



The Smithfield Review

Studies in the history of the region west of the Blue Ridge

Volume 19, 2015

A Note from the Editors	v
The Draper's Meadows Settlement (1746-1756) Part II <i>Ryan S. Mays</i>	1
Peter Harrison Whisner, D.D. <i>Paul L. Nichols</i>	33
The Early Years of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University: Part I <i>Clara B. Cox</i>	51
A Sketch of Letitia Preston Floyd and Some of Her Letters <i>Jim Glanville and Ryan Mays</i>	77
Governor John Floyd, Letitia Preston Floyd, and the Catholic Church <i>Jim Glanville</i>	121
Letitia Preston Floyd: Pioneer Catholic Feminist Harry E. Winter, OMI	137
Brief Note: Sugar Maples and Maple Sugar at Historic Smithfield <i>Donald E. Bixby</i>	147
Index to Volume 19 <i>Rachael Garrity</i>	150

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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 These articles present previously unpublished material that should extend our understanding of the origin and early history of each of these two entities.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.

Hugh G. Campbell, Editor

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The Draper's Meadows Settlement (1746–1756) Part II

Ryan S. Mays

Located in the New River Valley in what is now Montgomery County, Virginia, the Draper's Meadows settlement was one of the earliest Euro-American settlements in the colonial Virginia backcountry. Its first known settlers were George and Eleanor Draper and their children, John and Mary, who arrived apparently in the year 1746. Part I of this article focused primarily on the history of the Draper family.¹ Part II continues the story of the Drapers but presents more information about the larger Draper's Meadows settlement through the year 1756, at which time it was more or less abandoned until after the French and Indian War (1754–1763).

George Draper and Family in Pennsylvania (1730s)

Since the publication of Part I, an interesting and significant new record of the Draper family in Pennsylvania was presented to the author,² who transmits it here as a supplement to the information he reported in Part I:³

In a petition to the Chester County Court dated 28 August 1739,⁴ George Draper “of the Township of Newton” applied for a license to keep a “Public House of Entertainment” for travelers along the road from Paxton Township to Philadelphia that passed through his property. None of the petition appears to have actually been handwritten by George Draper himself, as the handwriting does not match that found on other documents known to have been written by Draper (see Part I). Instead, it was probably written and signed for Draper, perhaps by the county clerk, and it was on this document, below the petition, that Draper's neighbors (themselves) also signed their names as subscribers to the petition. This petition is printed here for the first time from the author's transcription (see Appendix). The document is particularly significant because in it Draper describes having first leased and then settled his land in Newton Township in 1734.

Further Records of Eleanor Draper (1749–1752)

George Draper had died by May 1749.⁵ The author has found no primary source records mentioning the cause of George's death, where he

died, or where he was buried. His wife, Eleanor, appears to have remained a widow, and she continued living at Draper's Meadows, in what was then Augusta County, Virginia, with her children, John and Mary. Apart from the 1749–1750 lawsuit, *John Baird (Beard) vs. Eleanor Draper, Administratrix of George Draper*,⁶ described in Part I, there are only a few other surviving records of Eleanor before her own death at Draper's Meadows in 1755.

As was reported in Part I, George Draper transacted business in 1745 and 1746 with a man named James Conly, who was murdered in 1751 by his servant.⁷ Augusta County Court ordered that James Nealy, Richard Hall, Thomas Ingles (Ingles), and Tobias Bright, or any three of them, inventory and appraise Conly's estate, but the location of his residence was not mentioned. Ingles, Hall, and Bright returned their appraisement to the court on 21 May 1752.⁸ Conly's administrator, George Breckenridge, conducted a sale of the estate in early 1753.⁹

In late 1751 or early 1752, Eleanor Draper brought suit against John Conly and George Breckenridge (the latter being James Conly's administrator) complaining that James and John Conly had owed her £19 since 1749. She submitted as evidence a promissory note for the sum, upon which James and John Conly had signed their marks "at the Parish of Augusta [County]" on 12 September 1749. According to the agreement, they were to pay their debt to Eleanor by the first of September 1750. The note was witnessed (signed) by Thomas Ingles and Mathew Ingles and perhaps written by one of them, since Eleanor and the Conlys were apparently illiterate. Little else is known about the lawsuit except that George Breckenridge was brought into custody by deputy sheriff, William Lusk, after a warrant was issued for his arrest in January 1752. The case was dismissed in August 1752, suggesting that some settlement was reached.¹⁰

Also in 1751 or 1752, Colonel John Buchanan (d. 1769) composed a list of the surveys he had made on the Western Waters (tributaries of the Mississippi River) since the mid-1740s. To identify the 7,500-acre tract he had surveyed for James Patton & Company on Tom's and Strouble's creeks in 1747, Buchanan wrote that it was "wher[e] widow Draper Lives."¹¹

Conrad Eakerd Enters Lands at Draper's Meadows (1752)

Another oblique reference to Eleanor Draper is found in a copy of Conrad Eakerd's entry for "Land out of [the] tract where Dreaper [Draper] Lives."¹² Colonel Buchanan made a record of this entry on 13 February 1752, so "where Draper lives" was apparently again used to describe the 7,500-acre tract in which Eleanor Draper was then living. There is a tear on the page where Buchanan noted Eakerd's desired acreage. However, the

same entry was also recorded by William Preston on 13 February 1752 in the Wood's River Land Entry Book, and here Preston noted that "Coonrod Eakerd Entred 2000 acres of Land out of the tract where Draper Lives" at the rate of £10 per 100 acres, he paying the surveyor's fees and charges for surveying the land. He was to settle the land that spring where Colonel Buchanan directed and then pay the money within two years, with interest beginning upon his date of settlement. Under this entry, Colonel James Patton wrote the following: "Conrad Eakerd desird [desired] us to tel Colnel paton he gave up that Bargain of Land on drapers survey & would not have it. [Signed] Adam herman [and] Jacob Harman."¹³

