucester-Mathews Gazette-Journal published the "Days Past" column about musical recordings that were done at Emmaus Baptist Church in the fall of 1938. At our weekly Rotary Club meeting that day in 2014, Dr. Art Miller approached me and asked me if I could find the original recordings. I accepted his challenge and went to work.

In November of 1938, Roscoe E. Lewis of the Hampton Institute on behalf of the Virginia Writers project came to Mathews County to record the traditional hymns of formerly enslaved people in Mathews County. The concert was held at Emmaus Baptist Church at North. This was documented by the Gloucester-Mathews Gazette Journal on Nov. 17, 1938.

Click this QR codes to hear the voices of Emmaus members singing traditional hymns of enslaved people.

After extensive research, I located the recordings at the Library of Congress American Folklife Center. There were several different cataloged recordings from Emmaus Baptist Church equaling 28 minutes of recorded music. Correspondence with the Folklife Center was very positive and they were able to send me the music in MP4 format within a few days.

Further research led me to Hampton University where the archives of Roscoe E. Lewis are housed. It appears that they hold the original records pertaining to Mr. Lewis's involvement in the writer's project. In 2014 I was unable to get access to Mr. Lewis's archives. It is my belief that there may be more music, and perhaps photographs of the event that took place at Emmaus Baptist Church in 1938.

After acquiring the music, I was put in contact with Cleo Hayes of Emmaus Baptist Church. He met me at my office where I played the music and gave him several copies of the music to share. It was a moving and emotional experience as he recounted the ancestors he heard singing the songs. I later made a YouTube video of the music using photographs from the Works Progress Administration from the same era to share with the public.

I have done one public program on this project with the Rotary Club of Mathews, back in 2014, but have not shared it with anyone since. I look forward to it being shared again!

EDITOR'S NOTE: Lori Jackson Black of Mathews is an author, historian, genealogist, and a researcher at The Fairfield Foundation.

What's happening?

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12C)

FALL FESTIVAL: Locust Grove Church, Dutton, will hold its annual Fall Festival & Chili Cook-Off on Oct. 19, beginning at 4 p.m. Fall foods; activities include chili cook-off, horse rides, hay ride, trunk or treating, bonfire and s'mores, face decorating, photo booth, costume contest, outdoor movie, bounce house, ring toss, sack race, corn hole, more.

THURSDAY, OCT. 24

CHILI COOKOFF: Salty Bottom Blue Oysters will hold a Waterfront Chili Cook-Off on Oct. 24 from 5-8 p.m. at 616 Old Ferry Road on Gwynn's Island. Tickets are $15 for adults, $7 for children; benefits the Mathews Maritime Foundation.

SEE HAPPENING, PAGE 21C



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Married 1930s luminaries at rest in Christ Church cemetery

BY ELSA VERBYLA

Two starring figures of the 1930s … one of the silver screen, and one of the blue skies … rest side-by-side under the same headstone at Christ Episcopal Church in Mathews.

Toby Wing, once called "the most photographed girl in the movies," gave up her booming career after marrying famous aviator Henry T. "Dick" Merrill in 1938. She had an enviable list of movies to her credit.

Dick Merrill, who made daring and record-setting transatlantic flights in the 1930s, continued amassing new records until age finally removed him from the cockpit.

The passing years saw them visit Mathews County frequently, after Toby's parents retired to the county in 1946, but they never lived here as a couple. A few years after Dick's death in 1982, Toby purchased one home in Mathews (the historic home in Mathews Court House now operating as White Dog Bistro, where her photo close-up beams from the main dining room wall), then sold that and purchased a home on Stutts Creek, and eventually came back to stay.

Dick Merrill

Born in 1894 in Mississippi, Dick Merrill served in World War I, became fascinated with aviation, learned to fly in France, and purchased his first aircraft, a surplus Cur-

SEE **LUMINARIES,** PAGE **15C**



FILE PHOTO

Dick Merrill, left, with the 1967 Mathews Spring Festival chairman Claire Stillman.



Toby Wing Merrill

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LUMINARIES

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14C)

tiss JN-4 Jenny, in 1920. He flew in aerial circuses and became an air mail pilot, when air mail was new, in the 1920s. His Richmond-to-Atlanta route evolved into what became Eastern Air Lines.

He built up a huge flying tally sheet by 1930 and also a solid reputation as a careful pilot who would accept any challenge.

In the 1930s, Merrill was part of two fame-making flights. Financed in 1936 by singer Harry Richman, Merrill and Richman modified a Vultee V-1A and filled empty spaces in the wings with 41,000 ping pong balls (hoping these would provide flotation in case of a mishap). They took off on Sept. 2 across the Atlantic, making the fastest crossing to date in 18½ hours. They began the return flight on Sept. 14, put down for repairs in Newfoundland, and finally landed at home in New York a week later.

