

SCHS News



The Newsletter of the Stafford County Historical Society

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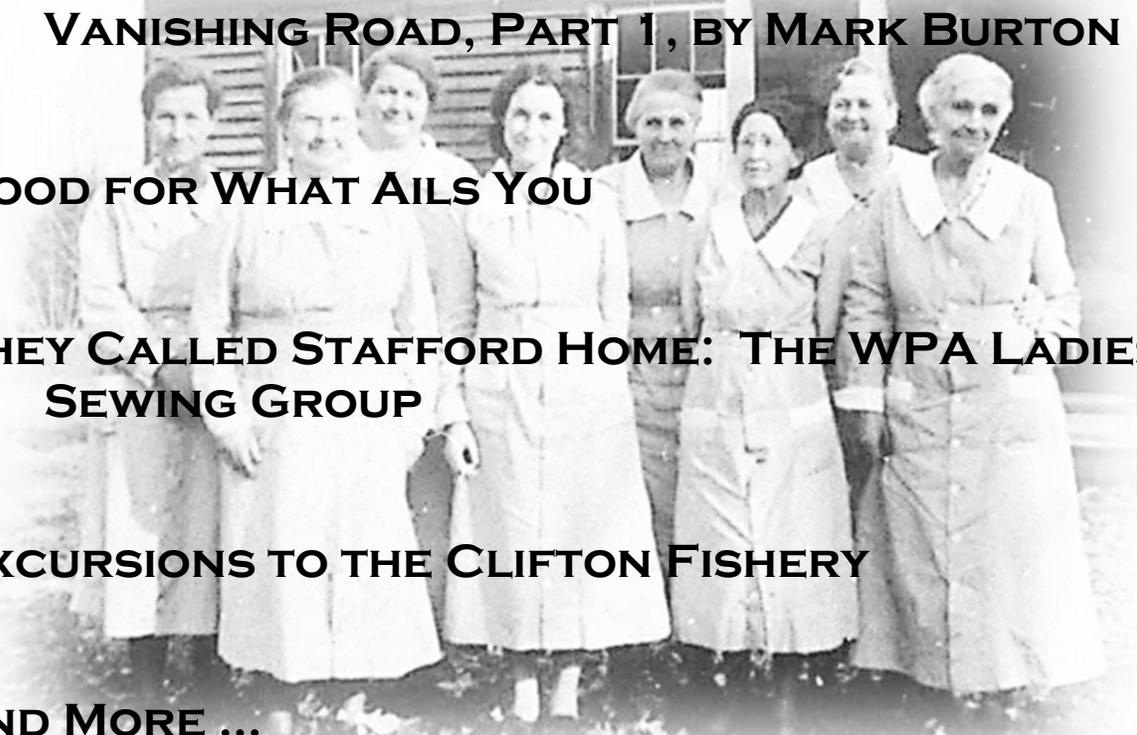
**FEATURE ARTICLE: THE MYSTERY OF THE
VANISHING ROAD, PART 1, BY MARK BURTON**

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PRESIDENT'S PEN

Dear Members,

How thankful I am that with all the impact COVID-19 had on everyone, it did not deter one bit the wonderful blossoming of springtime. The little snowdrops, crocuses, and daffodils look as happy as ever and give renewed hope that better days are to come.

On a sad note, we extend our condolences to the Maki family for the loss of Ray. He was a good friend to this Society and an avid historical researcher. Our prayers are with those he left behind.

If you recall, we were scheduled to meet in March of 2020 to vote on changing our bylaws and officially merging our Society and the Museum Foundation. Last year, a letter was sent out to members in preparation for this but, unfortunately, the meeting was cancelled due to COVID. Our board met on April 1 for the first time this year. Our goal is to have a general membership meeting on May 20, 2021 at which we will vote on the changes in the by-laws and the merger of the Historical Society and the Museum Foundation. You will be receiving official notification of this soon. The board believes this is the best path forward in accomplishing our ultimate goal of having a Stafford County Museum. We have been doing some preliminary planning and have taken some actions towards this goal and very much look forward to your support of this endeavor. As is the case with many other organizations, we are not thriving, BUT we are surviving thanks to your continued support. I believe this is the right path to take and hope to see each of you at our May meeting.

2021 SCHS BOARD MEMBERS

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**	Denotes Past President

With best regards,
Rick MacGregor, President

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Cover Illustration: The WPA Ladies Sewing Group, c.1940

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figures as they travelled to and from Chatham? Or was it just a minor Chatham farm path used to access northern fields for planting and harvesting crops?

If it was a major road, then that would fundamentally alter our understanding of antebellum Falmouth's lines of communication. For example, did people traveling south on the Forbes Street predecessor turn onto the vanishing road and head straight down to Chatham, bypassing Falmouth altogether and thus avoiding the steep and twisting southern end of today's Forbes Street? It is hard to imagine stagecoaches and heavily loaded wagons going up and down an unpaved Forbes Street hill, especially in bad weather. Surely there would have been a better alternative for the bulk of northbound and southbound traffic in the area.