For some reason, Conrad Eakerd left Augusta County by the summer of 1753.¹⁴ It appears, however, that a tract of land was indeed surveyed for him, presumably in 1752 or early 1753. This is evident from the fact that when William Preston was surveying land in the spring of 1771, he made a transcript of Eakerd's old survey for his records.¹⁵ Although the original (circa 1752 document) has not survived, Preston noted in 1771 that he had made a copy of "The Courses of The Tract formerly laid off for Coonrad Eakerd." Preston's copy may not be complete because he did not state whether the last course he listed was the closing course of the survey. Nevertheless, the tract appears to have measured approximately 600 acres, which was far short of the 2,000 acres for which Eakerd had made an entry (see Figure 1).

William Preston Surveys the Subdivisions of Draper's Meadows (January–February 1753)

Colonel John Buchanan had spent at least six years surveying tens of thousands of acres for James Patton & Company on the New, Holston, and Clinch River watersheds. In 1749, he married one of James Patton's daughters, and by about 1751, the year he completed his last surveys for the company, they had settled at what is now Max Meadows along Reed Creek, a tributary of the New River in present-day Wythe County, Virginia.¹⁶

James Patton's nephew, William Preston (1729–1783), was officially commissioned a deputy surveyor of Augusta County under Thomas Lewis in November 1752,¹⁷ although records indicate that he had been assisting John Buchanan and Patton's other surveyor, John Poage (d. 1789), both of whom surveyed illegally without licenses from the College of William and Mary, since probably 1746 or earlier.¹⁸ Preston now resumed (legally) the surveying of land for his uncle on the Western Waters as well as on the Roanoke and James River watersheds.

It appears from Preston's survey book and a single surviving plat, that he surveyed the subdivisions of the 7,500-acre Draper's Meadows

tract during the cold winter months of January and February 1753. His survey book is now preserved in the F. B. Kegley Library at Wytheville Community College; the single plat is at the Virginia Historical Society.¹⁹ Unfortunately, the records Preston kept of his Draper's Meadows surveys are quite incomplete, for the metes and bounds (the land measurements) he put down in his survey book do not match perfectly those recorded later in the final deeds. In fact, surveys for only eight of the 18 known individuals who bought land at Draper's Meadows in 1754 are recorded in the survey book; a ninth is mentioned by name in the description of a corner of one of the other surveys. It therefore seems that Preston might have used this particular book intermittently, recording his field notes in yet another book that has been lost.

Nevertheless, that William Preston did complete probably all of the Draper's Meadows surveys and present their final plans to Thomas Lewis is fairly certain. His survey book shows clearly that he surveyed land on the Roanoke River through December 1752 before traveling west to Draper's Meadows. Who may have assisted him is unknown.

In his survey book, above the first of the tracts he surveyed at Draper's Meadows, Preston wrote "January 1753 Tom's Creek Survey." On only one other survey in this section of the book did he record a date, that being "12th Jany [January]," but the plat now at the Virginia Historical Society bears the date 10 February 1753. In addition to his notes on the subdivisions, Preston copied into the survey book the metes and bounds of Buchanan's original 1747 survey, which he titled "The notes of Draper's Survey on the west side of the Ridge that Divides Roanoke & new river Waters." Preston also copied them on the back of a list he made of surveys run out by John Poage and John Trimble (Thomas Lewis' other deputies) for Patton on the James and Roanoke rivers. This document is undated but was probably prepared in 1752 or 1753.²⁰

James Patton Receives a Patent for Draper's Meadows (June 1753) and Sells Seventeen Land Parcels (February–March 1754)

Colonel James Patton received a patent for his 7,500-acre tract at Draper's Meadows from Governor Robert Dinwiddie on 20 June 1753 for the price of £37:10:0.²¹ He no doubt felt great pride and satisfaction at having finally patented his largest survey on the Western Waters. And since his nephew had surveyed the tract's subdivisions earlier that year, Patton was ready to begin selling them.

Between 1 February and 21 March 1754, Patton signed the deeds of 17 subdivisions sold to 18 male settlers (see Table 1 below).²² The deed

transactions were variously witnessed by (signed, sealed, and delivered in the presence of) William Preston, "Jacob Harman," and "Adam Harman." The total acreage was 6,617 acres, sold for a sum of £701:7:0 to be paid by the settlers, supposedly through quitrents and other means over time. The subdivision numbers correspond to numbers on the map of the settlement (see Figure 1 below):

Table 1. The Subdivisions of Draper's Meadows (1754)

<i>Settler</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Date of Purchase</i>	<i>Patent (Fee) Price</i>	<i>Source</i>
(1) Adams, John	210	2 February 1754	25:0:0	ACDB 6:50–52
(2) Barger (Barrier), Casper	507	10 February 1754	50:0:0	ACDB 6:93–95
(3) Byers, William	160	7 February 1754	20:0:0	ACDB 6:75–77
(4) Cook, John	190	7 February 1754	24:0:0	ACDB 6:72–75
(5) Draper, John	315	10 February 1754	25:5:0	ACDB 6:34–36
(6) Draper, John and Ingles, William	440	9 February 1754	35:0:0	ACDB 6:37–39
(7) Harman, Jacob Jr.	625	2 February 1754	75:0:0	ACDB 6:69–72
(8) Ingles, William	255	10 February 1754	20:7:0	ACDB 6:31–33
(9) Kinder, Conrad	290	11 February 1754	35:15:0	ACDB 6:87–89
(10) Kinder, Michael	200	2 February 1754	25:0:0	ACDB 6:52–56
(11) Leppard, William	620	21 March 1754	70:0:0	ACDB 6:47–49
(12) Lingell, Jacob	280	10 February 1754	32:0:0	ACDB 6:60–63
(13) Lorton, Jacob	560	2 February 1754	79:0:0	ACDB 6:56–59
(14) Loy, Martin	230	2 February 1754	30:0:0	ACDB 6:84–86
(15) Price, Augustine, Daniel, and Henry	1130	2 February 1754	80:0:0	ACDB 6:65–69
(16) Sharp, George	285	2 February 1754	35:0:0	ACDB 6:90–92
(17) Sharp, Harness	320	2 February 1754	40:0:0	ACDB 6:42–46