In 1937, hired by Hearst Publishing, Merrill flew from New York to London on May 8 to acquire photos of the May 10 coronation of King George VI. He got them home on May 14 and Hearst papers on both sides of the Atlantic published the first pictures of the event.

Merrill was a civilian pilot on the China-Burma-India supply route during World War II. He continued flying for Eastern after the war, and retired in 1961 with the most distance and as the second most senior pilot. That

SEE **LUMINARIES,** PAGE **16C**



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LUMINARIES: *Toby Wing, Dick Merrill, and an extended family connection in Mathews*

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15C)

didn't end his flying days: Merrill continued flying for pleasure well into his 80s.

Toby Wing

The actress Toby Wing, born in 1915, got into movies very young, with bit parts in the silent films starting at age nine. She moved into larger roles about the same time the silent films gave way to talkies. Her father Paul Wing was associated with Paramount Motion Pictures in Hollywood and his beautiful young daughter had a few bit parts in the silents at the age of 9. She became a Goldwyn Girl in 1931 and her first role was in "Palmy Days," 1932.

Wikipedia states, "Wing made an impression with producers and moviegoers, but she seldom broke through to leading roles."

She did take the lead in 1936 and 1937 opposite Pinky Tomlin in the musicals "With Love and Kisses" and "Sing While You're Able." Toby was also the lead in "The Marines Come Thru," filmed in 1938 but not generally released until 1943 as "Fight On, Marines!" in the midst of World War II.

She also played on Broadway in the 1938 Cole Porter musical "You Never Know." She was married the same year, and retired from acting.

Mr. and Mrs. Merrill, in their family life, had two sons, one dying as an infant and the other a victim of a murder in Miami in 1982, where the family then lived. Tragically, both sons died before their parents, and Dick Merrill died a few months after the murder, adding to Toby's grief. The sons are also buried at Christ Church and listed on the family headstone.

After her final move to Mathews, Toby Merrill became active in community and church affairs; she died in 2001.

Honors and quotes

During Merrill's illustrious flying career, he was hailed as a hero in 1948 after the propeller on an Eastern Constellation came loose and tore through the fuselage at 10,000 feet.

An article in the Gazette-Journal, noting Merrill's local connections, said his heroic efforts in landing the plane prevented a disaster, "saving 68 passengers. The plane threw a propeller while 80 miles out over the sea. A portion of the propeller killed one flight attendant. A fire developed and the engine went dead. The pilot radioed that he was ditching the plane but he and Merrill, who was flying as check pilot to observe the duties of the airplane's regular flying crew, handled the plane and brought it down to safety in Florida."

He was guest speaker at the Mathews Spring Festival in 1967, relating many highlights in his long career and according to the Gazette-Journal, "described the jet engine as the greatest invention of the age." He made a prediction not yet realized, that in the 1970s new planes would be able to fly from the U.S. to London in 20 minutes.

He said that in his 50 years in aviation he had logged 40,300 hours and more than 8 million miles, escaping serious injury even when encountering danger. "I've been lucky. That's really the story of my life."



WING FAMILY PHOTO

Many members of the Wing family gathered at Shadecliff, 1950s: seated in center, Col. Paul Wing and Martha Wing; from left in front, Toby Wing Merrill, Ricky Merrill and Bill Perry. Back from left, Patricia Wing Perry (later Gill), and Paul Wing, son of the colonel.

The Virginia Senate honored Merrill in 1981 with a resolution noting his contributions to aviation.

Toby Wing, in an interview that appeared in the Gazette-Journal in 1956, said she had only recently visited Hollywood for the first time in 15 or 16 years. She laughed, telling the reporter (who told readers) she had once been "the most photographed girl in the movies" that she gave an interview there. "They even ran the story on page one" she said. "It was headlined: 'What Ever Happened to Toby Wing?'"

Wikipedia reports that on Feb. 8, 1960, "Wing was honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame."

The Mathews connection

How did the family come to Mathews? The connection started in 1946, after Toby's parents Paul and Martha Wing purchased a home called Shadecliff, now known as Sutherland, on the

SEE **LUMINARIES,** PAGE **18C**

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LUMINARIES: *Toby Wing, Dick Merrill, and an extended family connection in Mathews*

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16C)

East River.

Martha Wing was a native of Amelia County, and Paul Wing had attended high school at Staunton Military Academy. Although they had resided in California and worked in Hollywood for many years, perhaps memories of the Old Dominion drew them to Mathews.

