

# The Messenger

April 1989 • Volume 15

The Chesterfield Historical Society of Virginia, P.O. Box 40, Chesterfield Courthouse, Virginia 23832

## Henry Johnson

(1834-1926)

by Lucious Edwards

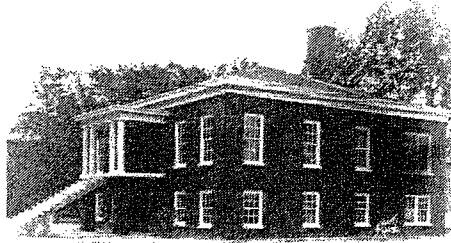
There is not a great deal of information about slaves from Chesterfield, their origins, family life, and in particular, how former slaves fared after slavery was abolished in 1865 by the 13th amendment. One unique bit of information can be found in The William Henry Johnson Papers housed in the Virginia State University Archives.

While not much is known of his early life, based on information from his son and other archival records, it is known that he was born in 1834, the same year in which the 10 room house where he grew up was constructed. He later became butler to the Griffin family who owned Fleets Farm in Chesterfield County, on the site of what is now Virginia State University.

There were few blacks in Ettrick during the antebellum period, because the cotton and grist mills, which operated on power generated by the fall of the river, used white labor exclusively.

The few blacks living in Ettrick looked to Petersburg where almost half the population of 8,000 was black in 1860, and 3,164 of these black people were free. Because of this large, free black population, there existed more opportunities to meet new people, and through the black owned churches, to enjoy something of a social life. Henry Johnson joined the Gillfield Baptist Church and there met another slave, Malinda, who belonged to John P. Branch, of Petersburg.

In 1858, a child, named



*Fleet's Farm (Plantation) House. This 10 room house was constructed in 1834 and torn down in 1936. The house and 33 acres of land were purchased for the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute, which is now Virginia State University. It served as a female dorm, principal's home and as the first science building on campus. The present day science building was constructed over its original foundation.*



*Henry Johnson, born a slave in Ettrick, Virginia. Raised on what is now the campus of Virginia State University. He was a wagoner by trade, the father of William Henry Johnson.*

William Henry, was born to Malinda Branch and Henry Johnson. From that date and throughout the war years, Malinda Branch and her child lived at various places close to Fleets Farm. In April, 1865, Ulysses S. Grant entered Petersburg. John P. Branch, now a major, fled to Danville, Virginia, taking Malinda Branch and her child with him.

With the end of the war, Malinda and William Henry returned to the Petersburg/Ettrick area and were reunited with Henry Johnson. His son wrote that shortly thereafter, his father, without any money, purchased a lot in "Wells Plat" and erected a house which still stands on what is now Rome Street. Also, with only his word, he purchased a horse and wagon and entered the business world as a contract teamster.

In today's business world it is standard operating procedure for companies to own or maintain their own fleet of vehicles necessary for their work. However, in the days before trucks and tax breaks, businesses in Petersburg and other cities throughout Virginia contracted with a teamster or drayman to carry raw and finished products to and from either the city's port, railhead or terminus of a canal. Because Petersburg had developed all three of these facilities before the war, there was always a need for good, dependable, cheap transportation.

His son wrote that as a teamster "... for 45 years he stuck to it, day and night and all hours of the night, cold, hot, clear, rain or snow; all weather, he was at it. He was never known to miss an appointment, never known to miscarry an

Continued on Page 4

## Quarterly Meeting Notice!!!

The spring meeting of the Historical Society will be held on Sunday, April 23rd, at Branch's Baptist Church, 3400 Broad Rock Boulevard, at 3:00 P.M.. The congregation, established in 1814, has invited us to come as they celebrate their 175th anniversary.

A history of the church will be given and a program of the heritage of the church music in Chesterfield County under the direction of the Rev. Jerry Harris will feature a local musical group. Join us for a delightful afternoon!

See page 3 for more information.

## Death Register

1855-1870

The original Chesterfield County, Virginia, Death Register, 1855-1870 is stored in the Virginia State Library. Access to this record is extremely limited. People who want to use the volume need special permission from the County Clerk to use the book.

The significance of this volume is that it lists the names of all slaves, whites, and "free colored" people who died in Chesterfield during that period of time, along with the date and place of death, age of the person at death, parents' names, place of the person's birth, marital status, occupation, cause of death, name of the person who reported the death and their relationship to the deceased, as well as the name of the owner, in the case of a slave. This information is invaluable to an historian and particularly to a genealogist.

