

The Messenger of the Chesterfield Historical Society of Virginia

Number 2

Chesterfield County, Virginia

October, 1982

News Notes:

The Chesterfield Historical Society now has an official headquarters. On May 26, 1982 the Board of Supervisors granted to the Chesterfield County Museum Committee the Old Jail located next to the Museum on the Court House Square with the directions that the Historical Society be allowed to occupy it under the supervision of the Museum Committee.

On the first floor of the Jail, the front room will be used for small committee meetings, research work, displays and to house our library. A small office is located in the back for work purposes. We will share a phone extension with the Museum. The jail cells on the second floor will eventually be on display as part of the county history.

The Society is deeply grateful to the Board of Supervisors and members of the Museum Committee for allowing us to use the Jail. We would also like to express our appreciation to Mr. Bill Howell of General Management who has given his personal attention to the renovation of the first floor for our use.

The Charter sheets of the Society signed by the first members have been framed and will hang in the Old Jail. The second copy of these sheets has been deposited for preservation at the Virginia Historical Society.

Mr. Lewis Vaden has been appointed by Judge Gates as Chairman of the Finance Committee. Also, under Mr. Vaden's guiding hand as Clerk of the Court, the loose papers of Chesterfield Co. dating back to 1760 are being microfilmed by the Virginia State Library and flat filed in acid free folders. A group of ten people from the Society were instructed by Suzanne Ray from the Virginia State Library on how to index the microfilm, and this is now under way.

The Historical Committee has cataloged 900 to 1000 private (church and family) graves and gravesite locations in the county. Chairman Patti Grady still needs lots of help. Anyone interested please contact her (790-1600).

We are beginning a picture collection of historic county events, homes, and citizens. If you have such photographs and will donate them to the Society or will copy them for us, they will be preserved and used for research. The CHESTERFIELD GAZETTE has requested that we supply them with 52 such pictures for publication. Call Hugh Goodwyn at 748-5082.

Volunteers are needed to help staff the museum. If you can serve for a day per month or a half-day, individually or with a friend contact Ruby Williams at 748-0886.

A Christmas house tour of historic homes in Chesterfield was discussed at the last meeting. If you can help with this project in any way please call Robert Woodcock at 276-2068.

The following items have been given to the Society:

1. The Ivey Memorial Methodist Church Register 1883-1931 presented by Mrs. Irene McDaniel. She also gave a large box of newspaper clippings on Chesterfield Co. and Virginia history.
2. "Genealogy of William Moseley Immigrant to Virginia 1649" by Robert B. Moseley presented by Catherine Bass, Ann Z. Travis and Edward A. Moseley, Jr.
3. An essay "Who is Anderson Edwards?" by Connie Clawson and Jesi Newman presented by Page Rudd Perkins.
4. Genealogy - "A Bass Family in Virginia" by Barbara Day Bass presented by Ms. Bass.
5. Photograph of the Dry Bridge School class of 1908 presented by Gladys Spears Dance.
6. Photograph and biography of Judge Beverly Hancock - presented by Tom P. Hundley.
7. "Basses and their Kin" written and presented by B. Calvin Bass.

List of officers:

President - Judge Ernest P. Gates
First Vice-President - Lucille Cheatham Moseley
Second Vice-President - Judge Lawrence A. Belcher
Recording Secretary - Robert Preston Jones
Corresponding Secretary - Vera Robertson
Treasurer - George W. Moore, Jr.

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—the Editor, Mary Ellen Howe

The Old Jail

by Waverly Winfree

A stone prominently marked "1842" and placed near the center on the facade of a building suggests and one assumes that it designates the date of the building's erection. However, for the "Old Chesterfield Jail" this is not true! The 1842 stone apparently came from an earlier jail known as the Bastile and located across the Court House green. It was simply used as construction material and was intended to be forever hidden by the roof of a one-story porch. Renovations in the mid-1930's dictated the removal of the porch and exposed the Bastile's cornerstone. Thus, the date marker of one building has confused historians and laymen alike about the construction of another; and doubtlessly

as long as the "Old Jail" stands, this same confusion will reign supreme except for the readers of *The Messenger*.

The Bastile, a small one-story granite structure with three prisoner cells was built in 1842. How Chesterfield's jail for the last half of the nineteenth century acquired this nickname is unknown. This building was condemned by the Virginia State Board of Charities and Corrections in 1890, and the Circuit Court of Chesterfield subsequently ordered the Board of Supervisors to repair the present jail or have a new one constructed. In considering these alternatives, the Supervisors moved with dispatch. Before the passage of a year they had reviewed numerous plans and specifications, interviewed prospective builders, and awarded a contract for the construction of a new Jail.

