

SCHS News



The Newsletter of the Stafford County Historical Society

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PRESIDENT'S PEN

Happy New Year!

I hope your pipes haven't frozen and that you are snuggled in, toasty and warm. Dad reported this morning that Aquia Creek had frozen over, but not enough to skate on like we did when I was a kid. It's been a while since we've had cold weather like this, but it's not unheard of. Just the other day, Jerrilynn was talking with a woman from New Jersey who said that she didn't remember it ever being this cold. I guess she was from south Jersey. Older people, like this woman, who don't seem to recall winters like this, fascinate me. I admit that I've been spoiled by the mild winters we've had for the past few decades, but I well remember winters like this one. I remember dealing with frozen pipes, watching Granddaddy check the antifreeze in all the automobiles, and working on the oil furnace because the fuel oil had jelled in the lines. We would put a light in the well house to keep the water pipes from freezing and would let the animals come in the house on the coldest nights. And plenty of firewood was burned in the stove and/or fireplace. Yes, we have had winters this cold (and much colder) before and, yes, I will be glad when it warms up.

One winter that I don't remember was that of 1918 in which an ice dam wrecked the Falmouth bridge (see photo inside). That was almost 100 years ago, happening in February of 1918.

If you have an opportunity, please check out the Master Hobby School. Much-needed repairs have been completed. Thanks to all of you who contributed funds toward this project. And thank you for your continued support of this organization.

With best wishes for the new year,
Rick MacGregor

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Cover Illustration: Nancy Ross (1839-1924)

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STAFFORD'S LAST QUAGMIRE: PAVING THE ROAD THROUGH CHAPPAWAMSIK SWAMP

The first two decades of the twentieth century witnessed massive road improvements along the thoroughfare now known as U. S. Route 1, these reflecting a larger effort to create a dependable route between Maine and Florida. The work conveniently coincided with Henry Ford's efforts to make automobiles affordable for the average family. Once folks had cars, they naturally wanted someplace to drive them.

Chappawamsic Swamp had hindered or prevented north-south overland travel through this region since colonial times. From the birth of the Virginia colony until the early twentieth century, each county was responsible for the maintenance of its own roads. This system was only marginally successful. By the early 1900s, the appalling condition of many of Virginia's roads led to the creation of the Virginia Department of Highways.

After assuming responsibility for road construction and maintenance in the early years of the twentieth century, Virginia authorities set about building an all-weather road between Washington and Richmond. Over a period of several years, they cut, drained, straightened, widened, and paved with concrete most of the road between these two cities. One might say they "left the best part for last," which was taming Chappawamsic Swamp. Alternate routes were few and costly. A June 1916 Washington newspaper noted that the detour around the swamp added 300 miles to a trip. Another workable, though expensive, option was to put one's car on the train and ship it north or south around the swamp.

Shortly prior to the creation of the Virginia Department of Highways, the local Mahoney brothers "tended" this section of road. They resided near what is now Hilldrup Transfer and Storage. The swamp's thick, deep mud quickly sucked a vehicle down to its running boards at which point all forward momentum ceased. It was similar in concept to an insect landing on fly paper. Ever ready to help a hapless motorist, the Mahoneys supplemented their meagre incomes by using the family mule to pull automobiles across the swampy area to higher ground—for a small fee. It is said that at the end of the day, they turned water back into the road to refresh the mud. A dry road was bad for business.

In November 1915, a Washington newspaper reported:

The [road] inspection party left the Riggs building about 8 o'clock yesterday morning, and had fine running over the new road as far as the Chopawamsic swamp, where one of the cars became bogged in a mud hole up to the hubs. It took the combined efforts of about ten members of the party and two hired laborers to get the car out of the mire. In an effort to avoid this particular spot another one of the cars backed down the roadway with a view of making a detour. The road was in such a treacherous condition that the car slipped off an embankment and nearly turned over in a small stream. It was necessary for several members of the party to stand on one of the running boards to prevent it from overturning. It took more than two hours to get the car righted and on the way again. By the time the trip was resumed many of the members of the party were covered with mud from head to foot. Among those who were particularly unfortunate in this respect were Charles W. Fairfax and E. L. Ferguson. While attempting to get some of the mud from his clothing, Mr. Fairfax stepped on the tail of a hound dog that was an interested spectator, and was bitten on the leg.