Through the dedicated efforts and hard work of Mrs. Pattie Grady, it has become easier to locate these names. Mrs. Grady has spent numerous laborious hours going through the register and taking the records that were in chronological order, transcribing them and putting them in alphabetical order, noting their page number in the original document. These records, in book form, are now available for review at the Historical Society's Library located in the Old Jail.

Although she has been doing research for over 20 years and goes to the State Library almost every week, Mrs. Grady still considers herself an amateur historian, and considers genealogy a hobby. She states that her interest in history never gets dull because for every answer she uncovers she discovers at least two more questions. Never one to sit idle, Mrs. Grady is now transcribing microfilmed death register records. These new (really old) records will be added to the volume at the Historical Society's Library. When completed, the book will contain death register records from 1853 to 1896.

## Help Find the Missing Link - - - Genealogy Inquiries

I am seeking the parents of Zacheus SNELLINGS, born circa 1810 in Chesterfield County, married Cleopatra Augusta PERDUE, October 3, 1837 in Chesterfield County, daughter of Bartholomew PERDUE and Alice GOODE. Janet K. Wentley, 311 E. Charlotte Street, Millersville, PA 17551.

I have family interest in two CHEATHAM lines and would love to share information with any Cheatham researcher. Richardson CHEATHAM and wife, Pheby BAKER, were my great X3 grandparents. Pheby's grandmother was Tabitha Cheatham ELLIOTT, daughter of Thomas CHEATHAM III and Ann PRIDE. Richardson and brother Owen were sons of William Cheatham who had at least 3 wives: Hatcher, Winfrey and Green. Richardson and Owen were grandsons of Samuel Hatcher Jr., will proved December 1, 1797, Dale Parish, Chesterfield County. I have lots of documentation and family clues but can't quite fit it all together yet. Would much like to communicate with anyone hoping to combine clues to solve some mysteries. Mary McCaffree, 812 Crestmere, Jefferson City MO 65109.

I would like very much to learn more about the family of my ancestor, John FERGUSON, who was born in the 1750s, probably in Chesterfield County. He died circa 1836 in Franklin County, Virginia. I am also interested in the lines of Joseph and Stephen GILL. I have some of Dr. Weisiger's books of Chesterfield and Henrico Counties, and have access to the others at my local library. These have been a great help, but I am hoping that someone can expand on what I have. Linda H. Sylvia, 234 Edgar Road, Webster Groves, MO 63119.



# Happy 175th Anniversary Branch's Baptist Church, 1814 - 1989

by Frances Morris

Branch's Baptist Church is celebrating its 175th Anniversary. On May 7, 1989 at 7 p.m. a drama, A NOBLE HERITAGE, written for the church's 150th Anniversary, will be presented. Other events will be announced later.

The church was organized in 1814 as a mission of the (old) Chesterfield Church. The original name of the church was "The Baptist Church of Christ at Hephzibah." The name "Hephzibah", meaning "In whom is my delight", was taken from the Old Testament. The church was also referred to as "Branch's Meeting House." On July 8, 1876, the church voted to change its name from "Hephzibah" to "Branch's." It may have been named for the Branch family who were early members.

Old church minutes give a glimpse into the times and struggles of past members. In the 1800s, members were often

excluded from the church and their names removed from the roll for a wide number of moral infractions, including intoxication, dancing, family squabbles or failure to attend church regularly. If they expressed regret for their past delinquency and promised to do better they were usually excused. In 1842 a resolution was passed by Hephzibah stating "... it shall be the duty of every white male member ... to report ... the conduct of any member ... that fails under his observation, or may reach his ear in an authentic manner which he may deem inconsistent with the character of a Christian." The first mention of a "sabbath - more school" was in a church meeting in 1851. On April 10, 1852, a motion was made and carried to establish a sabbath school.

The War Between the States had its effect on Hephzibah. In 1865, this sad entry was made in the church

minutes: "In Apriel the State of things was such we had no meeting. Our sity had just been given up to our enimeys."

"October 4, 1884: It was reported by the Comit. on Cemetry that they had laid off & arranged the lots, fixing the price at 50 cts. per foot for not less than 10 ft. for a lot."

