

# The Messenger of the Chesterfield Historical Society of Virginia

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## News Notes:

This issue of the Messenger was delayed in order to report the story of Magnolia Grange, the Federal period plantation house located on Route 10 across from the Chesterfield Courthouse. In August, 1983, a large moving van pulled up to Magnolia Grange, and when it left, the house was empty. From that moment on, the project had begun to turn Magnolia Grange into a museum for the people of Chesterfield County.

A committee consisting of Judge Ernest Gates, Arline McGuire, Lewis Vaden, and Mary Ellen Howe was appointed, and Jeffrey B. Muzzy, Assistant County Administrator for Development was sent by the County to work with the committee. Negotiations between the owners of the house, Philip and Julie Daffron, real estate developer C. Porter Vaughan, and the County were coordinated by Jeff Muzzy and Mary Ellen Howe, who represented the Society as Chairman of the Magnolia Grange Committee.

The process was long, complicated, and frustrating. But in July, 1984, the Board of Supervisors tentatively approved the purchase of Magnolia Grange by the County as an addition to its Museum Complex. The contracts between the Daffrons and Porter Vaughan were signed on October 16, 1984. Final appropriations and the necessary zoning were approved by the Board of Supervisors on October 24, 1984. The County paid \$180,000.00 for the house and approximately three fourths of an acre of land surrounding the house.

Funds were appropriated by the Board of Supervisors on December 12, 1984, and the contract between the County and Porter Vaughan was signed. Mary Ellen Howe presented the keys to Magnolia Grange to the Board's Chairman, Harry Daniel. On December 28, 1984, the final deeds were signed by C. Porter Vaughan and Harry Daniel.

For its part, the Historical Society has pledged to conduct a fund-raising drive to raise \$100,000.00 to be given to the County as reimbursement for Magnolia Grange. The house, fully restored and in excellent condition is being operated under the auspices of the County Museum and has been deeded to the County, which will assume responsibility for maintenance and upkeep. The Society has assumed the responsibility for furnishing the house with appropriate antiques and will staff the house with trained tour guides. A committee is being formed to work together with the County in coordinating the many, varied uses and activities that are possible for the house. Anyone interested in working on this committee, please contact Lucille Moseley.

The Society would like to thank the Board of Supervisors, the County Administration, and Mr. C. Porter Vaughan for saving Magnolia Grange and giving this beautiful part of the past to the people of Chesterfield County.

Donations of appropriate antique furniture for Magnolia Grange are badly needed. Remember, they are tax deductible. Kitchen utensils and equipment are also needed. The Society calls on each of its members to help in any way possible to make this a museum of the highest quality.

The Society would like to thank Arline McGuire for getting the 1888 La Prade map of Chesterfield County reproduced. Judge Ernest Gates' map was used in making the copy, and the County's Drafting Department touched up the faded areas without taking away from the authenticity of the map. It is printed on antique-toned paper and is an excellent reproduction.

Donations may now be made to the Historical Society in memory of deceased individuals. Each gift is deductible for tax purposes and will be acknowledged with an appropriate card sent according to the donor's wishes. Send donation, name of deceased, your name, and the name and address of the individual or family to be notified to: Corresponding Secretary, c/o Chesterfield Historical Society, P.O. Box 40, Chesterfield, Virginia 23832.

Pheby Walthal was reinterred by the Roper Land Development Company on May 22, 1984. She was buried in Sunset Park Cemetery. The Cemetery donated the grave site and will place a bronze plaque near her large stone with the same inscription. A wreath laying ceremony was held at the Cemetery and Mr. Loxley L. Cashion gave the service. Members of the Society attended.

The Society wishes to thank Mr. William Gentry for the donation of the papers of Miss Lila Spivey who was the first County school nurse and was a nurse with the Health Department. Miss Spivey kept meticulous notes and these papers are excellent research material.

The Museum is now presenting a film on the history of Chesterfield County with slides and narrative. This excellent film was done by Arline McGuire and everyone is urged to see it. Please contact the Museum for more information.

The Chesterfield County Fair offered free space again this year to display our picture collection and it was said to be one of the most interesting exhibits at the Fair. A committee of 27 members organized by Lucille Moseley worked at the exhibit. The collection, which now totals 250 old historical photographs

was also displayed at a luncheon meeting of the Chesterfield Kiwanis Club and at an in-service program for Chesterfield Elementary school teachers. The Society is grateful to Hugh Goodwyn for his work in making this collection an excellent one.

The oldest member of the society is Ordway Gates who celebrated his ninety-ninth birthday in December, 1984. He was the Sheriff of Chesterfield County for many years.

#### List of Officers:

President - Lucille C. Moseley  
 First Vice-President - Lewis H. Vaden  
 Second Vice-President - Mary Arline McGuire  
 Recording Secretary - Anne White  
 Corresponding Secretary - Sue Peek  
 Treasurer - George W. Moore, Jr.  
 Board of Directors: Judge Ernest P. Gates, Chairman, Robert M. Woodcock, Randolph H. Watkins and Mary Ellen Howe

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-the Editor, Mary Ellen Howe

## "The House by the Side of the Road"

An Interview with Catharine Cogbill Cumming  
 by  
 Mary Ellen Howe

Catherine Cogbill Cumming was born at Magnolia Grange on July 23, 1904, and lived there until she married in 1935. Mrs. Cumming remembers:

"Magnolia Grange was my home for many years. The house was the center of social life in that part of Chesterfield County. Rich and poor alike were entertained there as my parents (Philip Valentine Cogbill, known as Mr. Phil, and Julianna Trueheart, known as Miss Julia) loved all people. It was a great gathering place.

