



# Tales from the Tavern

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

## Summer 2019

### Inside this issue:

Save The Date - October Historical Society Meeting, Holiday Open House, Thank You Museum Docents, Supporting King & Queen Schools, A New Virginia Historical Marker, Donald Robertson's School, Following the Fossil-Man, A Request of the Museum, Invitation from the King William Historical Society

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### Save the Date:

**Sunday, October 27, 3:00 p.m.**

The King & Queen County Historical Society will hold its next meeting at historic Norwood, home of Dr. A. W. Lewis and Elizabeth Christeller, 859 Norwood Road, Bruington, VA 23023. Dr. Lewis, who was instrumental in the establishment of the Bruington Rural Historic District, will talk about that experience, highlighting the primary structures the Historic District encompasses. Norwood is one of those houses



Norwood - built in 1812

**Sunday, December 8, 2:00-4:00 p.m.**

The Courthouse Tavern Museum will hold its annual Holiday Open House at the museum featuring festive music, food, gifts, and children's activities. Admission is free.

### Thank You Museum Docents

by Nancy Herman-Thompson

The 2019 Docent & Volunteer Appreciation Dinner was held June 18th at the King & Queen Women's Club. Over 50 docents and guests attended and enjoyed visiting and a delicious meal prepared by the Women's Club. As is usual for this event – thunderstorms were nearby but the weather waited until we were safely in the building before the deluge this year.

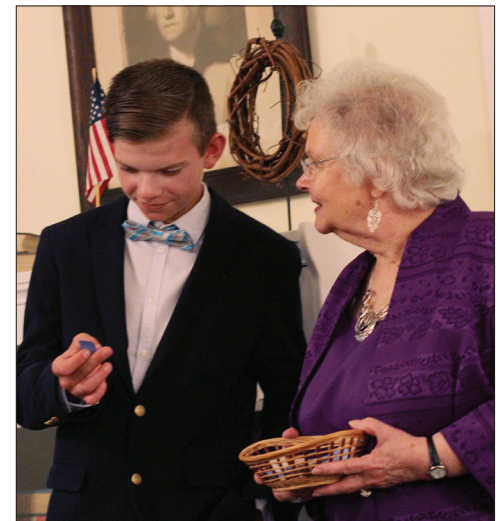
Several new docents were welcomed and brief announcements regarding our new scheduling procedure and notice of our upcoming 20th Anniversary were given. A special thank-you went out to Dennis Roane & Dale Seward. While working on Memorial Day weekend, their quick thinking saved the Museum building from water damage due to leaking HVAC pipes in the attic above the second floor.

Museum Council Chair, Nancy Herman-Thompson, gave a special recognition to three Docents for their extra efforts in volunteering at the Museum: Newell Randall, Page McLemore, and Biddie Shelor. Newell was presented with a special photograph of the Mattaponi taken by David Litchfield, and Page and Biddie each received a watercolor painting by local artist (and Museum Council member) Gwynn Litchfield.

We were treated to another visit by "Dorothy Docent" who continues to encourage, educate and humor us into being better docents! This year Dorothy also gave us our list of needed improvements to the building and exhibits, and reminded us to pick up a dust cloth and use it. Thanks to Linda Barnes for her preparation and her continued desire to educate us with her alter-ego.

Our speaker for the evening was Ms. Holly Horton of Poquoson. Holly had previously been employed with the Middlesex County Museum and the Historical Society of West Point. She spoke on current trends in genealogical research, and especially the use of DNA results to further your family history. She enthusiastically shared that she is related to a local King & Queen family, the Chenaults, and that her early ancestors were French-Huegonaut immigrants to America.

A door prize raffle was led by Wyatt Sheley and Roberta Jones with twelve lucky winners. A special thanks goes to Frank and Barbara Hurst for providing our meal. And THANK YOU again to ALL Docents for all you do to help keep the doors open for our Museum.



Wyatt Sheley and Roberta Jones draw door-prize number. Photo by Alice Sheley.

### Supporting King & Queen Schools

Each year, the Courthouse Tavern Museum invites new King & Queen County teachers, their mentors, and school principals to lunch in August to introduce them to the museum and to share with them the support that the Museum can provide to the school



# Tales from the Tavern

system. Over the years this event has strengthened the Museum's relationship with the schools.