Paul Wing, a veteran of World War I, had also signed up in World War II and retired as a colonel after harrowing experiences. He was a survivor of the Battle of Bataan and of three years in Japanese prisoner of war camps. He received the Legion of Merit for pictures he took secretly as a POW. He died in 1957 at the age of 65.

Upon moving to Mathews, he was invited to speak to the Mathews County Woman's Club in 1947. An account of this talk in the Gazette-Journal did not mention his wartime ordeal. It quoted him as stating that America must never be caught unprepared again, as it was before both world wars. He showed American and Japanese films of the war, climaxed by the signing of the Japanese surrender.

The Be-Jo Theater in Mathews Court House was loaned for this showing, which was repeated later at Mathews High School.

Col. Wing's background in Hollywood included working as assistant director of "The Lives of a Bengal Lancer" in 1935, for which he won an Oscar.

His wife also had a foot on the stage. By the time of Martha Wing's death in 1981, she had moved to Lake Elsinore, California. Her obituary stated that she had appeared in numerous Western films in the 1930s. Her grandson Paul Wing said "my grandmother was a very famous equestrienne. She did stunt riding for Mary Pickford and other stars."

The family member who resided longest in Mathews County, however, was Toby's sister, Paul and Martha's daughter, Pat Gill. She married Dr. John R. Gill in 1957, after an earlier residence in Mathews County after World War II. The year that Dick Merrill appeared at the Spring Festival, Dr. Gill was the festival's honorary chairman.

Pat Gill was also in the stage business in the 1930s with the other members of her family. She kept her connection with the media, appearing in 1958 on The Price is Right and in 1962, hosting a radio show, "Listen Ladies" on WDDY in Gloucester. She moved from her Put-In Creek home to Gloucester in 1994 and remained here until her death in 2002.

The sisters had a younger brother, Paul Wing Jr. He and his wife and infant son, the Paul Wing we quote here, came to the county for

SEE LUMINARIES, PAGE 19C



LUMINARIES

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18C)

several years around 1951. Paul Jr. helped on the farm at Shadecliff, because his father had been in poor health since his wartime ordeal. After moving away, the family returned for a visit to Mathews every summer.

All of these individuals who had outstanding careers came and went from Mathews over the years, but for most, their final moves were to the county. Toby and Dick Merrill, their sons, and Toby's parents, are at Christ Church. Paul Wing's (the second) and Pat Wing Gill's bodies were cremated, and their ashes scattered on land in local waters.

References: Gazette-Journal clippings, Wings of Man by Jack King, Wikipedia. With gratitude to Paul Wing and his daughter, Chanel Pike, for their assistance with family photos and stories.



FILE PHOTO

Pat Gill in 1962, when she hosted "Listen Ladies" on WDDY Radio in Gloucester.