### Life at the House

"There was always a large family group for Sunday dinner (which was a big affair). Brunswick stew was usually the first course followed by a roast or baked chicken, vegetables in season such as corn and butterbeans in the summer, and always home-made bread. Dessert was frequently ambrosia, pound cake, or Blanc Mange. In the summertime, we had peach or strawberry ice cream that had just been made in the backyard. At Christmas and on holidays, Mother served her wine jelly with baked country ham or turkey. Oysters were always a part of the meal at Christmas.

"The County operated a clinic for its crippled children and handicapped people. Miss Spivey, the County nurse, and I arranged for a Christmas party to be held at Magnolia Grange for the clinic. About forty handicapped people, both black and white, old and young were there. The house was decorated with a huge Christmas tree and lit with candles. The large ballroom doors of the living room were opened and a choir sang. Presents were given to each person. It was a beautiful affair and everyone had a wonderful time. I remember an older hunchbacked woman saying to me with misty eyes, 'This is the first time I have been in a real home for Christmas.'

"During the Civil War, Grandmother (Lucy Catherine Winfree Cogbill) helped the troops whenever she could with food and shelter. One soldier in gratitude gave my father (young Philip

Cogbill) his cap. Needless to say it was my father's pride and joy. However, on the day of evacuation when the starving and ragged confederate troops came through, Grandmother took the cap and gave it to a soldier who had lost his own cap. (My father later related to me that he was utterly crushed!)

### The Beattie Trial

"When the judges of the circuit court came to Chesterfield, they stayed at Magnolia Grange. I can remember Judge Robert Goode Southall from Amelia and Judge Walter Watson. Judge Watson stayed with us during the famous murder trial of Henry Beattie, who was convicted of murdering his young wife and put to death in the electric chair. Henry Beattie was held without bond in the Old Jail, and Miss Julia in her compassion sent meals over to him every day saying, 'He could have been one of my boys.' The mother of Beattie's slain wife was a surprise witness. I remember a taxi (which was an unfamiliar thing in those days) pulling up to Magnolia Grange and bringing Mrs. Owen. She was a small lady. Mother served her tea and comforted her until it was time to go to the Courthouse. They drove her up to the door, and she swept into the courtroom in her long black mourning clothes. It was the only time during the whole trial that Beattie showed any emotion at all. He ducked his head and appeared visibly shaken.

"Ladies were not allowed to cross the road (Route 10) during the trial because it involved Mr. Beattie's affair with his actress girl friend. She stayed at the Courthouse Hotel under guard. National reporters rented rooms there where they could send off quick telegrams. The hotel had twenty-two rooms and was located where the new courthouse is now—on the corner of Route 10 and Beach Road. The night the verdict was brought in, Mother let me stay up (which was most unusual!) and about 10 p.m. she said, 'Let's walk to the road and see if we can hear anything.' The courthouse green was filled to capacity with people. After it was all over (about 11 p.m.), Judge Watson came back to the house. He was very upset because of the youth of Beattie and the large amount of circumstantial evidence in the case, and he walked the floor for a long time. Liquor was kept in our house for 'medicinal purposes' and the only time I ever saw it served was that night. Father poured a drink for Judge Watson to try and get him calmed down.

### Description of the House

"I remember my grandmother telling me about the front of the house. A large circle of boxwoods was between the house and the road. A path from the front door to the road cut it in half. Within the two large semi circles formed on either side of the path were Magnolia trees and flowers. The house, originally known as Cold Water Run, was then called Magnolia Grange. The trees were later cut down by a Mr. Duval.

"On the east side of the house, my mother had a flower garden of cultivated purple violets and roses. At the back of the house, on the east side, was a large orchard of apple, peach, damson, plum, pear, and cherry trees. A smoke house stood about fifty feet back from the rear door of the house. It had a dirt floor with a brick enclosure in the center for the slow fire of hickory wood that cured the hams. West of the smoke house was the wood house that contained an extra bedroom. The barn was located west of the wood house. It had a huge loft where we kept the hay raised on the land to feed our horses. The horses and cows were kept in a large fenced area that extended to Beach Road. Siliker Pond was once a part of the farm. An ice house, which was not used during my lifetime, was located behind the smoke house about 300 yards from the house. We bought our ice (about 300 to 400 pounds at a time) from Petersburg. It was sent by train,

and we picked it up at Centralia in a horse and buggy and kept it in a large ice box at the house.

"The basement in the house was always there, and I believe it to be original. The door leading to the basement matches the other original doors in the house. We kept potatoes, sweet

potatoes, preserves, canned goods and hanging red peppers there. Tomatos were also put there at the end of the summer to ripen. The basement was enlarged when the furnace was put in probably in the early 1920's. (Con't on page five)



Front view of Magnolia Grange

Photo by Beth Landi



Back and Side view of Magnolia Grange

Photo by Beth Landi