A Map and Survey Analysis of the Draper's Meadows Tract

The Draper's Meadows settlement was located in a wide valley between Brush and Price mountains. The head springs of both Tom's Creek and Strouble's Creek are located along the eastern border of the tract. These streams flow west through the valley toward their confluence with the New River, which flows about one mile west of the tract's western boundary.

Although John Buchanan's survey was reported as measuring approximately 7,500 acres, the author has determined that the Draper's Meadows tract actually measured approximately 10,000 acres. The first step in determining this was to transpose Buchanan's original 1747 plat for "7,500" acres over modern 7.5-minute scale United States Geological Survey topographic maps, after first re-drawing the plat to fit the scale of the map. The author's map was then checked against the earlier work of John Garrett, who had prepared a similar map in the 1980s.²³ The author next used a computer program, ACME Planimeter,²⁴ to measure the area of the survey as it lay over the USGS map. This mapping of Draper's Meadows cannot be 100 percent accurate, but it represents possibly the most precise view of the tract to date.

The question arises: How is it that the survey is 10,000 acres in size when only 7,500 acres were reported? Needless to say, the colonial surveyors had none of the fine-tuned land measuring devices and surveying technologies available to modern surveyors. It is remarkable that they achieved as much as they did, and, understandably, errors were common in the early surveys. However, an error on the scale of 2,500 acres probably cannot be explained solely by the use of poor instruments or faulty calculations made in the field or later at the desk. Instead, the discrepancy revealed here suggests that Buchanan and Patton may have intentionally reported the survey as containing far less acreage than it actually did contain. To pay fewer quitrents (taxes) on the land would have been the most likely reason for doing so. Although Draper's Meadows could be an isolated case, there is indeed evidence that Buchanan and Patton also "decreased" the acreage of several other large tracts surveyed for the company.²⁵

The author has not attempted to measure all of the 1754 subdivisions of the 10,000-acre Draper's Meadows tract that were surveyed by William Preston. However, he did measure the "1,130-acre" Price tract and found that it is approximately 1,450 acres in size. It would not be surprising if the other parcels are also larger than reported.

The map of the Draper's Meadows tract presented in this article (Figure 1) is the result of many years of careful work studying the primary source records on the part of Frederick B. Kegley, Mary B. Kegley, J. R.