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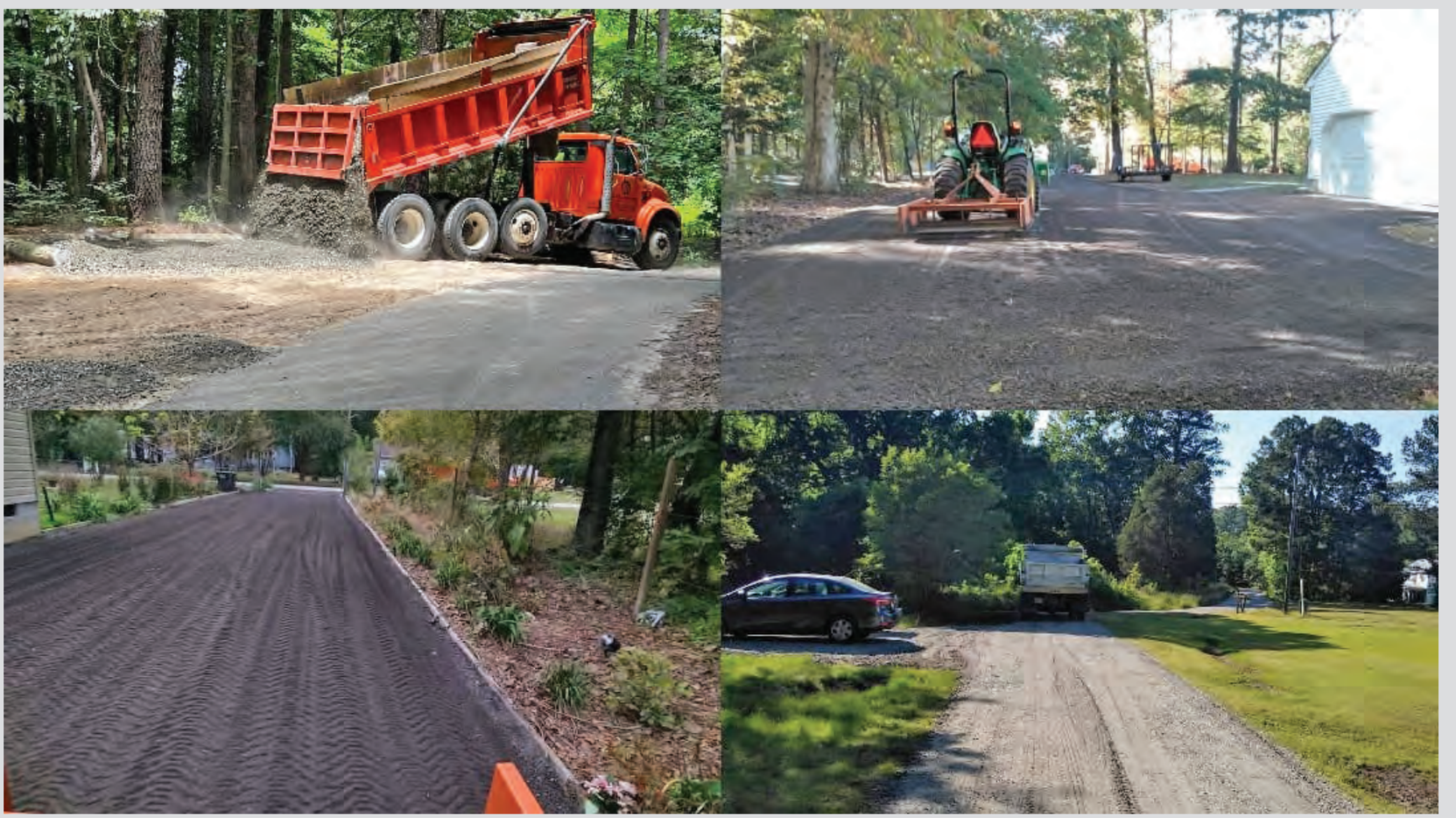


Gloucester based veteran & woman owned small business

What's happening?

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13C)

SATURDAY, OCT. 26

FALL FESTIVAL: The West Mathews Community League will hold its fall festival on Oct. 26 at the league building on East River Road. There will be a yard sale, bake sale, plant sale, clam chowder, barbecue and live music.

STARS OF TOMORROW: Virginia's Li'l Ole Opry will hold its Stars of Tomorrow show on Oct. 26 from 7:30-9:30 p.m. at Mathews High School's Harry M. Ward Auditorium. Tickets cost $15.

TUESDAY, OCT. 29

WIZARD OF OZ: The Gloucester County Public Library, Main Street Center, will hold a Wizard of Oz theme night on Oct. 29, beginning at 6 p.m. Follow the yellow brick road to a Halloween event celebrating the 85th anniversary of the 1939 movie. For ages 18 and older. Registration begins Oct. 15.

THURSDAY, OCT. 31

SPOOKTACULAR: The Gloucester County Public Library, Main Street Center, will hold its Spooktacular on Oct. 31 from 5-7 p.m. Trick-or-treat in the library. All ages welcome.

FRIDAY, NOV. 1

HALLOWEEN PARTY: Bay School Community Arts Center, Mathews, will hold its Backyard Halloween Party on Nov. 1 from 5:30-9 p.m.

SEE **HAPPENING,** PAGE **22C**

T.C. Walker learned the law from 2 Confederate veterans

BY ELSA VERBYLA

Did you know that the famous black lawyer of Gloucester County, Thomas Calhoun Walker, received his legal instruction from two men who had served as officers in the Confederate army?

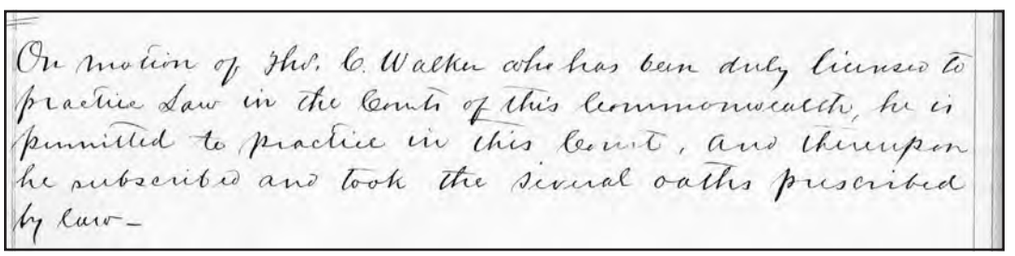
Walker was admitted to the bar in 1886 at a session of Gloucester Circuit Court. He practiced until his death at the age of 91 in 1953; and his funeral at Bethel Baptist Church, Sassafras, was attended by fellow members of the local legal profession. Members of the Thirteenth Judicial Bar Association, all or mostly white, were honorary pallbearers.