Van Dorn Iron Works Company of Ohio was the successful bidder for the project. Construction began in mid-1891. The 1842 jail was dismantled and serviceable materials, particularly the granite blocks, were used in the new building thus accounting for the misplaced cornerstone. Several sub-contractors aided in the construction which was completed late in 1892. Financing the new jail was accomplished through a bond issue for six thousand dollars sanctioned by a special act of the Virginia General Assembly and floated by the Board of Supervisors. No ballot of the registered voters was required at this time for local bond issues.

The original building of 1892 consisted of two stories with a tin hipped roof. The first story was of granite ashlar blocks from the old jail and the second of red pressed brick with windows surrounded with granite. A one-story porch spanned the entire front. Capacity of the jail was twenty-four prisoners. There were six cells designed to house four prisoners each, three cells on each floor; apparently the top floor remains today as it was originally constructed. The building was heated by wood stoves, oil lamps provided light, and there was no running water. Prisoners were fed from outside sources, in some instances by the sheriff and his family.

For a large part of the time during the early twentieth century, the jail was completely empty, due to the low crime rate in Chesterfield. However, early in 1936 several prisoners dislodged decayed planks from the ceiling of the second floor and cut their way through the tin roof to effect their escape. This action precipitated a renovation of the building the following year. The hipped roof was removed and replaced by the present flat roof with parapet. The front door was changed from the left side to the center of the facade and the porch was removed. Apparently the first floor cells were taken out at this time to provide space for the County Police Department. Due to the spectacular growth of the county's population during the post World War II years as well as a gradually increasing crime rate, the old jail was no longer sufficient to serve as a detention facility. Chesterfield prisoners were housed in the Henrico County Jail in Richmond on a contract basis. They were shuttled between there and the Court House for trial, and the building merely served as a temporary lockup. Chesterfield's new jail was completed in 1962 and the old jail converted into offices for the Fire Department. It was used by the Fire Department until May of 1982 when the Board of Supervisors designated it to be used as part of the Chesterfield County Museum.



The misleading dated stone.



The Old Jail—1982.