A 1916 newspaper reported on a car that had been stolen and abandoned in Chappawamsic Swamp. "It required three teams of mules, a pair of horses and 25 men to get the car out of the mud hole in which it was found and back on the so-called road...The road is practically impassable."

The June 4, 1916 *Evening Star* (Washington, DC) reported that Mr. A. H. Edwards of Ottawa, Canada had just completed an auto trip across the continent. He proclaimed that "the worst stretch of road in the United States is between the National Capital and Fredericksburg, Va....and it was just the other side of Dumfries, in Chopawamsic swamp, that the most deplorable stretch on the entire trip was encountered." Another article reported, "Hardly a story of a long-distance tour appears in the newspapers here or in other cities that does not contain the tourists' condemnation of the Chopawamsic swamp. Without exception the country within thirty miles of the nation's capital is designated as the worst in the country and everywhere motorists tell each other to avoid it—which means avoiding Washington unless a wide and expensive detour is made."

Planners determined that it would take about \$12,000 to construct a permanent road through the swamp. By mid-1916, the A. A. A. District Automobile Club had put forth an optimistic plan to accept donations from the public to help pay for the project. Forms were published in the newspapers that read, "Gentlemen: Herewith is my check in the sum of \$_____ to be applied to the fund for the construction of a roadway through the Chopawamsic swamp." While donations were received, the sum collected was inadequate to meet the need.

By July 1917 the new road was still not completed. The Postmaster General finally designated the Washington - Richmond highway as a "through post road," which made the project eligible to receive federal funding. Upwards of 200 men were put to work on the road and, finally, on Sept. 22, 1917 the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported, "Officials of the District of Columbia club of the A. A. A. say that the worst impediment to auto travel between Washington and Richmond has been removed. The section of road between the two capitals running through Chopawamsic Swamp has caused acute distress to tourists for years. Having just returned from an inspection of this route, these officials declare that expert road building at that point has removed the evil features of this portion of the road...By the late spring at least this whole road should be among the best in the country." In December 1920, the *Washington Herald* informed its readers, "The old Chopawamsic swamp section on the road from Washington to Richmond, which has heretofore served as a barrier and terror to motorists, comparing in notoriety with the Everglades of Florida, has been concreted, and what was once a veritable mud lane now has been converted into a fine, wide highway."

THE BRIDGE OVER ACCOKEEK RUN



Driving south from Stafford Courthouse you may have noticed an abandoned bridge tucked back in the woods to the immediate south of the Rowser Building. This was part of the U. S. Route 1 project and was built around 1920 at a cost of \$9,000. It was abandoned around 1933 when Route 1 was shifted eastward and widened. Route 1 was originally built of concrete, but was later covered with asphalt. This concrete bridge remained in service long enough to receive a layer of asphalt.