His remarkable life began in slavery and ended crowned with honors. More than 70 years after his death, a county school facility, emblem of his own struggle for an education, and of his

SEE **T.C. WALKER,** PAGE **22C**



An undated photograph of Thomas C. Walker.



On motion of Thos. C. Walker who has been duly licensed to practice law in the Courts of this Commonwealth, he is permitted to practice in this Court, and thereupon he subscribed and took the several oaths prescribed by law—

Copy of Gloucester court record showing T. C. Walker's admission to the bar.



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T.C. WALKER

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21C)

leadership in erecting schools for black children in an era of deep racial segregation, still bears his name.

But, back to the early days.

Walker had scraped together a basic education and then a college degree at Hampton Institute, and returned to his home county as a teacher. One day with time on his hands he stepped into the courthouse and witnessed a young black girl wearing a yellow dress, without a defense attorney, convicted of larceny and sent to a state penal institution. To him, the case seemed flimsy.

After that, according to his autobiography "The Honey-Pod Tree," "I was filled with a bitter sense of the injustice of it all, for I felt that the girl had done no real wrong and that any kind of lawyer could have succeeded in getting her freed ... Then and there I made up my mind to study law."

There were obstacles. Walker had no money and could not leave his work in the county. He took advantage of an opportunity that presented itself as he walked

SEE **T.C. WALKER,** PAGE **24C**

What's happening?

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21C)

THURSDAY, NOV. 7

GRAND CAVERNS: Gloucester Parks, Recreation and Tourism is sponsoring a Best Years Trip (for ages 55 and older) to Grand Caverns in Grottoes on Nov. 7 from 8:30 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. Tour the caverns and make sure to dress in layers. Lunch will be on your own. The cost is $80. Deadline to register is Oct. 24.

THURSDAY, NOV. 14

HUG A TREE: Beaverdam Park will hold its Hug a Tree and Survive program on Nov. 14 from 5:30-6:30 p.m. at the Stewart Building. This program teaches children ages seven to 11 how to make themselves more findable if they become lost in the woods. This is a free program. Registration required.

HISTORY PROGRAM: The Mathews County Historical Society will hold a talk on "Lighthouse Keepers of Mathews County," Nov. 14 at the Mathews Memorial Library, beginning at 7 p.m. This presentation is free and open to the public.

SATURDAY, NOV. 16

OWL WALK: Beaverdam Park will hold its Owl Walk program on Nov. 16 from 5-7 p.m. Bring a flashlight. The cost is $5.

SATURDAY, NOV. 23

HOLIDAY MARKET: Deltaville Maritime Museum will hold its Holiday Gift Market on Nov. 23 from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. There will be vendors, food, produce, children's activities, mimosas and more. Entry to the museum is free.



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$25 per person - 10PM - meets at the Capitol. Duration: 1 hour 45 minutes

Tours rain or shine. Not recommended for children under 13.

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T.C WALKER

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22C)

home one day.

Maj. Benjamin F. Bland, a lawyer, lived in the village and was in poor health. His paid helper was sick and Bland was struggling to get wood into his house. Walker offered to help and was waved away as "a college man." The next day he returned in the morning and was refused again. That afternoon without asking permission he set to helping Major Bland with chores that needed doing.

Refusing pay, Walker continued to help the major after school hours until "he formed the habit of having me stay on in the evening to talk about General Armstrong, his ideals, the educational methods he had inaugurated at Hampton Institute, and other matters of mutual interest and concern. Of course, I never could say enough in praise of General Armstrong even to this old Confederate soldier. And he listened with rapt attention," wrote Walker.

After some time, Walker asked for instruction in the law, and Bland fetched some elementary books from another law office in his native King and Queen County. Walker wrote that Bland would never accept payment for them.

For three years, Walker studied under Bland, acting as his clerk and assisting in minor legal matters. Bland became ill and could not continue.

Then, wrote Walker, he "was most fortunate in being able to transfer my studies to the office of General William B. Taliaferro, another eminent white citizen of Gloucester."

The former Confederate general gave Walker the run of his law library and "there he and I would read, study, and talk over my problem. We even discussed slavery for hours and hours at a stretch." If the talks ran into dinnertime, "Of course, it was contrary to custom to ask me to join the family at the dining table but his wife and daughter would fix up a tray for me so I could have my meal in his office. They all made me feel I was welcome there."