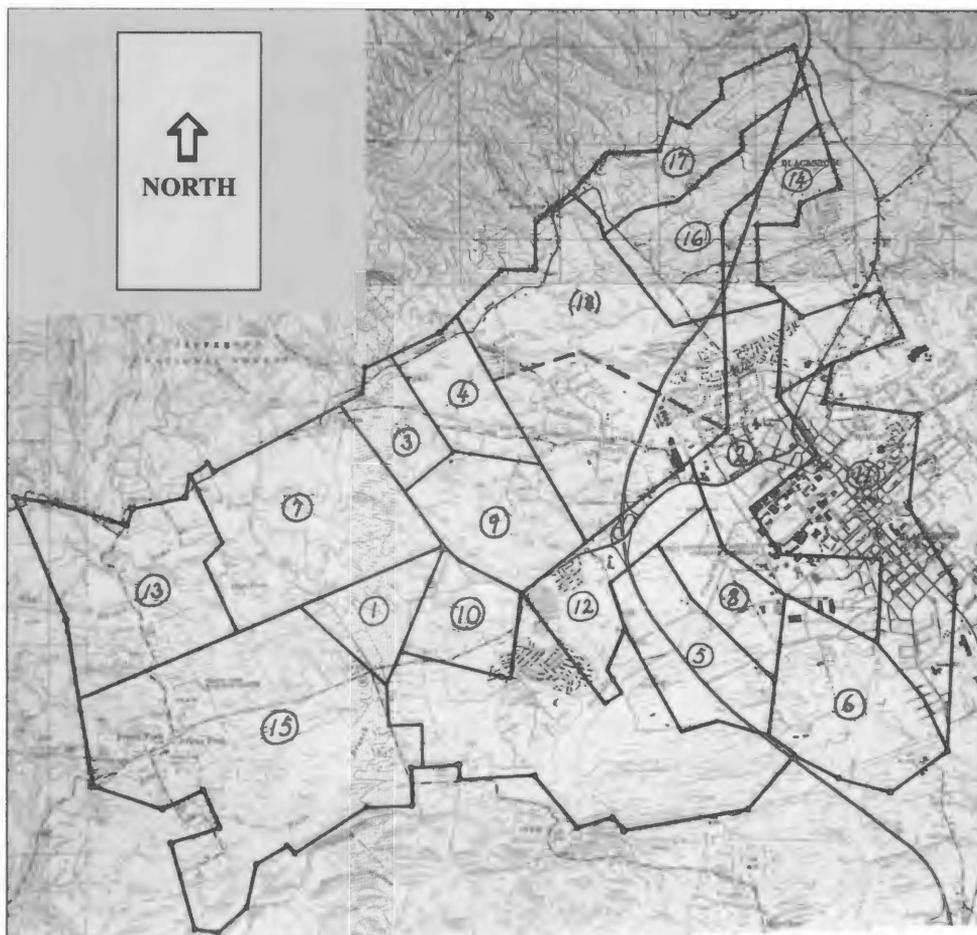


Figure 1. Colonel James Patton's 7,500 (ca. 10,000)-acre tract "at a place called Draper's" (Draper's Meadows), surveyed by Colonel John Buchanan on 21 October 1747. The specific subdivisions (lots) 1 through 17 (labeled with circled numbers) were surveyed in the winter of 1753 by William Preston and sold by James Patton to 18 settlers in early 1754 (see corresponding list in Table 1 above). Number 18 in parenthesis is the tract surveyed ca. 1752 for Conrad Eakerd, who abandoned it in 1753. The metes and bounds of Eakerd's survey were found in William Preston's records of 1771. Areas on the map without numbers represent lands not surveyed or divided up and sold to anyone until after the French and Indian War.

The following is a key to the map: (1) Adams, John-210 acres; (2) Barger (Barrier), Casper-507; (3) Byers, William-160; (4) Cook, John-190; (5) Draper, John-315 (6) Draper, John and Ingles, William-440; (7) Harman, Jacob Jr.-625; (8) Ingles, William-255; (9) Kinder, Conrad-290; (10) Kinder, Michael-200; (11) Leppard, William-620; (12) Lingell, Jacob-280; (13) Lorton, Jacob-560; (14) Loy, Martin-230; (15) Price, Augustine, Daniel, and Henry-1,130; (16) Sharp, George-285; (17) Sharp, Harness-320; (18) Conrad Eakerd (acreage unknown).

The author drew the survey plats in 2014 over the following U.S. Geological Survey 7.5-minute scale topographic map quadrangles: Blacksburg, 1965 (photo-revised 1983); Newport, 1998; Radford South, 1998. These were the most recently published maps available.

Hilderbrand, John Garrett, Sara B. Keough, Blaine Adams, Hugh Campbell, and the author.²⁶ The map was drawn by the author based on these combined efforts. The perimeter boundaries of the tract are those measured by John Buchanan in 1747²⁷ (see Figure 3 in Part I), and the subdivisions are based on the metes and bounds of William Preston's 1753 surveys as officially reported in the deeds of 1754. Later deeds for land sold in the Draper's Meadows area through about 1800 were also consulted.

The Natural Environment of the Draper's Meadows Tract

We should briefly reflect on what the natural environment at Draper's Meadows must have been like in the 1740s and 1750s. So much has changed in over 260 years that apart from its general topography, much of the land would probably be scarcely recognizable to its first inhabitants if they could see it today.

For example, when John Buchanan and William Preston made their surveys, probably 80 percent of the land was heavily forested. This was an ancient and beautiful forest with many large trees, including American chestnuts. As is typical of the few meager, fragmented tracts of old-growth forest remaining in southwest Virginia today, the understory of this great forest was probably fairly open—certainly not choked with invasive exotic species such as multiflora rose, honeysuckle, and privet. In the lowgrounds along streams, beaver-damming activities through the years had created many small glades and meadows. Indeed, beaver dams, glades, and meadows are noted specifically at several corners of Buchanan's and Preston's surveys. American Indians had lived in the region for thousands of years and were probably also responsible for having created small clearings. The Indians may have used fire to some extent to clear undergrowth in portions of the forests,²⁸ yet their impact was perhaps relatively negligible when compared to the large-scale deforestation and destructive building projects wrought on the landscape by Euro-Americans, starting especially during the nineteenth century.

Draper's Meadows was also home to a great abundance of animals, including some species that are now rare, extirpated from the region, or even extinct, such as passenger pigeons (extinct species), elk, buffalo, mountain lions, and gray wolves. A lick, or mineral spring, which such animals had visited for perhaps hundreds of years, was even noted by William Preston as being located at or near the site of the modern-day, artificial "Duck Pond" on the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VPI & SU) campus.²⁹ Preston further noted that a branch of Strouble's Creek was called the Lick Run, probably because this same lick was alongside it. This and other head branches of Strouble's Creek that once flowed through

the Ingles, Barger, and Leppard tracts now run underground through large concrete culverts to make room for the buildings and parking lots of VPI & SU and the Town of Blacksburg. For instance, what was described in 1928 as a “monster grading and draining task” changed the course of Strouble’s Creek to make way for the VPI & SU Drillfield.³⁰

The Draper’s Meadows of the mid-eighteenth century is long gone, but it is important to remember what has been lost and appreciate all the more what remains of this fragile environment.

Sketches of the Draper’s Meadows Settlers

In this section are brief biographical sketches of the first settlers of Draper’s Meadows. Very little is known for certain about most of these people. Although their names sometimes appear often in the early records, only those records that most definitely refer to the individuals living or owning land at Draper’s Meadows are reported here. In several cases the author has decided to cite records that have been placed on Internet genealogical websites. These online records are not well-substantiated by primary source data and should be regarded with great skepticism, but they do at least provide pathways for further investigation. Additional information about some of the settlers and the larger Draper’s Meadows community can be found in Frederick B. Kegley and Mary B. Kegley’s 1980 book *Early Adventurers on the Western Waters* (Volume 1) and in Turk McCleskey’s chapter “The Price of Conformity,” in the book *Diversity and Accommodation: Essays on the Cultural Composition of the Virginia Frontier* (1997).³¹

The following list is arranged in alphabetical order according to the surnames of the men who purchased the subdivisions from James Patton in 1754 (see Table 1 above):

(1) **Adams, John**—On 10 February 1753, William Preston surveyed a tract of 420 acres for John Adams and John Crapps.³² The 210 acres that Adams purchased in 1754 from James Patton included part of the original 420-acre tract. The author has found no additional records of John Crapps, but on 15 August 1753, Adam Harman Sr. and Adam Harman Jr. were accused of beating and abusing John Adams.³³ According to papers in the judgment file of this case at Augusta County Courthouse, the assault took place on 16 April 1753.³⁴ Because Adam Harman Sr. was a resident of land along lower Tom’s Creek and the New River,³⁵ this record suggests that Adams lived on his own land farther up Tom’s Creek at Draper’s Meadows. Adams appears to have abandoned his 210-acre tract during the French and Indian War.

