



T H E M E S S E N G E R

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

BERMUDA HUNDRED - CHESTERFIELD'S SLEEPING GIANT

I. INTRODUCTION

The southern tip of Chesterfield forms a broad and expansive peninsula facing both the James and the Appomattox rivers. This point of land has long been recognized to be both strategic and valuable. During the period of time where Chesterfield was largely unsettled except for those native Americans who occupied the north and the south, Bermuda Hundred represented an excellent base of operations for what was later to be called Appomattox.

The presence of native Americans in this area would be a determining factor on the future colonization by the English in the years to come. The advent of Jamestown and the development of Henricus also would play important roles in the development of Bermuda Hundred.

Bermuda Hundred today remains a mystery to many residents and historians. It is an area that studied extensively yet exploited the least of all of Chesterfield's historic sites. Bermuda Hundred has a rich history -- no matter what period you study, pre-colonial, pre-Civil war, Civil war, post Civil War, World War I and World War II, Bermuda Hundred has played a role in Chesterfield's long and distinguished history. An investigation of literature and source material relative to Bermuda Hundred reveals a rich and often diverse history that is well-documented and studied for over one hundred years.

The remoteness of Bermuda Hundred and the fact that the area has never been truly exploited from a promotional sense, has caused its importance to not be emphasized as other areas in Chesterfield County. Today, Bermuda Hundred is a sleepy village on the southern tip of Chesterfield. Many of the residents of Bermuda Hundred today are the descendants of many generations of families that have lived in Bermuda Hundred. Across the river lies Shirley Plantation, which has always faced Chesterfield's historic Bermuda Hundred, especially during the period when Bermuda Hundred was an important port to Central Virginia.

Bermuda Hundred peninsula is formed in the confluence of the James and Appomattox rivers. The land lies within Chesterfield County, Virginia, although historically the five Bermuda Hundreds (Nether Hundred¹, Upper Hundred, West/Shirley Hundred, Rochdale Hundred and

Digges' Hundred lay within the current boundaries of Chesterfield, Charles City and Henrico Counties. For the purpose of the present work the term "Bermuda Peninsula" is used to refer to that portion of the peninsula including and lying east of the primary line of Civil War trenches which cross the peninsula from Battery Danzler to Point of Rocks. This line approximately follows the 1611 Rochdale Palisade line constructed by Sir Thomas Dale which separated the communities of Henrico City and the "New Bermudas". The term "Bermuda Hundred" is used to refer to the easternmost portion of the peninsula including the original Nether and possible Upper Hundred settlements, from Shand Creek on the west to Bermuda Hundred Point at the eastern extreme, and from the Appomattox River to the James, including the northern peninsula known as "Presquile".

QUARTERLY MEETING NOTICE

You are cordially invited to the Historical Society's 10th birthday party on Sunday, October 27th, as we celebrate with a History Fair at the Old Courthouse area. Bring the family and your friends! The Society will provide a special birthday cake.

Highlighting our accomplishments since our beginnings in 1981, we will have programs and exhibits by our various committees as they have made contributions to the Society and to the preservation of our county's heritage. There will be exhibits on archaeology, genealogy, county cemeteries, the Lord Chesterfield bateau, our collection of old county photographs, and other subjects. The Museum, Magnolia Grange, Library and Old Jail will be open to welcome you to see their expanding collections and a slide-lecture on the Bermuda Hundred Campaign will be given at 2:00 p.m. in the Old Courthouse by George Fickett, Chairman of our Civil War Sites Committee.

Please visit us between 1:00 and 5:00 p.m. as we celebrate with pride our remarkable decade of progress where we have grown to be recognized as the largest historical society in Virginia.

All around the periphery of the Bermuda Hundred waterfront are found small hamlets and activity sites from various prehistoric periods. Of special interest are various sites associated with the Appomattox Indian Settlement. A large central village area may have once existed at the location of the Allied Plant. The purpose of this article will be to highlight what many have found to be the most significant and historic assets of Bermuda Hundred. The article will not attempt to go into extreme detail, because to do so would literally require writing a book instead of a historical overview, which is what this article proports to do.