After one year of this, he applied for admission to the bar. In May 1886 "The old judge then announced that he was "going to examine this young man who is the first Negro who has applied for examination in this section."

Walker said about 40 lawyers were in the courtroom but he escaped a public examination. The judge took him into the jury room and asked questions for 3½ hours. "I fumbled one or two but I knew what I was talking about even though I sometimes had difficulty in stating it as clearly as I should."

The judge, he wrote, returned to the bench and announced "he has passed a better examination than anybody I have tested in forty years!"

Upon this announcement, Walker wrote, "all the white

SEE T.C. WALKER, PAGE 25C



T.C. WALKER: *Instructed in the law by two Confederate veterans*

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24C)

lawyers present welcomed me to the bar."

The Gloucester Court records of June 7, 1886 include the notation, "On motion of Thos. C. Walker who has been duly licensed to practice law in the Courts of this Commonwealth, he is permitted to practice in this Court, and thereupon he subscribed and took the several oaths prescribed by law." Judge Warner T. Jones signed the records.

And so began a trailblazing and remarkable career at the bar. Walker was just 26 years old.

The instructors

Maj. Benjamin Franklin Bland was a native of King and Queen County. He was a member of the Virginia Senate representing Gloucester, Mathews, Middlesex and New Kent, 1875-1879. His portrait hangs in the historic Middlesex Courthouse in Saluda.



B. F. Bland W. B. Taliaferro

According to research conducted by Ben Harris, Bland was born in 1835 and enlisted June 7, 1861 King and Queen Court House, age 26, in the 5th Virginia Cavalry, serving in Company E. His occupation was listed as a teacher. He was promoted to sergeant in 1864, and commanded a company later that year. Toward the end of the Civil War he was in a hospital in Richmond. He is believed to have died in 1888.

Gen. William Booth Taliaferro was the highest-ranking soldier in the Confederate Army from Gloucester County. He was a member of the Virginia House of Delegates after the war.

Born in 1822, he was an officer in the U.S. Army before the Civil War, and according to a biography found in Wikipedia, he commanded a division of the Virginia militia and commanded at Harpers Ferry (then still a part of Virginia) following the raid of that town's arsenal by John Brown. When the Civil War erupted, Taliaferro became commander of Virginia militia and served through the war on the southern side in Virginia, Georgia, Maryland and Florida.

He returned to Gloucester after the war to practice law and also became Grand Master of Masons in Virginia. He died in 1898 and is buried at Ware Episcopal Church.

Research assisted by the College of William and Mary Special Collections, Tyler Radabaugh of the Middlesex County Museum of History, Bill Lawrence, Roane Hunt's Family Tree Searcher, Cathy Dale, Gloucester Clerk of Court, "The Honey-pod Tree" by Thomas Calhoun Walker, Library of Virginia.

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ELSA VERBYLA / GAZETTE-JOURNAL

A remnant of King's Fish Camp in Perrin.

Fish camps: a vanished part of the commercial seafood industry

BY ELSA VERBYLA

Today the shoreline is quiet. A few old buildings give a hint of the once-bustling fish camp and seafood business that operated there.

In decades past, fish camps dotted the shorelines of Guinea, and probably other fishing communities as well. What were they?

The fish camps were not recreational areas; instead, they were the centers of activity for commercial fishing crews who went out daily before dawn to bring in the catch from their pound nets. The sooner they got back to the docks, the better price

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FISH CAMPS: *A vanished part of the commercial seafood industry*

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26C)

they could receive.

Sue Belvin Blake of Bena remembers them well. Her father, Howard Belvin, had fish camps near their home on Belvin Creek.

"The last one he had was in the field in our yard," she said. "He kept supplies and kept a man in there who would cook lunch for them (the fishermen) every day." In earlier days, even with a house full of young children, Howard's wife Hazel would cook for everyone. The hired cook came after she couldn't do it anymore.

Depending on the season, the fish camp served various roles. "In the spring of the year they would put pound nets out in the field" to mend them and tar them and to prepare for the spring run of shad and herring. Poles cut from the woods would be sharpened there, and later taken out on pile drivers to build the impoundment from which the nets were hung.

Later in his life, Howard Belvin "got so he couldn't work anymore" on the pound nets, she said, so he and his son Benny "bought the Walter Brown railway property on Perrin Creek, later owned by Benny alone.

"My brother had an old station wagon he would go around in in the mornings" to pick up all the men who were fishing his nets. "They would go out fishing at 2 o'clock in the morning, or when the tide was right."

