

The Messenger of the Chesterfield Historical Society of Virginia

Number 9

Chesterfield County, Virginia

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News Notes:

On May 4, 1986, Magnolia Grange officially opened as a house museum. Mrs. Jeannie P. Baliles, First Lady of Virginia, assisted by the Honorable Mr. Harry G. Daniel and the Society's President, Mrs. Mary Arlene McGuire cut the ribbon tied across the front door. The Thomas Dale High School band played and about 300 people toured the house.

Magnolia Grange will be open Tuesday through Friday from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Sundays. Admission is \$2.00 for adults, \$1.50 for senior citizens and groups of 15 or more with prebooked reservations and \$1.00 for children 12 and under. Historical Society members may tour free of charge. Please present your membership card.

The Honorable Harry G. Daniel presented the Society with a check for \$5,000.00 from Philip Morris. This money is to be used towards a computer for the Society's records.

On May 31, 1986, the newly formed Bateau Committee launched "the Lord chesterfield" in Lynchburg, Va. on the James River. This boat, made of native oak and pine and duplicating the Bateau used on the river in 1770, will compete with 13 counties in the first annual James River Navigation Society Competition. It will end on June 8 in Richmond, Va.

A cookbook committee has been formed and will have a book ready in the fall of 1987 intitled *Chesterfield's Heritage of Good Cooking*. Nancy Dunnivant is the Chariman.

George Fickett, Jr. and Steve Perkins will head up the Civil War Fortification Committee. This committee is locating all existing Civil War Fortifications and photographing them.

Martha Gibby, owner of Sycamore Pewtersmith, has designed a pewter Magnolia blossom (which may be used as a paperweight) for the Society. The Magnolias are \$15.00 plus tax and may be purchased at the house along with stationary designed with a drawing of Magnolia Grange by Robb Woodcock.

Dr. Louis H. Manarin, State Archivist of Virginia, has published a book on Thomas Dale for the Chesterfield Museum. They may be purchased at the museum.

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-the Editor, Mary Ellen Howe

Sir Thomas Dale

by

E. Lee Shepard

No leader in the founding of America has suffered greater vilification over the years than has Sir Thomas Dale. Yet, the testimony of his contemporaries in the Virginia venture seems unanimous in laying much of the tribute for the ultimate success of England's first permanent colony in the New World at the very feet of this enigmatic seventeenth-century soldier and adventurer. Largely through his leadership, colonists began the settlement of interior regions along the James River in what would someday become Chesterfield County.

Sir Thomas Dale's early life, to cite the old cliche, is shrouded in mystery. Recent scholarship indicates he joined the English Army under Queen Elizabeth's favorite, the Earl of Leicester, in the Low Countries during the latter portion of the 1580's.¹ He rose in the ranks from common soldier to captain of a company in the Dutch forces, fighting in the religious wars against Spain and her allies. There, he formed lasting friendships with Lord De La Warr and Sir Thomas Gates, and, in 1606, was knighted by King James. He secured the patronage of powerful men, not a few of them members of the Virginia Company.

As the leaders of the colonizing enterprise struggled with the effects of the first disastrous years of the Virginia venture, they seem to have settled on the need for a more rigorous form of governance for the fledgling province, at the very least for the control of its military personnel. They appointed Sir Thomas Gates governor of the colony and secured for the States-General the services of Sir Thomas Dale as high marshal.

The high marshal in the modernized English military tradition ranked second only to the commanding general. His duties involved the promulgation and administration of the general's commands regarding discipline and organization of military units. Thus, as historian David Flaherty has demonstrated, we can detect the intent of the Virginia Company leadership in sending these military veterans to Virginia.²

Dale arrived in Jamestown several months ahead of Gates and took command of the colony as acting governor in May, 1611. Within a month he had formulated the stern set of marshal's laws which have become so infamously associated with his name. The penalties, even for minor infractions, were harsh, but the intent was to insure the survival of the colony. Just how far Dale went in administering these penalties cannot be known for certain, for the criticisms leveled at him, the tales of brutality, came many years after his own death and in the wake of a concerted effort to discredit the leadership of the Virginia Company.³

Whatever the realities of Dales's laws — and historians continue to debate the issue — the high marshal proved an effective administrator whose rule turned a motley group of settlers into a cogent work force who labored in order to eat and who began to fashion a viable settlement from the wilderness. Sir Edwin Sandys proclaimed Dale's accomplishments as "miraculous,"⁵ while Sir Thomas Gates added his personal stamp of approval to Dale's performance upon his arrival in the colony later in 1611.

