



Courthouse Tavern Museum

Tales from the Tavern

For Friends of the King and Queen Courthouse Tavern Museum and Members of the King and Queen County Historical Society

Spring 2015

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Museum Management Changes

Ellen White has stepped down as the head of the Tavern Museum. She has been volunteering at the Courthouse Tavern Museum since its inception, approximately 14 years ago. Ellen grew up in King and Queen County and returned to Virginia after a long career in finance in New York City. She was a member of the original volunteer team who did whatever needed to be done to make the Museum a success. Over the years she wore many hats and dealt with the inevitable challenges of a start-up organization, spending many hours on tasks great and small. Her enthusiasm and excitement was always present. More recently, she served as Chairman of the Museum Council. We wish Ellen success in the next phase of her life and look forward to her visits to the Museum.

Nancy Herman-Thompson, also one of the original volunteer team, has returned as a Museum volunteer to take the position of Chairman of the Museum Council.

cosmopolitan, like their European counterparts. However, the colonial communities had barely begun emerging from their “hard scrabble” existence and had very few, if any, upscale entertainment venues where these individuals could “be seen.”

Fashionable towns in Virginia did not exist before the mid-18th Century. Therefore, they built their own “banqueting” houses where dances, dinners, and musical entertainment were held and which also served as private “inns” for overnight stays. Although no new artifacts specific to this concept have been discovered, a fresh look at existing artifacts and data substantially supports this theory. Mr. Carson walked the audience through the analysis, citing three colonial buildings in Virginia as examples: one each on Green Spring Plantation in James City County built by Gov. William Berkeley in 1645, Fairfield in Gloucester County built by Lewis Burwell II in 1694 and Corotoman in Lancaster County built by Robert “King” Carter in 1725.

Mr. Carson was Vice President for Research at Colonial Williamsburg Foundation until his retirement three years ago. He received his professional training in early modern British and colonial American history from Harvard University. He served as Colonial Williamsburg’s chief historian from 1976-2006 and for many years on the National Historic Landmarks Advisory Board. Currently, Mr. Carson divides his life between Williamsburg, Virginia and The Hague, Netherlands.

A New Concept In Colonial Era Entertaining

At the January 25, 2015 King and Queen Historical Society Meeting, Mr. Cary Carson introduced “All Dressed Up, and No Place To Go,” a new concept about Virginia colonial society – magnificent private buildings initially considered private homes (MacMansions) masquerading as private club houses. The owners were born in the Virginia colony or arrived mid-1700s, married into the early prestigious colonial families and were wealthy, fashionable, and



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Museum provides artifacts for WTVR CBS 6 News Video

On Friday, February 13th WTVR, the CBS 6 News affiliate in Richmond, Virginia, presented a video clip billed as “Friday the 13th: What happened 130 years ago dubbed Richmond’s crime of the century.” Thomas “Tommie” Cluverius, an ambitious, mild mannered, respected young lawyer from King and Queen County, was accused of murdering his cousin Lillian “Lillie” Madison of King William County when she became pregnant after their “secret, steamy” affair. The murder occurred in Richmond on Friday, March 13, 1885. At first, authorities thought she had committed suicide, but further investigation revealed that she had been murdered. Although the evidence was circumstantial and Tommie’s defense team was formidable, he was convicted and hanged in Richmond on January 14, 1887. He was buried at his aunt Jane Tunstall’s home, Cedar Lane, in Little Plymouth, King and Queen County, where he had grown up and where he lived when not in Richmond. About 10 days before the video aired, Page McLemore, accessions administrator for the Museum, received a phone call from the news team requesting assistance. The Museum is a treasure trove of artifacts from the Nineteenth Century and information about the old homes in King and Queen County. Museum display rooms and artifacts were used in the video.

The book *Old Houses of King and Queen County Virginia* published in 1973 by the King and Queen County Historical Society provided background on Cedar Lane, the Tunstall family and a mention of the murder. One passage of note was, “Citizens of King and Queen County...thought that the accused was innocent...incapable of committing such a dastardly crime.”



Thomas Cluverius

In October 2011 author John Milliken Thompson reviewed his novel *The Reservoir* at the Museum. The novel is based on the actual information available on the murder and has been described as an exciting “did he do it story.” Even though Tommie paid the ultimate price, he went to his grave declaring his innocence. In the era of the murder, it captured frontpage headlines throughout the East for many weeks. The *New York Times* printed 37 articles on the case. Page McLemore noted, “It does sound like fiction. He was lost to our history. But he has been brought back.”

The video clip can be viewed on the Museum website.