Camps on Brown's Bay

Sam Hogge Sr. provided evidence in 1999 of how common the fish camps were.

Using a hand-drawn map of Brown's Bay, Belvin Creek and John West's Creek, he told who had the camps, and what was on them.

The talk was held in the back room of the country store at Severn, and recorded for posterity by the Guinea Heritage Association, which now has its headquarters at Buck's Store Museum in Bena.

He started out with Belvin Creek, which he said "over the years had four camps. They were also called seine houses. The first one was Mr. Howard Belvin's … had tar kettles and pilings all piled up."

Hogge pointed out where Edgar Hogge moored his boat on Belvin Creek, and where he kept his fishing camp across a cove. It contained a tar pot for the nets and a pump to provide fresh water. Upstream from Hogge's camp was Howard Belvin's, and downstream of Hogge's boat was Belvin's mooring spot. Belvin Creek also had a camp operated by W.E. "Noody" Belvin, and across the creek was a stake pile maintained by a fisherman named Kellum.

Leaving Belvin Creek, Hogge's finger traced around the shoreline of Brown's Bay, showing who had fishing wharves and fish camps, and also indicated where other fishermen had boats and homes. He even marked an eel hole found on John West's Creek.

Like the video, Hogge's map is at Buck's Store Museum.

Lifelong Guinea resident Hamilton Williams believes that fish camps got their start in the late 1880s, when pound netting took hold as a very efficient way to catch fish. He thinks they continued into the 1950s. At one time, he said, "The men would leave home on Monday morning and get to the fish camp, and stay all week, come home Friday." This was probably early in the 20th century when transportation was mostly by foot.



PHOTO COURTESY GUINEA HERITAGE ASSOCIATION

Long-ago calendars photographed years ago by Nan Belvin McComber in the remnant of a fish camp.

A news item from the Mathews Journal in Feb. 13, 1913, underlines the camps' early use as temporary residences. This was the time of year that fishermen started to prepare their poles, mend and tar nets, and put out pound net rigs for the first fish runs. In addition, the news article shows how fishing at that time supported individuals black and white, and storekeepers whose own profits improved once fishing season began:

"A great number of men, mostly colored, who have come from various sections of the county to assist the fishermen, are camping in (New) Point. They are making the store keepers get a

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FISH CAMPS

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27C)

hustle on themselves because of their laying in a supply of food."

An attractive remnant of the fish camps is still standing on Cooks Landing Road in Perrin. The one-room building is the King's Fish Camp, once operated by John King. Sharon Chiappitta owns the property now, and said that she would love for it to be preserved—at another site—by a local historical group.

We are grateful to Sue Blake, Sharon Chiappitta, Jerry Varner, Hamilton Williams and Jeanie Woo for their assistance in compiling this article.



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FILE PHOTO

A view of Callis Wharf on Milford Haven in 1959.

Reminiscing about growing up on Callis Wharf

BY JOHN LEE CALLIS
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Growing up on Gwynn's Island in the 1950s had its charms. I was a bike ride or a few steps away from several beaches, afternoon football games, adventures in the woods, playing along the shore, and all of the fun things that come with being a youngster in a small coastal community. Because of my family connection, among those fun things for me were adventures at Callis Wharf.



FAMILY PHOTO

John Lee Callis, age 7, in 1958, with his grandmothers' five-foot-tall gladiolus.

A typical summer day for a boy would include wearing short pants, tennis shoes, and sometimes, a shirt. There were soft crabs to catch: we would use a dip net to scoop them up as they clung to the many wooden pilings that surrounded the docks. Fishing was done on the end of the dock facing Milford Haven. If you didn't have a rod and reel, you could go into the grocery store that my family ran and buy a hook, a sinker, and some fishing line. You could tie one end of the line to one of the pilings in the absence of a fishing rod, and then

SEE **CALLIS WHARF,** PAGE **30C**

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CALLIS WHARF: *Growing up on the busy commercial waterfront*

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29C)

throw the other end with the hook and sinker into the water. For bait, we would use either soft crab or perhaps a bloodworm, also purchased at the store.

The many nooks and crannies in the warehouses and other buildings provided excellent opportunities for hide and seek.

Refreshment was needed after all of the hard work and play. Those little 7 oz. Coca-Cola bottles were a dime, often with a bag of Lance salted peanuts poured in them. There was a penny candy counter, complete with the tiny brown paper bags to hold your selections. Root beer barrels, several kinds of bubble gum, a molasses chew called Mary Janes, fireballs and other sweet confections filled the counter. Candy bars were five cents. Ice cream sandwiches were a dime.