Also, if the road was just a minor farm path, then why was it such a prominent feature on so many Civil War maps of Falmouth? Had it been a major antebellum road that fell into disuse after the Civil War, when the Southern economy collapsed and Chatham was no longer a hospitable rest stop for the rich and famous? After all, with the northern tracts of Chatham sold off, postwar Chatham owners would have had no incentive to maintain the road and no slaves to do it cheaply.

Some Civil War maps, however, including a Confederate map of the area, do not depict the road. Why not? Did the road not exist before the war? Or was it just a minor antebellum road? Perhaps Union troops, who didn't have to worry about trespassing laws, created the road from scratch, or enhanced an existing minor road, to use as a shortcut to their Chatham headquarters.

In other words, perhaps it was only a major road temporarily, during the Union occupation. That might explain both its prominence on Civil War maps and its gradual disappearance after the war. One must be careful, of course, because some Civil War maps are notorious for their inaccuracies.

A Borderline Assertion

Whether it was a major road or a minor one, if the vanishing road really did extend all the way down to what is today Butler Road, then I wonder if it served not only as a road but as the western boundary between Chatham's northern land and the neighboring estates, such as Clearview in the south and Bellmeade farther north? I don't know enough about the boundaries of the various properties, however, to assert this with any confidence.

Still, if I'm not mistaken, all of the land lying east of such a road, as far as and including the eastern side of Claiborne Run, would have belonged to Chatham. That is, until Chatham owners Judge John Coalter and his wife, Hannah, gave 400 acres of Chatham's northern land to their son, St. George Tucker Coalter, in the first half of the 19th century.

I suspect that those 400 acres comprised all of the Chatham land that was north of the predecessor of today's Harrell Road and lying on both sides of Claiborne Run, but I don't know for sure. If nothing else, a better understanding of the vanishing road might give us a better understanding of the borders of Chatham's original 1,200 or so acres.

There is much more, however, to this story of the vanishing road, including its 19th century name. All will be revealed in a forthcoming issue of this newsletter in *The Mystery of the Vanishing Road, Part II: The Falmouth Triangle*.

Mark Burton is a life member of the Stafford County Historical Society and a former editor of the Society's newsletter. He is the author of several books, including Burtons of Stafford: 1680 to 1930.

GOOD FOR WHAT AILS YOU:

For routine household emergencies, we can now easily find remedies and suggestions on the internet. When this writer was young, most people kept the numbers for the fire department and sheriff's department next to the telephone (there was no 9-1-1 system then). Before that, many families kept little books that contained directions for making all manner of home remedies. One of these has recently appeared, it belonging to the family of Charles Duff Green (1873-1957) of Brooke. If you're having trouble with head lice, try this:

“Saturate hair with kerosene for 30 minutes. Then shampoo with soap & water, rinse with clear hot water, then rinse with hot vinegar, & then with hot water. Rub vasoline on hair & scalp.”

THEY CALLED STAFFORD HOME: THE WPA LADIES SEWING GROUP



These eight ladies in their matching uniforms constituted the WPA Ladies Sewing Group. The photograph may date from the 1940s. The names of five of them are known. On the front row, left to right, are Temple (Chewing) Powers (1879-1970), Dora B. Cooper (1871-1955), Nellie (Raines) Spicer (1896-1992), Daisy (Shackelford) Armstrong (1884-1970). On the back row, only Dora Lee Johnson (1895-1969) on the far right is known. If you can identify any of the others, please send an email to staffordhistory1@verizon.net.

Note to Readers: The SCHS seeks to spotlight Stafford residents from earlier generations. Each one had a special story that is worthy of remembrance. When possible, the writer tries to include a photograph of

the featured individual or group. If you have an image of and information about someone who called Stafford home, please send an email to staffordhistory1@verizon.net.