photos by Beth Landi

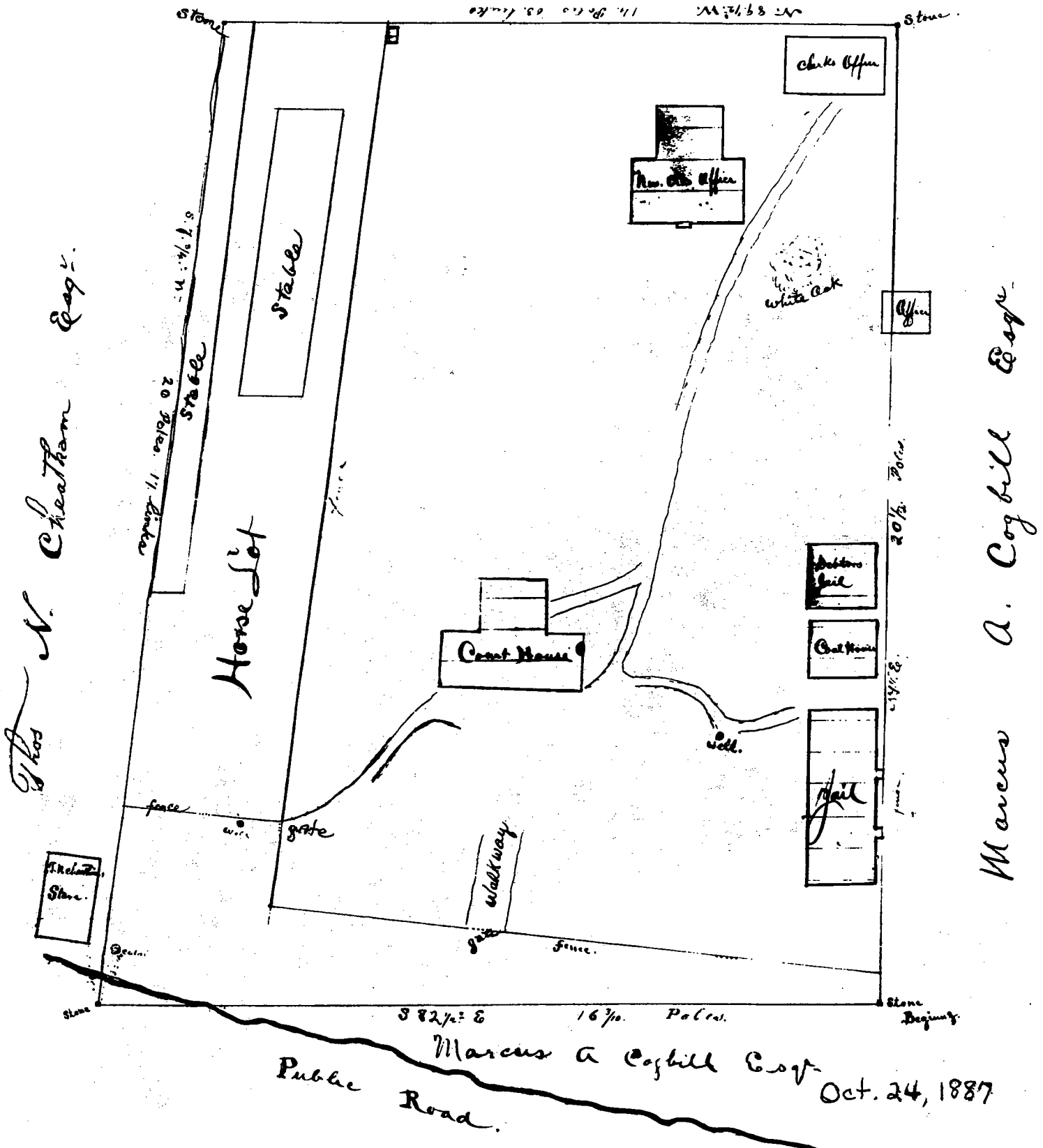




The Old Jail Circa 1924-35

photo by Dementi Studio

Marcus A Cogbill Esqr



Plat of Court House area by LaPrade Bros. - 1887. Building in lower right corner marked "Jail" is the Bastille.

"Times Were Different Then"

by Mary Ellen Howe

The State Board of Charities and Corrections by 1909 had made an inspection of the Old Jail in Chesterfield County, Virginia and gave the following report: "Six rooms; six cells; capacity, four prisoners to a cell—one room has no cell. Heated by stoves; lighted by lamp. No water in building. Not very clean. Inadequate ventilation.

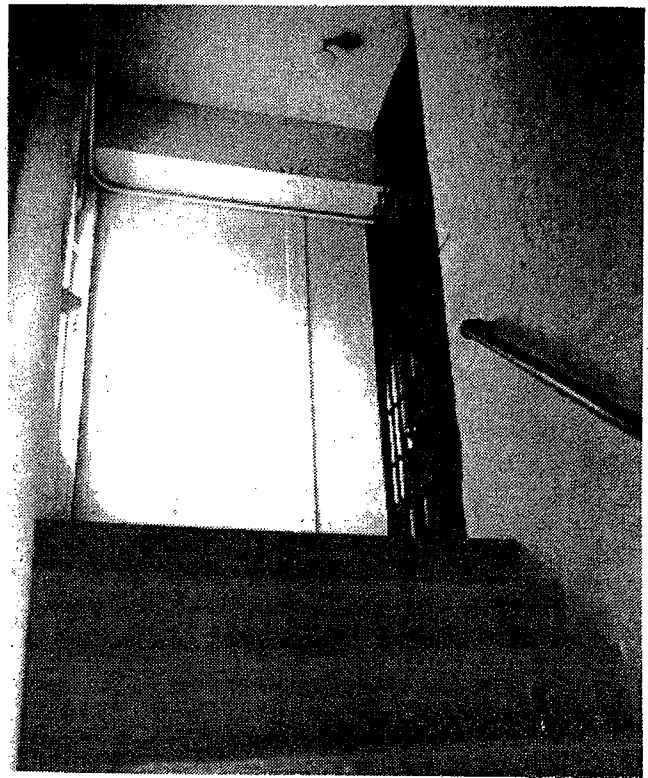
"There is provision made for the separation of sexes, the insane, and children. No recreation; religious services very seldom; prisoners are not employed." However, conditions at the jail were not really as bad as the report would lead us to believe.

From 1875 to 1924 Sheriff Gill tended to the old jail, and in 1924 Mr. O. B. Gates became sheriff until 1960. Shortly before 1924 Mr. Nathan Herbert Cogbill became the jailor and served as such for 50 years. His homeplace, a large two story frame house located on the corner of Route 10 and Beach Road (on the right side), is deserted now and almost covered with trees and brush.