THEY CALLED STAFFORD HOME

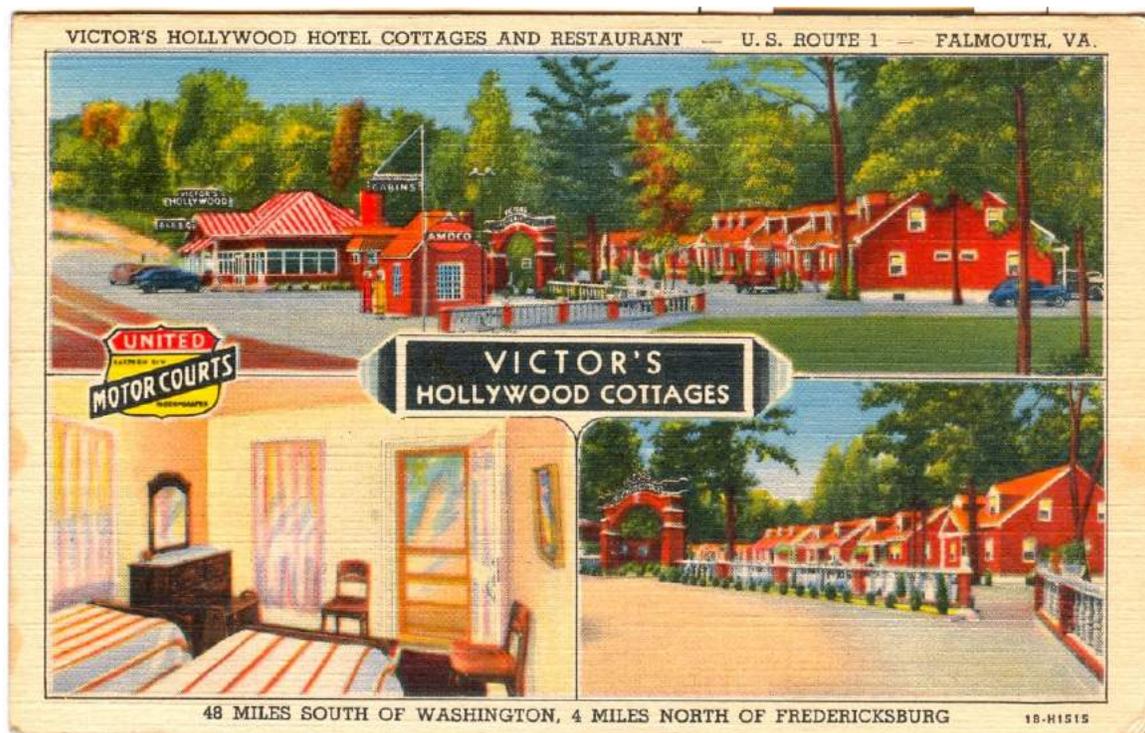
Interracial marriage wasn't legal in Virginia until 1967. Despite this, the writer is aware of several mixed-race families living in Stafford and there were likely more. Nancy Ross (1839-1924) was a slave in Stafford County. At some point, she came to live with Alexander Morson Green (1827-1904), the son of Falmouth industrialist Duff Green (1792-1854). The 1870 Stafford census listed Nancy as Alex's cook. Nancy and Alex had a family of at least nine children. One of these, William Carter Ross (1856-1915), became a Buffalo Soldier in Oklahoma where some of his descendants still reside. Alexander M. Green owned farms on both sides of Potomac Run. For many years before and after the war, he and his family resided on a farm on the outskirts of



Brooke. His land on the south side of Potomac Run, standing in the White Oak area of the county, was devastated by the Union encampments. Census and court records suggest that Alex and Nancy may have separated after the war. As an older man, he lived for some years in Oklahoma with his son, but eventually returned to Virginia. He spent his last few years in Prince William County where he died and was buried. Nancy seems to have remained in Stafford. She purchased part of Alex's property just south of Brooke and she and some of her family are buried at the end of Bexley Lane there.

VICTOR'S HOLLYWOOD HOTEL, COTTAGES, AND RESTAURANT

The last several SCHS newsletters have featured articles on U. S. Route 1 and the various businesses that thrived there between 1920 and the mid-1960s. We continue this with a brief look at another well-known local landmark, Victor's Hollywood Hotel, Cottages, and Restaurant. The numerous brick buildings that comprised this facility stood on the west side of U. S. Route 1. These disappeared in the 1990s and most of the site was lost to construction of the new bridge across Route 1 that leads to the Stafford Regional Airport. Just south of Victor's and on the same side of the road was another tourist camp called Oak Grove. This used to occupy what's now a vacant lot in the northwest corner of Route 1 and Mountain View Road.



The Hollywood Hotel was built in the early 1940s by Victor Menache (1896-1973) and his wife, Evelyn (1894-1958). Each spacious 13 foot by 17 ½ foot cottage featured two beds, two chairs, a writing desk, a dresser, one nightstand with a lamp and telephone, one radio, and one radiator for heat. As an added luxury, each cottage also had its own private bathroom with shower. No need to share with the neighbors. Behind each cottage was a garage. According to the description on the back of the postcard, these were “modern, steam-heated, sound-proof cottages, with a private bath in every room. Beautyrest mattresses – pleasant type Swiss furniture. Large dining room serving excellent food – Southern fried chicken and Virginia ham dinners. Where Service is our Watchword and our Guest is King.” The proprietor also offered gasoline and a gift shop. The Hollywood had what may well have been Stafford's first swimming pool, long before the advent of air-conditioned homes and public and private swimming pools so common today. The pool was in front of the cottages and restaurant making it very visible from Route 1.