"In June 1893 Bro. J. B. Childress of R. Coledge was unanimously extended a call at a salary of \$100 per year and \$50 if posible to colect it."

During the latter part of the 19th Century, baptisms were held at Murchies Mill on Pocoshock Creek. After World War I baptisms were held in Falling Creek at Hopkins Road.

Today the Rev. Cecil Chambers is pastor of the vibrant church of more than 1900 members. With gratitude for its heritage, the church stands ready today to face the challenges of tomorrow in the service of the Lord.

## Spring Day Tour of Surry County

In previous years, many of you have enjoyed the fun and fellowship of our trips to such historic sites as Scotchtown, Stratford Hall, Monticello, Ash Lawn, Kenmore, the Mary Washington House, etc. So join us for what promises to be another delightful day with Society members on Saturday, May 6, for our annual spring bus tour of more historic sites in Virginia.

This year we will be going to Surry County for tours of Smith's Fort Plantation, Chippokes Plantation, Bacon's Castle and St. Luke's Church, with a lunch stop at the Surry House. We will leave from the Courthouse at 8 a.m. and return around 6 p.m. The cost is \$25 which includes bus transportation, all admissions and lunch.

For reservations send a check to the Chesterfield Historical Society by April 26th. Your guests are also welcome.

## The Messenger

of  
The Chesterfield Historical Society of Virginia

Jeanette Hartter Ortiz, *Editor*

Pauline A. Mitchell, *Editorial Assistant*

Susan Whiteman, *Associate Assistant*

# Henry Johnson

Continued from page 1

article .... Those were the days in which a barrel of flour or molasses or sugar, would be transported anywhere within the city limits for ten cents; when 25 cents would suffice to have a trunk and its owner anywhere between Wilcox Branch and the boundary of Pocahontas, north between Knights Farm .... A wagon load of furniture was carried for 50 cents .... And the cost of moving a piano was two dollars; one dollar for the teamster and 25 cents to each of our men at the corners.”

Henry Johnson, because of age and ill health, retired from his business in 1910. He died in 1926. Malinda Johnson was active in Petersburg's black elite social circle and served on numerous committees in the black community. She died in 1910.

Although Henry, Malinda and William Henry Johnson were born slaves they quickly adjusted to being free and set out to make a better life for themselves. Of prime importance to Henry and Malinda Johnson was the future of their only child, William.

Then, as today, many blacks connected upward mobility directly with one's level of education. William Henry Johnson's parents were of that opinion and began his schooling at home. His first teacher, other than his mother, was Mrs. Addie Berry, who taught school at her home on Perry Street. Next was Mr. Collier Tabb, who taught at "East Hill" on Lombard Street. His next move was to the basement of the Gillfield Baptist Church under a teacher named Mr. Bates. After spending some time there he was enrolled in another private school, where he was taught by



*Wedding Portrait of William Henry Johnson and Nannie Brewer, ca. 1887.*

*William H. Johnson was one of the first serious writers hired by the Progress Index. He wrote a weekly column, Rome Street News.*



*Melinda Johnson, wife of Henry Johnson and mother of William Henry Johnson. Born a slave, she belonged to an owner on High Street.*



*William Henry Johnson photographed at Camp Poland, Tennessee, 1898, in the uniform of the 6th Va. United States Colored Troops. Johnson was a major.*

a former Confederate Army officer, Major Giles B. Cooke, in the old frame First Baptist Church. His final years at school were spent at the Colored High School, located in the same building as the old First Baptist Church near Harrison and Filmore Streets. He was a member of the first graduation class in 1874.

Two years later, in 1876, he enrolled at the Hampton Normal and Agricultural School. After graduating from Hampton in 1878, he taught in Surry County for five months. The following fall, quite by chance on a walk through lower Chesterfield County, he encountered a Captain Blankenship who was the county School Superintendent. A conference was held and when the superintendent discovered who young Johnson's father was, and that William Henry was a Hampton graduate, he was offered a position at a new school which was under construction near what is now Virginia State University. Young Johnson accepted the position and taught at that school which was later called the "Old Brickyard School" on Dupuy Road in Ettrick.