EXCURSIONS TO CLIFTON FISHERY

Seine fisheries, which provided many of the fish offered for sale to consumers, operated primarily in March and April. In Stafford, the largest of these businesses were on the Potomac River in the Wide Water area. Smaller ones functioned on Aquia and Potomac Creeks. The extension of the tracks of the R. F. & P. Railroad across Aquia Creek in 1872 sent the line right through the Clifton Fishery on the Potomac River. This allowed fresh fish to be shipped to market almost as soon as they were caught and resulted in substantial growth of the facility there. People were fascinated by the activities at the fishery during the season and it became a local attraction. A Fredericksburg newspaper reported, "A Popular Place. Col. Withers Waller's fishing shore at Wide Water is quite a popular resort at the present time. There is a large attendance of sight-seers there every day to witness the hauling of the seine. There are some forty or fifty men and six or eight horses engaged in this business, and the scenes attending the hauling are very interesting. Two hauls are made every twenty-four hours, and anywhere from ten to one hundred thousand fish landed at a time. Col. Waller is a very busy man, but finds time to entertain a large number of his friends. The past few days have seen several large parties at the shore. Friday Major T. E. Courtney, of the R. F. & P. R. R., and a large party of friends were there, and Saturday Mr. C. A. Taylor, of the same road, accompanied by a large party from Richmond and other points along the railroad, spent several hours there. Every day this place [Fredericksburg] sends over a party. Yesterday some forty or fifty went over on the 10:45 train, arriving in time to see the seine carried out and landed with twenty thousand fish. Today another large party will go from here, and as it is a holiday a crowd of the country folks may be expected also" (*Fredericksburg Daily Star*, Apr. 19, 1897).

CAN YOU HELP?

John James Porter of Culpeper was a noted local portrait and landscape artist in the mid- to late nineteenth century. His great-granddaughter is photographing as many of his paintings as she can find as a legacy for her two grandsons. If you know the whereabouts of any of Mr. Porter's paintings, would you kindly contact her with that information? She may be reached either by email or postal mail at:

Mrs. Rachel Bitler
41 Lookout Dr.
Bloomsburg, PA 17815

rbitler@ptd.net

SOME USEFUL TERMINOLOGY:

In this area, the bulk of the land grants and patents date from between 1651 and 1761. In these documents, property was frequently described using the terms river, creek, run, head, and branch. These terms continue in limited use today (according to their earlier definitions), but usually only amongst older county residents who grew up with an understanding of the words. For a researcher trying to determine the location or bounds of a particular early tract of land, an understanding of the words is useful. "River" is pretty much self-explanatory and we have here the Potomac and Rappahannock. "Creek" refers to a tributary of a river that is deep enough to be navigable by boats of significant size. In Stafford, Aquia Creek

and Potomac Creek would be examples. Now imagine that you are in a small rowboat and have traveled upstream on either Aquia or Potomac Creek beyond the point that most boats can go. The water becomes more and more shallow and once your little craft grinds to a halt, you have reached the “head” of the creek. Above this, Aquia Creek becomes Aquia Run and Potomac Creek becomes Potomac Run. A “run” is not deep enough to float a boat but is wide enough that in order to cross it on foot, you will get your feet and pants legs wet. Continuing to progress upstream, once the run becomes narrow enough to hop across, it is considered a “branch.” The early surveyors and land records folks understood these terms, used them consistently, and they have distinct meanings in the patents and later deeds. It is worth noting that silting has altered the location of the “heads” of the creeks. When George Brent (c.1640-c.1700) built his home at the head of Aquia Creek, he was able to take a small boat up as far as what is now called the Catholic Cemetery near the Crucifix. Due to the effects of silting, the “head” is now some distance downstream. During the early years of the eighteenth century, the head of Potomac Creek, as mentioned in the land patents, was about where Centerport Parkway crosses Potomac Run and Mountain View Road. Obviously, that head is also further downstream now.

LINCOLN’S JOKE ON SEWARD

An article in the *Dupuyer Acantha* newspaper (Dupuyer, Montana) of Mar. 9, 1895 relates from earlier years an amusing story about Abraham Lincoln and an ambulance driver in Stafford.

On the 9th the First Corps, commanded by Gen. Reynolds was reviewed by the president on a beautiful plain on the north of Potomac Creek, about eight miles from Hooker’s headquarters. We rode thither in an ambulance over a rough corduroy road; and, as we passed over some of the more difficult portions of the jolting way, the ambulance driver who sat in front, occasionally let fly a volley of suppressed oaths at his wild team of six mules. Finally Mr. Lincoln, leaning forward, touched the man on the shoulder, and said, “Excuse me, my friend, are you an Episcopalian?”

The man greatly startled, looked round and replied, “No, Mr. President; I am a Methodist.”

“Well,” said Lincoln, “I thought you must be an Episcopalian, because you swear just like Gov. Seward, who is a churchwarden.” The driver swore no more.

UPCOMING MEETINGS: We pray that 2021 will be a better year for all of us and that we will be able to eventually resume having our meetings. When the situation improves—and it will—we will notify the membership by email, Facebook, and the newsletter. That will be a time of celebration!

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.

DUES WERE DUE IN JANUARY!

Dues for 2021 were due January 1st. Membership benefits include a subscription to the newsletter and participation at special events. Please don’t forget to renew your membership so you’ll not miss out on any of our 2021 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
\$25 Family Annual Dues

\$5 Student
\$200 Individual Life Member

Please make checks payable to Stafford County Historical Society (SCHS) and mail them and the completed form (below) to the **Treasurer** at:

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