John B. Trueheart, retired Magistrate of Chesterfield County and grandson of Nathan Herbert Cogbill, gives us a vivid eye-witness picture of how it really was: "I remember Sheriff Gill who drove a horse and buggy to the Court House each day. He had a long white beard. My Grandfather (Mr. Cogbill) would take breakfast over to the prisoners about 9 or 10 a.m. each morning. The food was cooked by my Grandmother. Sometimes they would have salt herring or eggs and always a loaf of bread and coffee. I would help carry it over to them. At 3 or 4 p.m. in the afternoon they had a meal of fatback, and vegetables—turnips, turnip salad, potatoes, etc. The trustee would then go over to the store and buy slices of pie or cokes for snacks.

"The trustees were prisoners who because of good behavior could be trusted. They were usually only guilty of minor crimes or were known Chesterfield residents. They more or less tended to things bringing in water and coal and making trips to the store. Many times the judge would send them home on the weekend with instructions to return to jail early on Monday morning.

Sheriff Gates held church services every Sunday for the prisoners. Preachers from Matoaca would come to hold services. When the weather permitted Sheriff Gates took them all out under the trees on the lawn. If anyone got sick Dr. Pretlow or Dr. Hurt was sent for from Chester. A well was located eight or ten yards from the front of the jail. Water for bathing was carried in and heated on the stoves. Prisoners wore their own clothes—there were no uniforms. Women occupied two small rooms in the back on the first floor and entered through a door on the left side of the jail. They were usually jailed for drunkenness or for infidelity. The large room in the front of the jail housed overnight drunks, gamblers, petty crime offenders and the trustees. Prisoners held for more serious crimes were kept in the cells upstairs on the second floor. The jailor did not stay overnight at the jail but locked up and went home. The night watchman for the Court House, Mr. Sam Hirshberg, checked periodically on the jail sounding the bell on top of the Court House if necessary to alarm the jailor.



Site of the shooting in the Old Jail. photo by Beth Landi

"The most notorious criminal I can recall was a man from up north who had a bad previous criminal record for robbery. One day he told the trustee that he was out to get Grandfather (Grandfather was rather deaf and a short, stout man). The trustee slipped out to warn him, and Grandfather said, "Well, we'll just see who gets who!" Later that evening Grandfather went to lock up the jail and climbed the steps to the second floor. Just as he got to the top, the man jumped out from the side and grabbed him from behind to choke him. Grandfather drew his gun from his pocket, got it under the man's vest and shot him. Mr. Frith, who ran a blacksmith shop that used to be located just east of Trinity Methodist Church on Route 10, made the man a coffin out of pine. He was temporarily buried on Grandfather's farm until his family came from Ohio and took the body home.

"The Jail began to deteriorate with age and some escapes were made. Prisoners picked holes in the loose mortar and pushed out the bricks. Towards the end of the Jail's useful days the two back rooms on the first floor were no longer used for women prisoners, instead they were used to store illegal, confiscated whiskey made locally in the county to be transported to New York and sold. It was kept there until after the court hearing. Then Sheriff Gates took it to the fair lot, poured it out and set fire to it. One time when a large amount of whiskey was being stored, someone during the night took a torch and cut around the lock through the steel door. The lock was a big square about 8" x 8" and 1½" thick. They never did find out who got all that whiskey.

"In all those years I never remembered any young people or children being in that Jail. Times were very different then."



Genealogical Corner

Approximately one quarter mile north of the old village of Bermuda Hundred in Chesterfield County on the banks of the James River is a small family cemetery of the WORSHAM family. As late as 1879 the stones could be read and according to the Rev. Phillip Slaughter, the land was at that time owned by a Mr. John Watkins and the following information was gotten from the epitaphs:

Edward Worsham; born Jan. 10, 1740, died 1775

Edward Worsham Jr.; born 1760, died 1792

Michal, daughter of Edward Worsham; born 1771, died 1795

Sarah, daughter of Edward Worsham; born 1773, died 1795

John Worsham; born 1771, died 1795

Articles printed in the MESSENGER are footnoted as to sources of reference. The footnotes are on file with the Society and will be made available to anyone wishing to use them for research.

All literary contributions submitted to the MESSENGER and published become the property of the Chesterfield Historical Society of Virginia.

Communications concerning the MESSENGER may be sent to the Editor, Mary Ellen Howe, 601 Ravenscroft Drive, Petersburg, Va. 23805.

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