(2) **Barger (Barrier), Casper**—The author has found very little primary source documentation about Casper (or Gasper) Barger.³⁶ He is said to have been born in Germany in 1708 and arrived aboard the ship *Winter Galley* in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on 5 September 1738.³⁷ James Patton sold him 507 acres in 1754; this land included part of what is now the heart of the campus of VPI & SU.³⁸ Barger was killed by Indians, presumably at Draper’s Meadows, during the 30 July 1755 massacre, but his burial site is unknown.³⁹ Patton had written a receipt sometime prior to that date for having “[r]eceived of Gasper barrier two Bushel [of] flower [flour] one of wheate [and] two bushel Indian corn for George willson.”⁴⁰ Barger evidently died intestate because his widow, Margaret, was administratrix of his estate in 1760, with sureties Christopher Vineyard and Lawrence Hunstman.⁴¹ George Trout, William Kear, and George Peterson conducted his estate appraisal the same year.⁴² This estate was apparently somewhere in the Shenandoah Valley—not at Draper’s Meadows.⁴³ Although a man named Phillip Barger (Barrier) later lived on Casper Barger’s 507-acre tract, his exact relationship to Casper Barger has not been definitely established, yet he was probably the son of Casper and Margaret Barger.⁴⁴

Hopefully more definite information about Casper Barger will someday come to light. For the time being, it seems beyond question that Casper did live at least for a short time at Draper’s Meadows on his 507 acres. Interestingly, “Widow Barier” paid quitrents on the land after her husband’s death each year from 1755 to 1760.⁴⁵ Colonel John Buchanan recorded on 18 October 1765 that he received “from Margret Barrier the sum of six [poun]ds ten shills. [shillings] in part of accot. [account] asign[ed] to me pr [William Le]pard” and in August 1766 that he had received five pounds from her “on acct. of accot. asign[ed] pr William Leperd.”⁴⁶

(3) **Byers, William**—James Patton sold 160 acres to William Byers in February 1754. A few days later, Jacob Harman Jr. sold 170 acres from his 625-acre tract to Byers.⁴⁷ It is possible that Byers did not actually live at Draper’s Meadows since a William Byers was ordered to help clear a road in March 1754 on the North River, a tributary of the James River in central Virginia now called the Maury.⁴⁸

(4) **Cook, John**—Almost nothing is known of John Cook except that he purchased 190 acres at Draper’s Meadows from James Patton in 1754 and was said to have been killed by Indians somewhere along the New River on 3 July 1755, suggesting that he had lived for a time at Draper’s Meadows.⁴⁹ His land was evidently abandoned until after the French and Indian War.

(5) **Draper, John**—According to John P. Hale,⁵⁰ John Draper was born in 1730 in Pennsylvania. He was the son of the Irish immigrants George and

Eleanor Draper, the founders of Draper's Meadows, and the brother of Mary (later Mary Draper Ingles). He was not yet 21 years of age when Eleanor was appointed administratrix of her husband's estate in 1749.⁵¹ Since there is no evidence that the Draper family moved away from their settlement at Draper's Meadows following George's death, John Draper presumably continued living there with his mother at the cabin he had probably helped his father build around 1746. Although Thomas Lewis had surveyed in 1747 a 275-acre tract of land for John Draper in what is now Pulaski County, Virginia, there is no documentation of Draper ever having lived there himself. John Draper sold the land to John Die in 1754 at the same time he purchased two tracts from James Patton at Draper's Meadows on the headwaters of Strouble's Creek.⁵² In April 1754, he married Elizabeth (Bettie) Robinson.⁵³ On 30 July 1755, their first child was killed by Indians at Draper's Meadows and Bettie was abducted.⁵⁴ John ransomed her about 1760 and they moved to Draper's Valley in what is now western Pulaski County, where they raised at least seven children. Bettie Draper's date of death is unknown, but it is recorded that John Draper married a widow, Jane Crockett, probably in the 1770s. John had died at his home in Draper's Valley by early 1824.⁵⁵

(6) **Harman, Jacob Jr.**—Jacob Harman Jr. was the son of Jacob Harman Sr., who is said to have been born in Germany about 1705.⁵⁶ Jacob Harman Jr. is thought to have been born before 1731.⁵⁷ Jacob Harman Sr. lived at the Horseshoe Bottom on land now owned by the Radford Army Ammunition Plant in Pulaski County, Virginia; he and his family appear to have settled at this location by 1745.⁵⁸ "Jacob Harman" (perhaps Jacob Harman Jr.) was commissioned cornet in the Augusta County militia on 19 August 1752.⁵⁹ James Patton sold 625 acres to Jacob Harman Jr. in February 1754. Harman sold 170 acres from this tract to William Byers in 1754, and he and his wife Sarah sold the remaining 455 acres to Joseph McDonald in 1768.⁶⁰ William Preston's account book of quitrents shows that Jacob Harman Jr. had made payments on the land from 1755 through 1760.⁶¹ Preston wrote that Jacob Harman Sr. and Jacob Harman Jr. were killed in 1756,⁶² but it is quite certain from the 1768 deed that Jacob Harman Jr. was still living in 1768. A Jacob Harman Sr., whose wife was "Catrina," wrote his will on 18 September 1761.⁶³ He mentioned his son Jacob Harman and several other children, including a grandchild "Madlina Price" (see Henry Price sketch below), and property around the Peaked Mountain—what is now called Massanutten Mountain in present-day Rockingham County, Virginia.⁶⁴ This suggests that the Jacob Harman Sr., who once lived on the New River, was by 1761 living on the Shenandoah River in what is now