II. PRE-COLONIAL HISTORY

The pre-colonial history of Bermuda Hundred does not provide a wealth of source material or literature. Most of the work related to the pre-colonial has been undertaken through archeological studies made by Virginia Commonwealth University. These studies validate and support historical sources which indicate that Bermuda Hundred was a major village or city center for the Appomattica Indians. There are several main sites that have been documented in the county's history for the Appomattica Indians. The Bermuda site appears to be a significant site because of its history related to the colonization of Chesterfield and also the fact that its locations seemed to be very important and significant to the indians. Other indian sites in Chesterfield include the present site of Virginia State University where, the final and main collecting center for the Appomattica Indians was sited.

When Captain Newport saw Chesterfield's shore he was struck immediately with its location between two large navigable streams on elevated and seemingly productive ground as meeting all of the Virginia Company's specifications. The fact that it was inhabited by indians did not rule it out in the bold mariner's mind. As the "Virginia" edged over to the shore, the primitively armed Appomatucks were seen to be lined up on the bank with every evidence of belligerency, not knowing what to expect from the white, bearded strangers in their queer craft with flapping white wings. Their orderly battle array was impressive to the English, but the unperturbed, determined Newport, by the use of eloquent, forceful gestures, apparently assured the numerically stronger body of red men that his was a peaceful mission and the party was permitted to come ashore unmolested.

III. COLONIAL HISTORY

The colonial history of the Bermuda Hundred Area is perhaps best documented and written history of any area in Chesterfield County during the same period of time. Bermuda Hundred was one of the areas designated by Sir Thomas Dale as one of the hundreds to be colonized and exploited as an agricultural center. The site was long recognized as a valuable port and agricultural center. The rise and fall of Henricus as a colonial city is well documented.² Likewise, the prominence and survival of Bermuda Hundred has been well-documented. Bermuda Hundred

was an extremely successful and productive site, which suffered a set-back during the famous indian massacre and it bounced back in terms of its eventual prominence as an area of commerce and agricultural production.

The plans adopted for Bermuda and later for Virginia, indicate that the adventures shrewdly capitalized on the desire of Englishmen in many different walks of life for title to the undeveloped lands of America. A newly stirring missionary impulse had its part to play, if only by giving to the name of Virginia more helpful associations. The colonist had captured Pocahontas, the favored daughter of Powhatan, and with her as hostage the colonists had forced a peace with a heretofore implacable foe. More than that John Rolfe had married the Princess Pocahontas, as the English like to call her, and Sir Thomas Dale as his last major service to the colony had brought her to England in 1616. In London, at court, and elsewhere, she and her entourage of Indian maidens had been a most effective advertisement of Virginia. Even after her own death in 1617, her maiden consorts had stayed on for many months before being finally returned to Virginia by way of Bermuda. Since 1613 the Virginia Company had leaned heavily on the missionary appeal in its efforts to encourage continued support of the colony, and it may well have been the company itself which prompted the bishops of the Church of England in the year of Pocahontas' death to sponsor a collection of funds for an Indian mission in Virginia. In any case, the approximately fifteen hundred pounds raised for the purpose were turned over to the company, which in 1618 ordered Yeardley to set aside 10,000 acres at Henrico (later to be Chesterfield) for the support of an Indian college.³

It was at this site that early concepts dealing with crop rotation and future technologies dealing with agronomy were practiced. This site was one of the earlier sites designated by the British as an official port into Virginia. It's access and visibility were extremely valuable in terms of providing adequate defenses from both internal and external invaders.

Among those passengers on the ships which had traveled from England on the Sea Venture, and which came on to Virginia, was Sir Thomas Dale, deputy to the deputy-governor, Gates. Sir Thomas Dale is the greatest name and was the greatest influence in the origin and strong beginnings of the area. He was dissatisfied with low-lying, disease-ridden Jamestown, and traveled up the James seeking better land.⁴

In 1611-12, Dale laid out his first upriver settlement, called Henrico. In December 1611, Dale led an expedition to punish the Appomattox Indians for attacking members of the colony. The Indian village was downriver at the junction of the Appomattox and James rivers. Attacking in force, Dale drove the Indians out of their village, burned their huts, and took their corn. Recognizing that it was a natural site for settlement, Dale resolved to "possess and plant it." Because it reminded him of Bermuda, he called the site "New Bermudas." It was not until 1613 that he established a settlement there that became known as