History of Callis Wharf

Callis Wharf has long been a recognized landmark on Gwynn's Island. The oyster shells that my great-great-grandfather, William James Callis, used as ballast in his schooner on his return trips from Baltimore during the 1860s and 1870s were dumped between log pilings that had been driven to the bottom on a point near his home on Milford Haven. The continued dumping of shells built up the area where the first wharf was built.

My great-grandfather, Walter Eugene Callis, built an improved dock on the same site and the wharf became a stopping point for the Maryland Steamboat Company, which operated from Baltimore to various docks and landings in the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula in the early part of the twentieth century. This company gave way in later years to the Baltimore, Chesapeake, and Atlantic Steamboat Company.



William James Callis



Walter Eugene Callis

The steamboat provided not only transportation to cities and towns along its route but also was a means of transporting items to area residents that weren't available locally. If you ordered something, it usually came on the steamboat. I have a recollection of an antique headboard that some friends bought at an auction. On the back, written in chalk, was the name of the person who had ordered it and the address of Callis Wharf, Virginia. My grandfather, Elwood Eugene, had a fleet of trucks to provide a delivery service of freight ordered by area residents that came into Callis Wharf on the steamers.

By the mid-1930s, the steamboat became an outmoded means of shipping. The steamboat made its final call at Callis Wharf in 1935.

Grandfather Elwood began operating his father's seafood buying, packing, and shipping business in 1912 at the age of 17. The abundance of seafood in local waters provided the resource, and the seafood industry at Callis Wharf thrived in the first half of the twentieth century, reaching its heyday in the 1950s. At its highest point, the business had over 200 employees. My grandfather was active in the business most of his adult life. At our grocery store one day, I remember someone asking him "How's fishing?" He replied that he didn't know …

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CALLIS WHARF: *Growing up on the busy commercial waterfront*

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 30C)

he hadn't been fishing since 1919.

During the '50s the docks at the Wharf were bustling during the summer months. Crabbers would bring in their daily catches during the morning hours. The crabs were unloaded and weighed, then put in baskets or barrels before being transferred to the big metal cages that were lowered into the crab steamer to be cooked right there on the dock. I have a vivid visual in my mind of my father, Elwood Callis Jr., standing on that dock operating the steamer with a cigar in his mouth. Once the crabs were steamed, they came out of the cooker and were taken to the picking room. There, workers were waiting to begin getting the prized crabmeat out of the shells before it was packaged in cans, ready to be shipped to market. During this decade, workers picked over 5,000 pounds of crab meat a day.

During the cold weather months, oysters took center stage. In the peak years, over 200 gallons of oysters were shucked daily. I recall the long concrete counters where the oyster shuckers stood in elevated stalls. I remember helping to shovel truckloads of oysters into wheelbarrows as a teenager.



Elwood E. Callis Sr.

Several grocery stores were operated at the wharf during the century. L. R. "Scrooch" Callis, a first cousin of my grandfather, had a general store at the site prior to going in business with his brother Rodney at the site of the Grimstead Post Office. My grandfather then ran a more modern grocery store after that. My brother Eugene ran the store before he became Mathews County Deputy Clerk, and then Clerk. My mother Charlotte managed it for several years after that. After our family sold the store business, several locals ran a store there before it ceased operations in the late 1970s. As a teenager, I worked at the store: stocking the shelves, unloading the cases of dry goods that came weekly by truck, and delivering groceries to area residents. Someone would phone the store, we would hand write their grocery list then fill the order, and deliver all over Mathews … for free.



Elwood Callis Jr. and Charlotte Callis

Back then, the store stayed open until 8 p.m. On most weekday nights, many of the men came back to the Wharf and congregated in a room at the rear of the store. One side of the room had a built-in storage bench, and the other an old church pew. There they would sit and discuss the day's catch, politics, and any other topic that was timely. The room was warmed by a gas heater and the air was so thick with cigarette and cigar smoke that you could barely see across the room.

Our family sold Callis Wharf in 1971 and it has changed hands again since then. While the booming days are a thing of the past, commerce at the Wharf continues today. Some business ventures have come and gone. Yet, seafood is still caught, unloaded, and shipped from the Wharf. There is a seed oyster operation going on in what we called the big warehouse where oysters are hatched and then sold to growers in the area. Located on the Milford Haven side of the building, The Hatchery seafood truck is a very popular outside eatery, where diners can enjoy the delicacy while enjoying water views and sunsets.

I'm the last person with the surname of Callis that had any connection to Callis Wharf. I was too young to have any kind of supervisory position with any of the business ventures, but that part of my childhood and the adventures I had there are forever etched in my memories.



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