Rockingham County. An inventory of Jacob Harman Sr.'s estate was made in May 1764.⁶⁵

Jacob Harman Jr. married Sarah Lorton, probably the daughter of Israel Lorton (discussed in Part I); their marriage license was issued on 15 June 1751.⁶⁶ An account of “Jacob Harman Jr.” to Andrew Johnston, who was a merchant, “[e]xcepted this the 14th Day of March 1755 [by] Andw Johnston” proves that Jacob Harman Jr.'s wife was Sarah Lorton (see the final debit entries below).⁶⁷ The debit and credit transactions recorded in this remarkable account, covering the period between 17 May (probably 1750) and 12 May 1751, provide significant information about the kinds of interesting goods that were available to the settlers of Draper's Meadows and elsewhere in the New River Valley at that time. All items listed here would have been greatly valued as possessions by Harman and his family, so we should take time to read the list carefully. The following is a slightly abridged version:

[Undated]—To cash £1:4:0; 17 May [1750]—one hank of silk, 24 flints, 4 lb of powder, 8 lb of lead, 1 ¼ yard [of material not listed]; 8 lb of powder; 22 August [1750]—4 yards of Holland [fabric], one knife, 1 China handkerchief; one [purse?]; one scarlet cloak, ribbon, one bell, one pack of cards, six yards of broadcloth, red shalloon, 24 coat buttons, 12 breast buttons, one yard of buckram [fabric], two hanks of silk, seven yards of flinen [flanen, i.e. flannel, a woolen fabric], six shirt buttons, three hanks of thread, 6 ½ lb of lead, one [illegible] knife, 5 lbs of tobacco, 12 buttons, 1 pint of rum, cash £2:0:0, “swap of a Bridle [£]0:3:9”; 4 lbs of powder; 8 lbs of lead; 1 lb of pepper; [owed] to Robert Breckenridge [£]0:3:10; 13 October 1750—1 ½ yards of cotton; [owed] to Robert Breckenridge £0:2:7; one pair of shoe buckles; 6 February [1750]—6 lb of powder; “To Cash Sent by Israel Lorton [£]1:1:8”; 19 March [1750]—[owed] to Robert Breckenridge for the year 1749 £0:2:7 ½; [owed] to Silos Ratliff £0:12:9; 11 April 1751—one quire of paper; one felt hat; one pair of knee buckles; [owed] to “Wm Buchann” [£]3:4:3; 23 April 1750—3 yards of bed ticking (fabric); 3 ½ yards of Irish Holland [fabric]; ¼ yard of cambric [cloth]; 12 pounds of lead; 12 May 1750—“To Cash paid at Mrs. [probably Eleanor] Drapers [£]0:11:6”; [owed] to John McCurry Sr. [£]0:15:11; 500 pins; one knife and fork; 4 lbs of powder; 1 ½ yards of cloth; [owed] “To Sarrah Lorton Your wife [£]2:3:8”; [owed] to Mr. Madison for a licence [license] £1:5:0.”

Jacob Harman Jr.'s credit account, recorded on the opposite side of the page, was as follows:

“[Undated] 10 “Grey [deer] Skins”; 28 “Drest” [deerskins]; 5 elk skins; 15 February 1751—“By 52 Grey Skins wt. [weight] 205 lb at humphry Bakers [Humphrey Baker's] house for which I granted him my Note for the same which amounts £12:16:3; 8 May 1751—one elk skin.”

The total credit came to £21:13:3 with a balance of £10:4:7 due Andrew Johnston, the combined total amounting to £31:17:10. It is noteworthy that Harman paid Johnston with deer and elk skins—the primary forms of currency, along with furs, of the early frontier settlers.

Where Jacob and Sarah Harman lived in the 1750s and 1760s is uncertain, but it seems reasonable to suppose that by 1754 they were living somewhere along Tom's Creek within the 455-acre tract that they later sold to Joseph McDonald. Jacob Harman Jr. is thought to have died after 1801 in Kentucky.⁶⁸

(7) **Ingles, William**—William Ingles was the son of Thomas Ingles, who is said to have immigrated to America from Ireland.⁶⁹ William first appears in the historical records of southwest Virginia on 19 November 1746, when he was listed as a road worker on the Roanoke River.⁷⁰ Thomas Lewis surveyed 25 acres for him on 9 April 1748 on “Inglis Mill Creek,” a branch of the South Fork of the Roanoke River in present-day Montgomery County.⁷¹ The location was about three miles east of the eastern border of the “7,500-acre” Draper's Meadows tract and was probably where Ingles was then living. William Ingles is said to have married Mary Draper in 1750, but there unfortunately appears to be no extant primary source record of their marriage.⁷² Dr. Thomas Walker found William Ingles still living on the Roanoke River in March 1750 when he passed through the area on his famous exploratory expedition for the Loyal Land Company.⁷³ William and Mary Ingles must have settled together at Draper's Meadows sometime shortly afterward. They were probably living on the 255-acre tract in February 1754 when William purchased the land from James Patton. This tract adjoined John Draper's tract of 315 acres and a tract of 440 acres that William and John purchased jointly (see Figures 1 and 2). Mary was abducted by the Indians during the Draper's Meadows Massacre on 30 July 1755 but famously escaped and returned to Draper's Meadows on foot in November 1755.⁷⁴ In 1762, William Ingles established a tavern and ferry on the New River near present-day Radford City. He and Mary continued to

raise their family at this location, now known as Ingles Bottom, having sold their land at Draper’s Meadows to William Preston. William died at Ingles Bottom in 1782 and Mary in 1815. William’s birth date is not definitely known, but if Mary was born in 1732 she was approximately 83 years old when she died.⁷⁵