Bermuda Hundred. In the meantime, he annexed many miles of open meadows and woodland to belong to the "freedom and corporation forever." He carved out several territorial subdivisions known as hundreds: The Upper and Nether Hundreds, Rochdale Hundred, West and Sherley Hundred, and Digges Hundred. At Nether Hundred corn was planted because of the fertile open area and a two-mile-long palisade was constructed from river to river. The workers palisaded Rochdale Hundred with a four mile palisade and built houses near it. This sealed off some twenty square miles, so the hogs and cattle could graze there in security.⁵

Indeed, signs of success were beginning to appear in Virginia. Dale's achievements were important steps forward; the friendship with the Patowomekes assured for the colonists a continuing supply of grain. There were soon to be further promising developments, among them a new and elaborate charter, to be issued the London Company on March 12, 1612. Soon the tobacco industry would be introduced into Virginia, to serve as the economic foundation of the expanding colony. Only dark shadow hovered over English advances in the New World - Powhatan's War that continued month in and month out, year in and year out, always threatening the colonists with imminent danger and ultimate defeat. The English could not claim a real success until they had come to terms, one way or another, with the Powhatans.

The Henrico settlement was defended by a series of long palisade lines. In 1613, Dale moved downriver to Bermuda Peninsula to begin an experimental settlement. Here he offered land ownership to those who would join him in founding the first corporate community in English America. The Bermuda Hundred palisade was described as having "watchtowers or commanders" all along it. By 1614, the Bermuda venture was, by far, the largest and most thriving settlement in Virginia; James and Elizabeth Cities were reduced to outposts on the lower James and Henrico was all but abandoned.

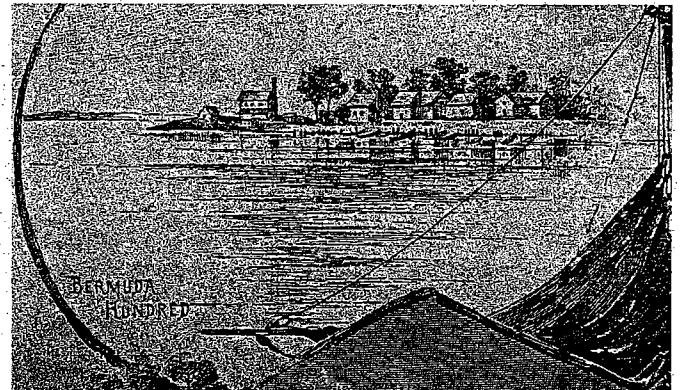
By 1616 Dale kept his promise and presented the first private land patents in English America. The earliest that can be identified in the records are near the core of the early settlement on Allied lands, southwest of the existing plant, near the cliffs overlooking the Bay. These adjoining small patents were awarded to the Bermuda City officers, John Woodlief, John Rolfe, Samuel Jordan and William Craddock. In addition, however, Rolfe reported that, by 1614 there were more than 50 private houses built along the palisade line and all along "the verge of the river".

At Bermuda Hundred, Dale put more rigid regulations into effect. The killing of a bull, cow, calf, mare, horse, goat, swine, cock, hen, chicken, dog, turkey, or any tame cattle or poultry without leave was forbidden upon pain of death. He also ordered crop diversification. Corn and vegetables were to be planted first and tobacco and other money crops second. Vineyards were set out on the Coxendale tract in 1614 and the native mulberry trees also were cultivated there and experiments made with silkworm culture. Dale

sent tobacco, sassafras, pitch, potash, sturgeon and caviar to England from the Chesterfield holdings.

Following Dale's exit from Virginia in 1616, the focus of settlement was returned to Jamestown, although Henrico and Bermuda City - now renamed Charles City in honor of Crown Prince Charles - remained settled by small groups. By 1619 the town of Henricus had fallen into a deplorable condition, unlike Bermuda Hundreds which was prosperous and growing fast and was rapidly overshadowing the other neighboring settlements.⁶ The Indian attack of 1622 led to further abandonment of the upriver colonies.

By the 1630's Bermuda Hundred was reclaimed by the English, including some of the "Ancient Planters" who had been part of the original community founded by Dale. The "upper parts" of the James River as they were referred to in the 1630's consisted primarily of small individual land patents on the old Bermuda Hundred/Charles City lands, as well as the Henrico lands. Bermuda Hundred became a focus of public activity. Court was held at the Hundred on Allied land - the small unnamed creek separating the southern spray fields was then known as "Court Swamp" - and a chapel of the parish church was established there. This would eventually become the home church of a new parish named Bristol, serving settlers on the south side of the James. The early church probably stood on the land occupied by the present Bermuda Hundred church.