Dale had early recognized the unhealthy and unprotected location of Jamestown, and he now proposed to Gates a new settlement up the James. Gates sent over 300 men with Dale to what is now Farrar's Island. There they laid out the foundations of a town, dubbed Henricopolis in honor of the Prince of Wales, and built a strong palisade along the neck of the peninsula, in front of which was dug a deep trench — a fortification technique common in the Low Countries — which may have given rise to the name of Dutch Gap.⁶

Under Dale's strong hand the settlement prospered. The English added several new sites in the area in rapid succession by enclosing other peninsula: Faith-in-Hope and Coxendale (on Hatcher Island), Rochedale (Jones Neck), and on the site of the village wrested from the Appamattucks Indians, Bermuda Hundred. At this latter spot in 1614 work commenced on the town of Bermuda, and there Dale would institute the first private land tenure in the colony, by renting lots to settlers whose indentures had expired, to be tilled for their own private use. The Virginia Company approved of Dale's plan and began granting title to these lands after three years' tenure by the settlers. The transition from communal farming to independent cultivation had commenced.

In 1614, Dale again became deputy governor when Gates left for England. He focused his attention primarily upon the settlements on the upper James, leaving them in a prosperous condition upon his own departure two years later. Testimony to the success of his efforts derive from the rapid expansion of the colony.

After Dale returned to England, in company with settler John Rolfe and his bride, the Indian princess Pocahontas, he secured command of an East India Company fleet commissioned to defend English interests against the aggressive Dutch traders in the Pacific. After a bloody fight with the Dutch fleet off Java, Dale turned his ships toward India, where he arrived on July 19, 1619. He died several weeks later, his body being entombed and returned to England for burial.

Today, Dale's important colonizing efforts in Chesterfield County are remembered in the names of Dale Parish, Dale District, Dale Memorial Cemetery, and Thomas Dale High School.



Cemetery Committee:

The Cemetery Committee has had some exciting and interesting developments the last several months.

John Finefield, a boy scout working on his Eagle Scout badge, asked the committee if there was a graveyard he might clean up as one of his projects. He was directed to the Snead family graveyard where Joseph Snead, one of the 1857 founders of Chester, was buried in 1885. John did a wonderful job of clearing the graveyard and repaired three stones as well. It is hoped this will inspire other scouts to choose similar projects.

The tour of Hollywood Cemetery on March 23 was interesting and was enjoyed by the 28 persons who attended.

Mr. Wooten, manager of Randolph Farm of Virginia State College, has notified the committee that the Randolph graveyard has cleaned and will furnish a guide for picture taking of the site. Pheeby Walthal's marker has been installed in Sunset memorial Park.

The Highway Archology survey of route 288 is keeping the committee informed when they find an old burying ground.

— Margaret Burgess

Maury Records:

The Cemetery Committee is currently finishing a project begun over three years ago — the recording of Maury Cemetery burials prior to the annexation of the area by the City of Richmond in 1910. These will number approximately 4000!

Each individual, his date of burial and age, and any other pertinent information are all listed on an index card and filed in a separate cabinet at the headquarters in the Old Jail. They are available to the public. Most of the people buried in Maury during the early years were residents of Chesterfield. Some of the later burials were brought from family graveyards when "progress" was going to destroy what was thought to be their final resting places!

Many interesting and often sad facts can come from the reading of the records. Babies died at birth or survived for a very short time, and the mother's death during or as a result of childbirth was common. Most interesting was that the causes of death were commonly things we don't think of as a serious problem today; influenza, tuberculosis, burns (probably from open fires or stoves), and railroad accidents. Drowning and suicide were sometimes seen as causes of death. Other burials were just listed as "bones" or "bones found in Mrs. Rice's garden", so we may never know the identity of these individuals.

Much history can be found in the reading of the old records. We have learned the names of some of the persons living in the Summer Hill estate and the names of the people occupying the graves removed from the old Weisiger burying ground. The project has been an informative experience for those of us involved, and it is hoped that we have helped in some small way to preserve the information and give easy accessibility to the files for those interested in Chesterfield's early residents.

— Pattie Grady

Genealogical Corner:

Help needed on: John Stevens or Stephens b. ca. 1815, Va. - d. ca. 1870 Iron Co., Mo. Wife possibly Alberia L. Stout m. in 1845, city of Petersburg, Dinwiddie Co., Va.
From: Mrs. Maxine Osborn Sturdy, 14410 Pinney St., Arleta, CA 91331.

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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In Memoriam

Keith Patterson

Computer Committee:

The Genealogy Committee under the direction of Angie Wilderman has been compiling data abstracted from microfilm containing the marriage records of Chesterfield County. This information is in the form of loose papers from ministers returns and has now been recorded on computer forms ready to compile and enter on the computer. The information system will enable us to extract data in seconds and index this information for a book to be published by the Genealogy Committee.

We approached the Data Processing Department of Chesterfield County approximately one year ago and have now come up with a Statement of Understanding with the Data Processing Department.

The Computer and printer have been ordered thanks to a donation from Philip Morris, and this project will soon become a reality.

— Donna Schneider

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