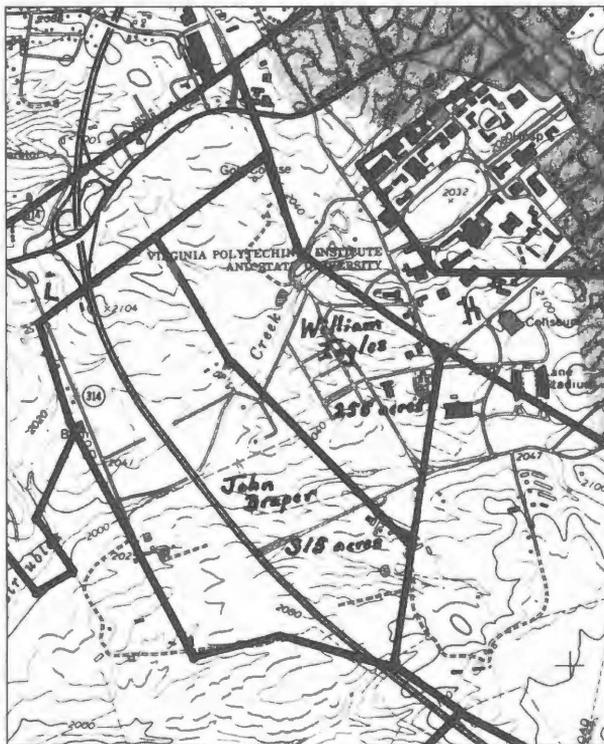


Figure 2. A closer view of the William Ingles and John Draper tracts of 255 and 315 acres, respectively, as also shown in Figure 1 above. To the right (southeast) of these tracts, and adjoining both, is the 440-acre tract which they purchased jointly. The 255 and 315-acre tracts, however, are probably where Ingles and Draper actually lived.

(8) **Kinder, Conrad**—Almost nothing is known about Conrad Kinder. His 290-acre tract, purchased on 11 February 1754, was listed as being resurveyed for Patton’s executors, William Preston and William Thompson, in November 1779 because it was “lapsed land,” for which no quitrents had been paid.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, William Preston’s reference to “Kinder’s cabin” in his January 1753 surveying notes indicates that either Conrad or Michael (see below) lived at Draper’s Meadows.⁷⁷

(9) **Kinder, Michael**—As with Conrad Kinder, almost nothing is known about Michael Kinder. He signed his mark on a promissory note to William Preston for 19 shillings on 1 February 1754.⁷⁸ It was not recorded on the document for what this debt was to be paid. The 200 acres he purchased at Draper's Meadows from James Patton on 2 February 1754 was resurveyed as lapsed land in November 1779, indicating that it had been long abandoned.⁷⁹

(10) **Lingell (Lingle), Jacob**—Jacob Lingell is said to have been born in 1708 in Germany and to have married Anna Urula Bankhard in 1736.⁸⁰ It is unknown whether he actually lived for any period of time at Draper's Meadows on the 280 acres he purchased from Patton in 1754, but he evidently paid quitrents on the property for at least five years (through 1760).⁸¹ He and his wife "Ann" eventually sold this land to Peter and Stephen Conrad in 1769.⁸² Evidence that Jacob Lingell lived at Draper's Meadows in the early 1750s comes from a summons by Augusta County Court dated 3 September 1754, in which Lingell was called to testify on behalf of Adam Harman Sr. and Adam Harman Jr. in their 1753 lawsuit with John Adams, whom they had been accused of assaulting. "Jacob Lingal" was noted as being located "on New River" in the document.⁸³

(11) **Lippard (Leppard), William**—William Leppard may have been the "William Lieppert" who arrived in Philadelphia from Germany on 16 September 1738 aboard the ship *Queen Elizabeth*.⁸⁴ He seems to have lived for some period of time on the 620-acre tract he purchased from James Patton at Draper's Meadows in 1754. On 16 August 1753, Augusta County Court appointed Leppard to "be surveyor of the highway on New River in the room of [in place of] Adam Harman."⁸⁵ A memorandum of this transfer of duty, possibly written in the hand of William Leppard but apparently signed in the hand of Adam Harman, reads as follows: "To the worshipfull Cort of agusta whare as I the sd Adam harman have sarved [as] over seer of the Rode one [on] the Rode [*sic*] betwend Cutelap[a] [Catawba] Creek and new River and now I Return In my place william Leeper. Adam hermo[n]."⁸⁶ On 25 March 1754, Leppard was appointed overseer of a road ordered to be cleared from "Bingamans Ferry to the Waters of Roan Oak [Roanoke] near Tobias Brights as also from the Widow Drapers to Jacob Browns."⁸⁷ Leppard's 620 acres were bought by Samuel Black in 1772.⁸⁸ Interestingly, there was also an earlier deed from James Patton to William Leppard for "seventy five" acres of land adjoining the northern border of Leppard's 620-acre tract.⁸⁹ The deed is undated but it was presumably made out to Leppard before Patton's death in 1755. In any case, the tract actually measured 175 acres, as determined when it was later resurveyed and sold

in 1779 to Robert Gresham, who purchased it from William Preston and William Thompson (Patton's only acting executors by that time).⁹⁰