EARLY BERMUDA HUNDRED

Some of the reasons for the colonization of early Chesterfield were social as well as economic. When the new settler arrived he found social distinctions quite as well marked as in England, with the additional incentive of a chance to rise to a higher class.⁷

Shortly after mid-century the Bermuda Hundred point became the locus of Merchant Captain Samuel Butler's store, and by 1660, Francis Eppes II had established his house and store on what would become lot #1 of the port town of Bermuda Hundred. A town was laid out by 1691 on the lands formerly belonging to Butler. The town founders were William Randolph and Francis Eppes III.

Throughout the 18th century the "town" of Bermuda Hundred thrived. While few people actually resided in the town, there were churches, taverns, markets, wharves, warehouses and other trappings of a public commercial and

governmental center. The principal 18th century merchants were Captain John Hylton and his son, Daniel. John Hylton arrived with the wave of Scots and Welsh merchants in the 1730's and 40's who began to give the wharves of the great planters considerable commercial competition. During the Revolution the port at Bermuda Hundred was occupied by Arnold who used it as a headquarters and transshipment point for booty from Richmond and Petersburg.

Following the Revolution, Bermuda Hundred was named the only legal federal port of entry on James River, and all ships entering the river had to clear the customs house established there. By 1800, rapid growth in Richmond and Petersburg led to removal of the customs house from Bermuda Hundred, and the town was relegated to the status of a local planters' port. Merchants Patrick Hendron and Archibald Batte led the economic recovery of the town throughout the period 1800-1840.

IV. PRE-CIVIL WAR

The Pre-Civil War history of Bermuda Hundred saw Bermuda Hundred as a commerce center and port. It's easy access to both the James and Appomattox rivers was exploited by central Virginian's. Railroad links eventually helped it provide expanded port facilities which provided the necessary access to Richmond and other environs in Central Virginia.

In the 1850's, William Johnson - a failed prospector of the 1849 California gold rush - took up the role of Bermuda Hundred merchant. Johnson extensively rebuilt the waterfront store and docks, as well the merchant's house originally constructed by Hendron or Batte.



THE BISHOP HOUSE TODAY

Elizabeth Cocke purchased the house from the Bishops in 1881 and lived there for the next twenty years. In 1919, following the tenure of several short-term owners, William T. Johnson bought the property. Johnson served as village postmaster and operated the same general store that Bishop had. This large frame structure (which was pulled

down around World War II) is said to have encased an earlier one-room plan brick building - perhaps the original store. The Bermuda Hundred post office, which closed permanently on Johnson's death in 1940, claimed one of the longest records of continuous service in the United States. Bermuda Hundred's maritime tradition is evident in the private graveyard behind the house. Among the inscribed stones are monuments to Rosalie Skinner (1843-46), who died at sea, and John Henry Joseph Leitithon (drowned 1839), "Who for Nine Years Was Steward of the Ship Ganges."

While many other early buildings in the village have deteriorated or disappeared since Bermuda Hundred's demise as a port town, the Bishop-Johnson house continues to be well maintained. For the last four decades it has been home to William Johnson's daughter Evelyn and her husband Frederick T. Gray, longtime state senator from Virginia's Eleventh District.

The market square at Bermuda Hundred included one of the regions' largest slave markets. Little testing has been done here and no specific site number has been assigned, although the boundaries of the square have been determined.

V. CIVIL WAR HISTORY

Although no more proposals for a Federal advance via the James River had been submitted to Washington, Major, General Benjamin Butler, commander of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina, had been making studies of such a movement ever since he had assumed command of the department in November 1863. Butler's investigation had finally centered upon a thirty-square-mile peninsula at the confluence of the James and Appomattox rivers known as Bermuda Hundred. Deep ravines at the foot of the peninsula, along with the rivers on both sides, would facilitate turning the enclosed area into a secure base with deepwater communication back to Hampton Roads. One of the railroads linking Richmond and the lower South lay within three miles of the proposed Federal defensive line formed by these ravines. Richmond itself was only sixteen miles to the north and Petersburg less than eight miles to the south. The more Butler studies the apparent advantages of the site, the more enthusiastic he became about basing an army there.⁸

General U.S. Grant decided to seek out Butler's ideas for the spring campaign.⁹ Grant gave Butler his opportunity to present the results of his study of the lower James River basin. First, Butler listed the advantages offered by an advance upon Richmond from the south: the city's defensive fortifications were less formidable there, and the ground was high and suitable for maneuvering. Moreover, the Bermuda Hundred peninsula would be an excellent base for such a campaign, once a defensive line was constructed across its narrow neck. Next, Butler suggested that City Point, a village located at the juncture of the James and Appomattox rivers across from Bermuda Hundred, should be seized as a supply terminus. In addition, two defensive

positions on the lower James, Fort Powhatan and Wilson's Wharf, would have to be secured to protect the army's line of communications. Butler ended his presentation by suggesting that the Army of the Potomac come to the James and make Bermuda Hundred its base of operation.