William Henry Johnson taught there seven months a year for seven years, at \$30 per month. In 1886 he was offered the principalship of Lombard Street School in Petersburg, with a nine-month school year and a record-breaking wage of \$40 per month. He accepted the offer immediately. This was not just a raise of \$150 per year, it was also possible for him to give up making barrels in the evenings from March through August. This job as a cooper paid \$3 to \$4 per day and he used it to supplement his teaching salary. He remained at Lombard Street School as principal for 31 years until the building was razed and the new Peabody-Williams Building was erected as a combination elementary and high school in 1919. He became principal of the elementary division and retired in 1929, after 43 years of teaching in the city of Peters-

Continued on Page 8

# Report of the Treasurer

as of  
December 31, 1988

**BALANCE AT JULY 1, 1989** **\$79,730.00**

## INCOME:

Bateau Committee	598.19
Cookbook Sales	180.00
Donations	431.37
Dues	3,390.00
Genealogy	32.00
Historic Sites Book	797.70
Historic Markers	425.00
Interest	2,009.60
Magnolia Grange Admissions	1,135.96
Magnolia Grange Donations	6,623.42
Magnolia Grange Pewter	132.00
Maps & Tubes	698.00
Mayfaire	12.00
Miscellaneous	14.98
Museum Donations	174.13
Note Paper Sales	42.00
	<hr/>
	<b>\$16,696.35</b>

## EXPENSES:

Advertisement	5.57
Association Dues	25.00
Bateau Committee	202.76
Computer	1,108.40
Conferences	25.00
Genealogy	18.10
Historic Markers	1,775.00
Hospitality	52.08
Library	145.31
Magnolia Grange	23,750.91
Messenger	577.00
Office Expense	1,003.03
Photographs	104.83
Postage	336.53
Treasurer	111.57
	<hr/>
	29,241.09
<b>Net Increase</b>	<b>(12,544.74)</b>

## ASSETS:

Petty Cash	200.00
Genealogy Petty Cash	20.00
Life Member Certificate	200.00
Cash-Dominion Bank Money Market	30,315.05
Cash-Dominion Bank Checking Account	5,588.35
Cash-Investors Money Market	30,887.20
	<hr/>
	\$67,210.60

## LIABILITIES:

Accounts Payable	25.34
	<hr/>
<b>BALANCE AT DECEMBER 31, 1988</b>	<b>\$67,185.26</b>

Respectfully Submitted:  
Joyce E. Honderich

# Civil War Sites Committee

Two Civil War sites on the Bermuda Hundred line built by Gen. Butler's Army of the James in May 1864 have been saved through the generosity of developer George Emerson, and the efforts of the Civil War Sites Committee Chairman George Fickett.

Both sites are located within the boundaries of a new development called Rochdale Hundred.

Emerson has agreed to set aside the land on which Ft. Wead and Battery Burpee are located. Ft. Wead was named after Col. F. F. Wead of the 98th New York Vol. He was killed in June 1864. Lt. Col. T. F. Burpee, namesake of Battery Burpee and a member of the 21st Connecticut Vol., was killed at Cold Harbor.

We, the Historical Society, wish to thank Mr. Emerson for his gift in saving a piece of Chesterfield County history.

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## We'd Like to Get You

If you wrote a letter to the Editor of *The Messenger*, would it sound like this:

Dear Editor:

I really like The Messenger and I want to be part of its publication. I'll be at the general committee meeting on May 10, 1989 at 7 p.m. in the Old Jail building to find out how I can become a part of the committee.

I. M. Coming

or would your letter sound like this?

Dear Editor:

I hate the way The Messenger is being put together. I could do a better job with one hand tied behind my back, and I plan to show you how at the general committee meeting on May 10, 1989 at 7 p.m. in the Old Jail building!

C. U. There

Whether you like it or hate it, please come and be a part of it by attending the May 10th meeting of The Messenger committee.

## Welcome to these New Members

The following people have joined the society since the last edition:

Mrs. L. J. Spengler  
7106 McCullough  
San Antonio, TX 78216

Dr. John Milne  
4 Norwich Meadows  
Norwich, VT 05055

Nancy Milne (Mrs. John)  
4 Norwich Meadows  
Norwich, VT 05055

Larry Hollister  
4800 Moseley Road  
Moseley, VA 23120

Barbara Hollister (Mrs. Larry)  
4800 Moseley Road  
Moseley, VA 23130

Charles H. Ryland  
P.O. Box 185  
Warsaw, VA 22572

Mrs. Charles Hancock Reed  
13912 Pagehurst Terrace  
Midlothian, VA 23113

Dennis W. Madison  
6207 Halrose Lane  
Richmond, VA 23234

**Vivian J. Fogle**  
**4905 Long Shadow Lane**  
**Midlothian, Va 23112**  
**(Our 1,000th Paid Member)**

Mrs. H. T. Berwold, Jr. (Sarah Adkins)  
4410 Eastwood Court  
Fairfax, VA 22032

Larry W. Brock  
3006 New Found Lane  
Chester, VA 23831

## The Historical Society Wants You!

Plans are underway in the Museum to open a new exhibit this summer of World War II memorabilia from Chesterfield veterans.

After enjoying a similar display at the Smithsonian and learning of its popularity with visitors there, it was decided to begin collecting such items locally.

We are seeking small items that will fit in an exhibit case or onto a bulletin board format. Do you have a Stars and Stripes newspaper, a Yank magazine, a weekend pass, photographs of interest, V-mail, a draft card, a discharge card, pin-up poster, or other souvenirs of your time in service? If you are willing to donate such items to the Museum, please let us hear from you. Call 748-1026 and talk with Lucille Moseley.

Please search your library and if you have books on the Branch and Eppes families of Chesterfield County which you do not need, we would be glad to have them. Our research library is used daily by genealogy enthusiasts, both local and nationwide, and we especially need more information on these two families.

In addition, we are searching for an old deer skin rug for Magnolia Grange to be used in the office. If you have one in your attic left from Grandpa's time and are willing to donate it, please call us. Thank you for your assistance.



**The Museum appreciates the generous donations received from the following groups and individuals:**

Broad Rock Ruritan Club  
Downing Ruritan Club  
Chesterfield Ruritan Club  
Midlothian Ruritan Club  
Tomahawk Ruritan Club  
South Chesterfield Ruritan Club  
Philip Morris  
Thalhimers  
Lind Lawrence Foundation  
Ukrop's Foundation  
Whitlow Chevrolet  
Mr. Howard Cary Adams  
Mr. Preston Holmes  
Dr. F. W. Nicholas  
Dr. Doris Ann Blanton  
Mr. Chewning Watkins  
Mr. Edward A. Moseley Jr.

# Gifts to the Historical Society Library

The Society greatly appreciates these gifts received for our Research Library from the following persons:

- Paul H. Shelton - Book: Food Consumption and Preservation in Colonial and Federal Period Virginia: 1607-1825.
- Mrs. Leslie Eanes Moore - Book: A Virginia-Carolina Genealogy.
- Mrs. Pattie Grady - Book: A Graveyard Preservation Primer.  
Book: Chesterfield County, Virginia, Death Register, 1855-1870.  
Map: Amphill and Chesterfield Lands Lying on the James River and Falling Creek, 1802.
- Frank Hall - Book: Holy Bible containing records of the Miller and Carpenter families 1805-1852.
- George K. Goode - Manuscripts: Goode Family Bible Records and other papers, 1831-1916.
- Lucille Moseley - Book: Guide to the Buildings of Surry and the American Revolution.  
Book: Off the Beaten Path.
- Gerald Wilkes - Book: Mining History of the Richmond Coalfield of Virginia.
- Frances Morris - Book: Hephzibah to Branch's.
- Estate of Mrs. Lilla Spivey - Manuscripts: Diaries, school dental records, personal papers, correspondence and Camp Baker records, 1926-1940.
- Olin L. Taylor - Account Book of William Cook, 1864-1865.  
Book: Bon Air, A History.  
Book: The Robertsons of Winterpock.
- Manchester Masonic Lodge - Book: History of Manchester Lodge No. 14, 1786-1986.
- Heritage Papers - Book: Bedford County, Virginia, Index Wills, 1754-1830.  
Map: Virginia, 1799  
Map: Virginia, 1794

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**We wish to express our thanks to the following persons for their generous gifts to the collection at Magnolia Grange:**

- Dr. Louise Jones - Several antique kitchen utensils.  
Mrs. Owen Field - Man's vest, ca. 1830.  
Mrs. Elizabeth Barker - Collection of old doll's clothes.  
Mr. Clifton Robertson - Daguerreotypes of the DuVal family.  
Mrs. Betsy Weaver - Antique hunting musket, powder horn and rack.  
Mrs. Martha DuBose - Antique toilet set, 4 pieces.  
Mrs. Doris Slayback - Silver punch ladle, ca. 1790-1800.  
Mr. & Mrs. Henry Jones - Mirror, ogee frame, ca. 1850.  
Mrs. Mary Johnson - Feather mattress.  
Mrs. James C. Farley - Wicker doll carriage, 1860 doll, cat door stop, toy Victorian dresser, several small antique toys.  
Mrs. Ethel Ahern - Woven coverlet, 1864.  
Mrs. Peggy Ragland - Baby pillows.

