



Smithfield is an important historic property adjacent to the campus of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia. The manor house, constructed around 1774 on the frontier, is a premier example of early American architecture and is one of few such regional structures of that period to survive. It was the last home of Colonel William Preston, a noted surveyor and developer of western lands, who served as an important colonial and Revolutionary War leader. Preston named the 1,860-acre plantation “Smithfield” in honor of his wife, Susanna Smith. Today, the manor house is a museum that is interpreted and administered by a local group of volunteers.

In 1997 the *Smithfield Review* was founded with the purpose of helping to preserve the often neglected history of the region west of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia and adjacent states. We seek articles about important personages and events; reports of archaeological discoveries; and analyses of the social, political, and architectural history of the region. Whenever possible and appropriate, the articles will incorporate letters, speeches, and other primary documents that convey to the reader a direct sense of the past.

A Note from the Editors

The earliest documented events in the histories of both Blacksburg and Virginia Tech are featured in the first three articles of this volume of the *Smithfield Review*. These articles present previously unpublished material that should extend our understanding of the origin and early history of each of these two entities. The final three articles examine the life of a remarkable daughter of Smithfield who undoubtedly had considerable influence on the affairs of Virginia, and probably the nation, in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The first article is the second part of the two part series on the history of Draper's Meadows---the original name of the community that later became known as Blacksburg. The author, Ryan Mays, presents the results of his extensive research in identifying and locating the pioneers in "The Draper's Meadows Settlement (1746-1756) Part II." An important feature of this article is a carefully researched and constructed map of the original Draper's Meadows parcels superimposed on a map of Blacksburg.

The next two articles explore the histories of the Olin & Preston Institute and, after the Civil War, its successor, the Preston and Olin Institute. A Methodist minister was instrumental in securing the funds that led to the survival of the struggling school, which was eventually selected to become one of two land grant colleges in Virginia. The brief biography, "Peter Harrison Whisner, D.D." is authored by Paul L. Nichols, Ph.D., of Gaithersburg, Maryland. Dr. Nichols describes the life of an enlightened man whose unusual vision included the value of education in an era when education was not available for many citizens. That vision led to the creation of the college that ultimately became known as Virginia Tech.

The third article, "Olin and Preston Institute and Preston and Olin Institute: The Early Years of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Part I," by Clara B. Cox, describes the history of the Olin and Preston institute and the court case that led to its transition to Preston and Olin Institute. In 1854 one of the early reports of a committee of the Methodist Church stated that the young Olin and Preston Institute "promises to be a flourishing school." It actually had to endure many financial difficulties, a civil war, numerous political maneuvers, and many years before this optimistic forecast became a reality, but in retrospect we can observe the accuracy of that mid-nineteenth century forecast. Part II, scheduled for Volume 20, will describe the school's evolution into Preston and Olin Institute and how it was selected to become one of Virginia's land grant Colleges, Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College.

The last three articles of Volume 19 describe various aspects of the extraordinary life of Letitia Preston, daughter of Col. William Preston and the wife

of John Floyd who was governor of Virginia from 1830 to 1834. It was during this important time that Nat Turner's rebellion occurred and events began to cascade toward civil war as the country began to polarize over slavery issues and the nullification crisis. Jim Glanville and Ryan Mays collaborate to produce the fourth article, "A Sketch of Letitia Preston Floyd and Some of Her Letters." The authors point out that John Floyd kept a diary during his tenure as governor that includes a December 1831 entry: "Before I leave this government I will have contrived to have a law passed gradually abolishing slavery in this state." With the help of two of Letitia's nephews, he tried but unfortunately failed. His diary and Letitia's letters also reveal a volatile relationship between Governor Floyd and Andrew Jackson, President of the United States. Letitia Preston, a child of Smithfield, certainly had a ringside seat and---given her intellect and character--- probably more than a little influence on the momentous events of her era.

In "Governor John Floyd, Letitia Floyd, and the Catholic Church," author Jim Glanville describes the transition of the governor's family from its protestant, Presbyterian roots to Catholicism. This transition is documented by Glanville's research and six letters written to Letitia Preston by clergy of the Catholic Church. The letters, addressed to Letitia at Burke's Garden after her husband's death, were written during a four-year period beginning in February 1843.

The final article, "Letitia Preston Floyd---Pioneer Catholic Feminist" by Father Harry E. Winter, also describes the family's transition to Catholicism and Letitia's intellectual struggles over religion. Jim Glanville, who found, annotated, and lightly edited Winter's unpublished manuscript, writes that the article "comes from an unconventional historical perspective and sheds new light on the remarkable former first lady of Virginia."

Our Brief Note section, "Sugar Maples at Historic Smithfield" by Donald Bixby, formerly of Blacksburg, features an old source of sugar at Smithfield. Bixby emphasizes the importance of the single remaining maple tree that was "likely a contemporary of the first years of the Preston family at Smithfield."

As always, the editors acknowledge the assistance of our authors and our anonymous group of reviewers for their essential contributions to our endeavor. Our gratitude is also extended to Christy Mackie, Barbara Corbett, and Rachael Garrity for their assistance in the final preparation of this year's content. We thank the Virginia Tech Department of History and the Smithfield Preston Foundation for their financial support and Professor Peter Wallenstein of the Tech history department for his greatly appreciated help in the final editing process.

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