The Bermuda Hundred area played a pivotal role in the siege of Richmond and Petersburg and the strategies which were employed by the U.S. and Confederate forces in the Civil War. Bermuda Hundred saw itself as the main embarkation center for General Butler's troops for their campaign against Richmond. The fact that Bermuda Hundred had access to the southside of Richmond and had additional access to City Point in Petersburg, made it an extremely valuable and strategic location.

The port facilities and the location of both the James and Appomattox rivers also provided an important ability to exploit the Naval and Maritime assets of the Federal union. General Butler's grand strategy of moving troops into the Richmond area worked well with the Bermuda Hundred location. Although no major battles occurred as a result of Bermuda Hundred, numerous skirmishes in the Bermuda Hundred area have been well documented and sited. In addition, the ill-fated attempts by Union forces cut off railway access into Richmond at Walthall Junction and Ruffin Mill have been well documented.

While Union General Hincks' men were occupying City Point, the rest of the armada continued a mile and a half upriver to Bermuda Hundred Landing. As Union gunboats chased a confederate steamer upstream and Lee's navy gunboats began the hazardous task of dragging the river for rapids, the soldiers of General "Baldy" Smith's XVIII Corps began to land. The process was hindered by shallow water that prevented the close approach of the transports to the beach. Consequently, ships' boats had to be utilized to get the first contingents on shore. First to land was the 23rd Massachusetts Regiment, Heckman's First Brigade, Second Division. The rest of Heckman's regiments followed immediately, pausing only long enough to establish their organization before fanning out into the countryside. As they prepared to disembark, the captain of the vessel bearing the 9th New Jersey Regiment passed among the infantrymen, shaking the hands of all he could reach. Once ashore, the 9th New Jersey was temporarily assigned to construct a makeshift dock from old canal boats and scrap lumber brought along by the fleet.¹⁰

According to local tradition, Union General B. F. Butler used the house as headquarters during part of the time he was "bottled up" on Bermuda Peninsula. While there he allowed the lady of the house, who was ill at the time, to remain upstairs under the care of a maidservant. Mrs. Bishop later recalled that when Union officers began moving into the house Butler ordered the parlor carpet and other fragile objects put aside for safekeeping.

The Civil War brought the planting of some 40,000 troops on the peninsula under Gen. Benjamin Butler who, for more than a year, was "bottled up" at Bermuda Hundred by the Confederate guns defending the upper James. Bermuda

Hundred remained an important headquarters locale during the siege of Petersburg in 1864-65.

VI. POST-CIVIL WAR

After the Civil War, Bermuda Hundred transcended itself back into a port of commerce rather than a military disembarkation center. During this period, Chesterfield remained, as well as Bermuda Hundred, a predominantly agricultural area exporting its production in the form of tobacco and food crops. Bermuda Hundred expanded during this time into a small residential village and many of its current families located to the area during this period.

VII. WORLD WAR I ERA

Rail access that was provided through the railroad made Bermuda Hundred a valuable disembarkation point. Commodities produced in Richmond were shipped to this point for exportation to the European battlefields.

During World War I, Bermuda Hundred was the bustling scene of much shipping activity, being served by a narrow gauge railroad which ran from the coal mines in the western extremities of Chesterfield County to the James River.

Bermuda Hundred flourished again under the influence of a short-line railroad constructed to the port from the back-country forests of Chesterfield County. From here lumber and coal were shipped throughout the country during the close of the century, and Bermuda Hundred rose to its greatest resident population ever. Only one house constructed during the railroad era of the town remains standing in relatively unaltered condition today. The tracks of the railroad were torn up to provide iron for the gun foundries of World War I, and Bermuda Hundred became a backwater community isolated from the surrounding countryside, not even attainable by road.