**We wish to express appreciation to the following persons who have generously contributed to the Historical Society and to Magnolia Grange:**

- Judge & Mrs. Ernest P. Gates  
Mrs. Mary M. Gates  
Mr. Roy N. Norton Jr.  
Dr. Wyatt Osborne  
Dr. Buford D. Philpy  
Mrs. Janice C. Reed  
The RECO Foundation  
Mr. Jonathan P. Rogers  
Mr. & Mrs. Englar Roop  
Mrs. J. Wilton Smith  
Thalhimers  
The Ukrop's Foundation  
Mr. C. Porter Vaughan  
Mr. Randolph H. Watkins  
Mr. Waverly K. Winfree

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**We express our appreciation to the following persons who have generously donated artifacts to the Museum, September 1988 - February 1989:**

- Mr. Charles H. Ryland - Map of the Richmond Coal Fields, 1858  
Mrs. Marguerite Christian - Empire side chair, ca. 1840  
Mrs. Nora Langford - Pewter child's thimble  
Mrs. Lillian Womack - Commemorative plate of Salem Baptist Church  
Mrs. Foy Ketchum - Souvenir photo card of Hickory Road School, 1912  
U.S. Army Reserve - Bicentennial costume; Revolutionary War Soldier's uniform
- U.S. Army Reserve - Reproduction of British Brown Bess musket (2)  
Mrs. Lee Goode Wood - Lady's fan, ca. 1900  
Mr. Charles Wilson - Block plane  
Mr. William Beverly Gates III - Collection of seven Confederate notes, three Virginia treasury notes, one Confederate bond and one U.S. Army Civil War belt buckle  
Mr. Clyde McPeters - Indian gorget

# Henry Johnson

Continued from page 4

burg and more than 50 years in the state of Virginia.

Although William Henry Johnson spent a considerable amount of time in professional activities, he still found time to become involved with different groups around the city and state. He was vice-president of the Negro Organizational Society, founded in 1912 at Hampton Institute. This organization was dedicated to the improvement of health, education and agriculture among black people. As one of the founders of a black Chamber of Commerce in Petersburg, Johnson served as president in 1924. In 1925 he was elected vice-president of the Old Dominion Investment Company, a local black bank, and was connected with the local Investment and Realty Corporation of Virginia, also a local black banking concern. William Henry Johnson was one of two highest ranking black officers

in what was then the black Virginia Militia. In 1878 he joined the Petersburg Blues as a private. Twenty years later, when war was declared against Spain, Major Johnson took command of the 2nd Battalion of the 6th Virginia United States Colored Volunteers.

And last but not least, he was one of the first black feature writers for a white southern newspaper. In 1919 the Petersburg Progress-Index engaged him to write a serious column about black life in the city. The column appeared first as "Rome Street," and then was renamed, "Subjects of Interest to Colored Readers." It lasted for 16 years, until 1935.

## Conclusion

The writer does not intend to suggest that this family's success was typical of former slaves from Chesterfield or any other area for that matter. Historians have long debated whether the success of blacks after the Civil War was directly connected to the person's skin color or to whom the slaves' former owner was. The argument

cannot be settled by the information available to us about the Johnson family. In this case, clearly, there were elements of both.

*Lucious Edwards was born and raised in Chesterfield County. He earned both his undergraduate and graduate degrees in History from Virginia State University. Since 1976 Mr. Edwards has been the archivist at VSU.*



## REMINDER

Annual membership dues for the 1988-89 year of \$10.00 per member were due by July 1, 1988. There are still some outstanding. Have you paid yours? If not, please mail your check today to: **CHESTERFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VIRGINIA**, P.O. Box 40, Chesterfield, VA 23832

The Chesterfield Historical Society of Virginia  
P.O. Box 40  
Chesterfield Courthouse, Virginia 23832

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