MEDICAL ADVANCES

Our friend, “Scribbler,” AKA Charles A. Bryan, recounted a humorous event involving a local resident: “A gentleman living near Aquia Creek, suffering from a bodily affliction, was told that Japanese oil was a panacea for all aches and pains that the human body on account of Adam’s sin has fallen heir to, and secured a bottle of that blistering remedy. Putting on a dressing gown for greater comfort these days of July heat, and applying the remedy, he gracefully sank upon his couch, assured in his mind he would soon be relieved from all such pain. In about two minutes the remedy got in its work, when springing from his couch he made a dive for the floor, bringing with him his couch and all its furniture; another rise brought down his mirror with the bureau on top of him, then a last effort and through the window he went, taking the sash with him on a rapid transit to the creek, when a last vision was a mess of arms, legs and dressing gown, as he disappeared over the bank, and Aquia enfolded him in its cool embrace, ridding him for the time being of the fiery remedy that cures ‘all aches and pains’” (*Free Lance*, Aug. 3, 1909).

NEW HOPE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH CELEBRATES 150TH YEAR SINCE FOUNDING

After 12 months of giving 150 items or \$150+ per month toward aid to wildfire and hurricane victims, Empowerhouse, Stafford Food Security, et al, the observance of the Sesquicentennial Anniversary of the establishment of the New Hope United Methodist congregation culminated in the 10 a.m. worship service on the 4th of December 2017. The Resident Bishop of the Virginia United Methodist Conference, Sharma D. Lewis, delivered the sermon to a filled church—the first time a Resident Bishop has visited and spoken at New Hope UMC. Present and appreciated for presenting a certificate recognizing New Hope’s establishment not only in mission to Stafford County but also the world was SCHS’s Officer of the Board, Doris McAdams. Together Bishop Lewis and the SCHS Board made New Hope’s celebration an important day forward in our history.

Submitted by Becky Guy, Member NHUMC

ICE DAM WRECKS FALMOUTH BRIDGE



FALMOUTH BRIDGE WRECKED BY ICE

In February 1918, the Rappahannock River froze over with a thick layer of ice. This acted as a dam, impounding the water behind it. Eventually, the weight of the water overcame the frozen impediment and a torrent of water, massive ice chunks, and even whole trees cascaded down the river toward Falmouth. The result was the loss of five sections of the Falmouth Bridge, then a steel truss structure. The local newspaper reported, “The crash as the thousands of tons of ice moved was heard throughout Falmouth and Elwood City. People rushed from their homes to watch the powerful force with which the heavy ice swept

everything before it...The ice is piled up to the sills of the remaining spans of the bridge and it is probable that when this solid mass of ice moves the remainder of the bridge will be swept away. The large trees on the island above the bridge were moved along with the ice and are now standing in the mass below the bridge as though they grew there” (*Fredericksburg Daily Star*, Feb 13, 1918).

BULLETIN BOARD

For the last 52 years, the Stafford County Historical Society has had as its goal the establishment of a county museum. This is not a project for which the Society can be wholly responsible. The physical plant, staffing, and artifact acquisition, maintenance, and display are far beyond our financial capabilities. In order for this to become a reality, Stafford County government must take the lead and commit itself to the endeavor. Stafford is one of the wealthiest counties in the nation, yet we have no dedicated place to tell the story of our history and people. We ask that you, our members, become involved in encouraging our county authorities to undertake this as a worthwhile and necessary project. You can help by:

- telephoning or writing letters to your supervisors
- speaking at meetings of the Board of Supervisors
- writing editorials for the *Free Lance-Star*
- appearing at candidates' forums and asking them about their plans for a Stafford County museum

People move, change e-mail addresses and discontinue landlines.

Do we have your current contact information - physical address, e-mail address, and phone number? We prefer to e-mail your newsletter since delivery is faster and it saves the society money. We also e-mail meeting notices and any other necessary notifications.

Please ensure we have your current contact information. You can e-mail us at info@staffordhistorical.org or by mail at P. O. Box 1664; Stafford, VA 22555.

Thanks,

Doris McAdams

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

You will be notified of the January, February, and March programs by email. If you don't have email, someone will try to call you.

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

CHECK OUT THE NEWEST SCHS ORNAMENT!



The newest SCHS ornament commemorates Aquia Landing's Civil War history. It features a steam locomotive, a steam-powered side-paddle-wheeler, and a sailing vessel, all of which frequented this important place during the war. The cost of the ornament is \$10 for SCHS members and \$15 for non-members. Don't miss adding this one to your collection. If you would like to order one or more of these, please send an email to:

staffordhistory1@verizon.net.

DUES ARE DUE IN JANUARY!

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

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

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

\$15	Individual Annual Dues	\$5	Student
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