Lunch with new King & Queen teachers, their mentors, and school administrators.

## A New Virginia Historical Marker

On Saturday, August 17, a highway marker commemorating Donald Robertson's School was placed at the junction of Newtown Road (Rt. 721) and Sorghum Road (Rt. 660) in King & Queen County between St. Stephen's Church and Newtown (at the location of the old Owenton store). Peter G. Meyerhof, PhD, DDS, a resident of California, sponsored the sign and worked with the Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Transportation to place it. When asked why he felt so strongly, he said, "While I was doing research for a comprehensive biography of Dr. Robert Semple who played several major roles in California history, I researched his mother Lucy Robertson Semple and then her father Donald Robertson. I remember Caroline Gwathmey of your Society was very gracious in helping me. Then in 2017 I had another opportunity to visit your archives and specifically research your materials on Donald Robertson. It was already quite clear how important Donald Robertson truly was, not only to President Madison, but to many other early Virginians who had attended his school, but it seemed that biographies of Madison and even my visit to Montpelier in that year had next to nothing to say about him....." Meyerhof felt strongly that Donald Robertson's School should be remembered. He further noted, "He [Robertson] also represents perhaps one of the most inspiring examples of the value of school teachers - a concept that needs to be remembered in our society."

Donald Robertson was an educator who from 1758-1773 operated one of the first schools in Colonial Virginia. Both boys and girls attended his school. Mr. Robertson influenced the lives of many individuals who went on to become leaders of Virginia and the nation. The most notable of these was James Madison, the fourth

president of the United States, who was considered the "Father of the Constitution." President Madison wrote: "All I have been in life, I owe largely to that man." Others included future Revolutionary War hero George Rogers Clark and his younger brother William of "Lewis and Clark" exploration fame. Others included future members of the Virginia General Assembly, Virginia Governors John Tyler and Robert Brooke, John Penn a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and Harry Innes a prominent justice who led the cause to separate Kentucky from Virginia.



Peter Meyerhof unveiling the historical marker.

At the unveiling, Meyerhof noted the significance of the school and its founder. In addition, Ms. Jennifer Loux, from the Department of Historic Resources spoke about the Highway Marker Program and Ms. Ellen White, a King & Queen County Historical Society Board member, talked about the archeological investigation by the HS into the location of the school. Ms. Elizabeth Chew, Ph.D., Vice President of Museum Programs at Montpelier, and Ms. Bethany Sullivan, Director of the James Madison Museum in Orange, conveyed the influence of the school on President Madison. The marker reads:

## Donald Robertson's School

**Donald Robertson (1717-1783), born and educated in Scotland, established a private boarding school on his farm two miles southwest of here by 1758. Among his students were James Madison, fourth president of the United States and "Father of the**

# Tales from the Tavern

Constitution,” and Brig. Gen George Rogers Clark, militia commander in the Old Northwest during the Revolutionary War. Madison attended the school between the ages of 11 and 16 and later described Robertson as a “man of extensive learning, and a distinguished Teacher.” Instructing both boys and girls, Robertson provided a classical education influenced by the Scottish Enlightenment. He operated his highly respected school for at least 15 years.

More detail on the school can be found by visiting the online exhibit on the Courthouse Tavern Museum website: [kingandqueenmuseum.org/donald-robertsons-school/](http://kingandqueenmuseum.org/donald-robertsons-school/). A transcript of Dr. Meyerhof’s remarks is also available upon request.

## A Request of the Museum

The Fluvanna Historical Society is writing an article about John Flannagan, the former slave of the Flannagan family in Fluvanna County, who went west after the Civil War, and his former “young master”, John Bowles Flannagan, who came to King and Queen County in the 1870s, married Louise B. Yarrington and established a wheelwright and undertaking business. They are looking for pictures of the slave and his cabin that were sent to Mr. J. B. Flannagan in 1903. The Museum does not have the artifacts, but wants to share the story in case readers may have more information. The story centers on a former slave’s unusual gift. When reading, please note that both principals have the same first and last names. For this article John is the former slave and J. B. is the “young master.”