Then and Now – Taking the Train to Richmond

Today many people who live in King and Queen County travel daily to Richmond in a motor vehicle for employment, business, and entertainment, and do not think twice about the travel time – approximately an hour (or a little more) each way. The roads and bridges are there and seem to always have been. However, during the later half of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries folks would take the train because it was faster and more comfortable. “What train?” you say.

The geography of the county, the Mattaponi and York Rivers on one side and the Dragon Run on the other side, made it difficult to travel anywhere

during the first 250 years the county existed. For much of that time the roads and bridges as we know them today did not exist. County residents who visited Richmond had to traverse the Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers and the Chickahominy Swamp to reach their destination. They would travel over poorly maintained roads that wandered here and there through the country-side to reach a ferry crossing, taking most of a day just to reach Richmond. Another option was to take a long trip of several days and go by sailing sloop or steamship down the Mattaponi and York Rivers to Hampton and then up the James River to Richmond. As commerce grew in the region, residents of West Point and the Virginia General Assembly recognized the need for a railroad. The Richmond & York River Railroad line from West Point to Richmond was completed in 1859, making travel between Richmond and West Point easier and more comfortable. It suffered considerable damage during the Civil War, but reopened in 1868.

Residents could take a ferry across the Mattaponi River and catch the train at West Point, or further down the line at Lester Manor. In a 1993 interview on the history of the Walkerton Bridge, Mrs. Martha Taylor Owen of Walkerton spoke about a resident riding the train as a child. “She lived four miles from Walkerton and what an adventure it was to take a trip to Richmond because at 3 or 4 o’clock in the morning they would have to get in their buggy and drive to Walkerton and take the ferry across the river. Then (they would) catch the stagecoach from there to Lester Manor in King William County, near the Pamunkey River, to board the train to Richmond. And it was probably close to an all day trip.”

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Do You Recognize These Men?

This picture from the Museum archives was taken of a group of Confederate Veterans in front of the Confederate monument at the King and Queen Court House in the late 1800's or early 1900's (before 1915). Can you identify these men?

Planning a Family Day Trip this summer? Visit the Courthouse Tavern Museum. We have something for everyone! Children love the classroom in the old Schoolhouse, the buggy that was used for transportation before motor vehicles, the toys, and the short video clips of local country life 100 years or more ago. Adults will appreciate the historic district, the artifacts depicting County Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness from the early Indians to the mid-Twentieth Century, and the Ivor Noel Hume Bottle Exhibit. Researchers will appreciate the wealth of county history in the collections in the Library, the Archives, and the video histories of residents. Access our website for more details.

Train cont'd.

The train delivered passengers to the commercial area of Richmond near today's Shockoe Bottom.

With the advent of bridges at West Point and Walkerton, and better roads in the early Twentieth Century, travel to Richmond was faster and easier. The increasing number of motor vehicles spurred the state to develop and maintain state roads such as Rt. 360 and Rt. 33, and build more bridges and update existing ones. With the flexibility offered by motor vehicles, the use of the Richmond & York River Railroad for public transportation diminished substantially.

Featuring the DVD Collection

As the Twenty-First Century began and the Museum was founded, it became important, not only to create a place to exhibit county artifacts, but to preserve memories senior citizens had of life in King and Queen County in the Twentieth Century. Thus, the Oral History Project was born. Twenty-seven men and twenty-four women were recorded over a period of five years. Each person interviewed provided family, education, and occupation background, sometimes including childhood and family anecdotes and pictures. In addition, they shared their knowledge of various subjects: Church, Civil Rights, the Civil War, World War II (WWII), the Great Depression, Health, School, Recreational Activities, Holidays, Teaching, Transportation, Volunteering and many others.

Since this year is the 70th year of the end of World War II, it is interesting to note that 17 of those interviewed spoke of their experiences during the war years, whether in the war theater or on the home front.

There are also DVDs relating the history of county schools, both black and white, and the experiences of the local Native Americans of the Mattaponi and Rappahannock Indian Tribes. In addition, there is a video of the history of the old Walkerton Bridge produced by the Virginia Highway Department in 1993.

The DVDs can be viewed in the Museum Library, and can be purchased online or at the Museum. The lengths vary.

Welcome to Tales from the Tavern, a communication to friends of the King and Queen Courthouse Tavern Museum and members of the King and Queen Historical Society.

Be A Volunteer

Volunteers are needed as docents and to participate in projects. This is a wonderful way to meet and work with interesting people and to expand your knowledge of King and Queen County. At the same time you will help to keep this "gem" of a Museum open to the public. Contact us using the information below.

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Help us provide better, less expensive and more immediate communications by sharing your email address. Newsletters by email and online are in color.

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