VIII. DEPRESSION ERA

Following World War I and the discontinuing of the railroad, it remained a shipping point for lumber and wood pulp. All that now remains of the wharves are a few tide-worn pilings and logs.¹¹

IX. WORLD WAR II ERA

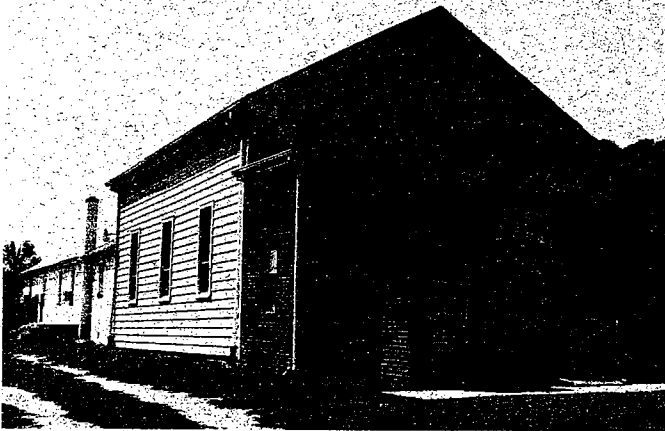
In March, 1941, the post office at Bermuda Hundred, at the time one of the oldest post offices in the United States still in operation, was closed; the area now being served by rural carrier out of Chester, a village some ten miles inland.

X. POST WORLD WAR II ERA

After World War II, the urbanization and suburban development of the Richmond area saw many new industries come to Chesterfield County and in particular Bermuda Hundred.

In 1954 the Allied Chemical and Dye Corporation constructed the first of a series of plant buildings at Bermuda Hundred which was to be later served by the Prince George and Chesterfield Railway. The development of the Allied, ICI, and Phillip Morris plants were significant industrial developments to the county.

In June of 1957, in connection with the commemoration of the 350th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, a party of distinguished visitors from the Island of Bermuda visited the spot bearing the name of their home. This group was headed by Sir John Woodall, Governor-General of the Colony, and included the Lord Mayor of Hamilton, Sir Stanley Spurling, their wives and the president of the Bermuda Chamber of Commerce, and representatives of Bermuda's press and radio.¹²



**FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
BERMUDA HUNDRED - ESTABLISHED 1850**



**ABANDONED RESIDENCE AT
BERMUDA HUNDRED**

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

We welcome the following new members who have joined the Chesterfield Historical Society since February 1991:

Ms. Mary E. Archibald
Mrs. Doris Jane Bennett
Mr. William Bernard Bennett
Mr. Clay Boatman
Mr. Rudolph L. Cavan, Jr.
Mrs. Jean B. Cavan
Mrs. Margaret W. Conelley
Mr. Alfred M. Covington
Mrs. Evelyn L. Dawson
Mrs. Beverley B. Dowdey
Mrs. Joan Cashion Dunkum
Mr. Benjamin Elliott
Mr. Christopher Elliott
Ms. Elizabeth Jean C. Harris
Ms. Mary V. Hill
Miss Suzie Hoover
Miss Nevin Elizabeth Horner
Ms. Emily Ann Jones
Mr. Marcellus Preston Jones
Mr. Jerome L. Lonnes
Mrs. Laurel B. Lonnes
Mrs. Betty G. Martinko
Ms. Anne Jackson Morledge
Dr. Julia H. Nixon
Mrs. R. N. Norton
Ms. Catherine Bacon Owings
Dr. George V. Puster, Jr.
Mr. James E. Quarles
Mr. Steve Quarles
Mr. Ray A. Robertson
Mr. Courtney F. Rooks
Mr. Charles D. Saunders
Mrs. Martha R. Saunders
Mrs. J. Westwood Smithers
Mrs. Barbara Watson
Mrs. Helen White
Mrs. Alice W. Wilson

Submitted by: Nancy R. Dunnivant

CHESTERFIELD COUNTY COURTHOUSE AND COURTHOUSE SQUARE NATIONAL HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

The Historical Society in Chesterfield County has nominated the 1917 Courthouse and Courthouse Square for the National Register of Historic Places. A detailed application has been completed by a preservation architect and paperwork has been submitted to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources to initiate the process. Copies of the application are in the file at the Museum and the County Administrator's Office. Individuals wishing to receive a copy or learn more about the 1917 Courthouse and Courthouse Square, are welcome to read the application material.