At a time when Virginia families were still recovering from the Civil War and many family members had migrated west, J. B. Flannagan of Shackelfords received a communication that was certainly shocking. An excerpt from an article in the *Richmond Times Dispatch* dated February 11, 1903 tells the tale. “Mr. John Bowles Flannagan, a well-known citizen of King and Queen, has come into possession of a large and valuable property in the city of Omaha [Nebraska] in a way that is very interesting and unique. Sometime in the fall of last year [1902] Mr. [J.B.] Flannagan received an account of a recent decision of an Omaha court sustaining a suit brought many years ago by John Flannagan (colored) against a number of wealthy citizens of Omaha for ownership of land upon which a large portion of what now constitutes the business section of Omaha is built. John says he was born in Fluvanna County, VA. more than ninety years ago; that he was a slave of Mr. James Flannagan, a prominent citizen of Fluvanna County; that he well remembers his old Virginia home and his

**GIVES ALL  
TO YOUNG  
MASTER**

Old Negro Wins After  
Long Litigation.

**KING AND QUEEN  
MAN IS WEALTHY**

Valuable Property In Omaha  
Involved in the Suit.

**THE NEGRO'S TITLE  
LONG DISREGARDED**

“young master” Mr. John Bowles Flannagan; that during the Civil War he was hostler for [CSA] General Buckner, and at the close of the war was employed by a party of western settlers operating in Nevada who having no money to pay him gave him forty acres of land considered worthless. Upon this he built a cabin, where he has lived ever since. Although he protested that the land was his, during the Omaha boom days no one gave serious consideration to his claims, but took up

the land and built on it. He employed counsel and took the matter into the courts, where it has been pending for many years and has now been finally decided in the old Negro’s favor. Mr. [J.B.] Flannagan wrote to John and his attorney who corroborates the statement made in regard to the suit. The editor of the *Omaha Work-Herald* recently wrote to Mr. [J.B.] Flannagan saying that old John had requested him to write that he must come to Omaha at once; that he had rather see his “young master” than anyone else and that if he would come there he would give him all of his property valued at several million dollars.” Photos of old John and his cabin were enclosed.

A month later another article appeared in the *Richmond Times Dispatch* that conveyed that J. B. Flannagan had found John well, unusually active for one at his advanced age, and was delighted to see his “young master”. Before J.B. left, John signed the necessary papers giving him eight valuable lots in the city of Omaha and a number of lots in Sylvester, Michigan. J. B. said that on one Omaha property there was a large flour mill producing one hundred barrels capacity per day and that negotiations were pending for the sale of the latter to the proprietors of the mill. J. B. also said that old John and his wife who is a paralytic are apprehensive lest the people who opposed his suit will poison him or that lawyers will cheat them of their property.

In 1913 John B. Flannagan passed away and was buried in Poroporone Baptist Church Cemetery. As we go to print additional information has been made available that will be shared in the next edition. Any more information from readers would be appreciated.



# Tales from the Tavern



The Fossil Man Newell Randall with campers at Jamestown 4-H camp. Photo by Newell Randall.

## Following the Fossil-Man

Fossil-Man Newell Randall was busy this summer along some of Virginia's rivers exposing young people to the marine fossils beneath their feet. He spent 3 days in June along the James River teaching campers from 5 Middle Peninsula/Tidewater counties at Jamestown 4-H Camp and a day in August at River Camp on the

Mattaponi sponsored by the Mattaponi Pamunkey Rivers Association. In all he engaged over 100 youths. These outdoor interactive classrooms were a relaxing setting that made learning fun.

## Invitation from the King William Historical Society

On Sunday, October 20, 2019, 2:30 p.m. the St. John's Church Restoration Association and the King William County Historical Society are sponsoring the presentation "Religion and the American Revolution" at Old St. John's Church. The speaker will be John Ericson, the Outreach Coordinator and Public Historian for St. Luke's Historic Church and Museum near Smithfield, VA. This under-explored topic is a vital one in understanding the reasons for separation from Great Britain. Religion was not only one of the causes of separation, but, also the grammar of the Revolution. John will explore the role of religious language and practices as part of the Patriot cause as well as the role of clergy and chaplains during the Revolution. Old St. John's Church is located on Route 30 at 103 St. John's Church Lane, about 9 miles northwest of West Point. For questions, contact Carl Fischer at (804) 843-9194. On the web, visit [oldstjohns.org](http://oldstjohns.org) for information on the church and the Old St. John's Restoration Association, and [kingwilliamhistory.org](http://kingwilliamhistory.org) for information on the King William County Historical Society.

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