(12) **Lorton, Jacob**—Jacob Lorton was probably the son of Israel Lorton and therefore the brother of Sarah Lorton and brother-in-law of Jacob Harman Jr. (see Jacob Harman Jr. above). He was an administrator of Israel Lorton's estate in June 1752. In February 1754, he purchased 560 acres from James Patton on Tom's Creek. He married a widow, Lydia Elswick, about 1768 and they moved to land along Meadow Creek in present-day Montgomery County several miles southeast of Draper's Meadows. Jacob Lorton presumably lived on his 560-acre tract at Draper's Meadows before moving to Meadow Creek, but the dates of his occupancy there have yet to be positively established. In 1768, Jacob and Lydia Lorton sold the 560-acre tract to James Bane, and in 1770, Jacob sold a black slave to Michael Price.⁹¹

(13) **Loy, Martin**—Martin Loy was probably born circa 1710 in Germany. He arrived in Philadelphia aboard the ship *St. Mark* on 26 September 1741 and is said to have married Catherine Faust (Foust) in either Berks or Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Although Martin Loy of Augusta County, Virginia, purchased 230 acres at Draper's Meadows from James Patton in 1754, the author has seen no records indicating that Loy and his family were actually settled there by that date. It seems possible that Martin visited his Draper's Meadows land at least once to inspect it, perhaps after having settled somewhere else in Augusta County (such as Beverley Manor near the town of Staunton). The Loys eventually moved to Orange County, North Carolina, where Martin wrote his will in July 1777. In it he mentioned his wife, "Catherriny," and children Mary, John, Henry, and George. His will was probated in May 1779.⁹² Martin Loy's land at Draper's Meadows was resurveyed in November 1779 after having lapsed.⁹³

(14–16) **Price, Augustine, Daniel, and Henry**—Except where noted, the following information is taken primarily from the 1985 publication *Increase in Prices: Some Descendants of David and Agnes (Hoffman) Price of 17th Century Germany* by Ann Yates and W. Conway Price,⁹⁴ which is the most recent and comprehensive published genealogy of the Price family in southwest Virginia. The reader should also consult Part I of this article for information about the important circa 1750 lawsuit *Michael and Augustine Price vs. Israel Lorton and James Patton*.⁹⁵

Augustine Price was baptized in Offenbach (Landau), Rheinland Pfalz, Germany, on 31 May 1722 and is said to have married Ann (Anna) Elisabetha Scherp/Sharp, daughter of Harness Sharp (see below) in 1749. He arrived aboard the ship *Winter Galley* in Philadelphia with his brother, Michael, and their brother-in-law, Phillip Harless, on 5 September 1738.⁹⁶

He bargained with Israel Lorton for land on the New River in the late 1740s. On 19 August 1752, he was commissioned a lieutenant of a troop of horse in the Augusta County militia.⁹⁷ He deposed on 16 October 1802, while living in Rockingham County, that he was “driven from his home on New River by Indians in the year of Braddock’s defeat [1755],” which indicates that he had been living at Draper’s Meadows.⁹⁸ His cabin is said to have stood about half a mile south of present-day Price’s Fork within the 1,130-acre tract he had purchased with his brothers Daniel and Henry in 1754 from James Patton.

Daniel Price was born in Offenbach, Germany, and baptized on 10 April 1724. He was married to Anna Catharina (last name unknown). It is not clear if he lived on the 1,130-tract he purchased with his brothers from James Patton in 1754, but he later owned land in Rockingham County and is believed to have died there. Daniel appears to have served as a soldier in the French and Indian War.⁹⁹

Johan Heinrich/Henricus (Henry) Preisch (Price) was baptized in Offenbach (Landau), Rheinland Pfalz, Germany on 8 September 1726. He married “Mary Magdalene [last name unknown],” who may have been related to Jacob Harman Sr.¹⁰⁰ Henry’s will was written in 1786 and probated in 1797. In it he specified that during her widowhood, his wife, Mary, was to have her choice of a room in either his house in Rockingham County or the one in Montgomery County.¹⁰¹ Perhaps the latter was somewhere on the 1,130-acre tract of land that he and his brothers Augustine and Daniel had purchased jointly from James Patton in 1754.

(17) **Sharp, George**—George Sharp was the eldest son of Harness Sharp (see below).¹⁰² He is said to have been born in 1722 in Germany,¹⁰³ and it is known that he arrived in Philadelphia aboard the ship *Queen Elizabeth* on 16 September 1738.¹⁰⁴ He purchased 285 acres at Draper’s Meadows from James Patton on 2 February 1754, but it is uncertain whether he actually lived there. He probably abandoned the land during the French and Indian War, as it was resurveyed in November 1779 after having lapsed.¹⁰⁵ Also on 2 February 1754, George Sharp signed in German script a promissory note to William Preston for 24 shillings.¹⁰⁶ Johan Michael Price and “Jacob Harman” both signed the document as witnesses. Although the reason for the debt was not recorded, Preston wrote on the back “George Sharps note 24/ nigh Drapers,” which could mean that Sharp was then living on his 285 acres. George Sharp is said to have married Anna Marie Loy before 1755 and to have died in 1789 in Orange County, North Carolina.¹⁰⁷

(18) **Sharp, Harness**—Harness Sharp was the father of George Sharp. He was probably the “Johannes Ernest Herman Harness Sharp” who

was born in Germany in 1699 and arrived in Philadelphia aboard the ship *Queen Elizabeth* on 16 September 1738.¹⁰⁸ His daughter, Ann Elizabeth, is said to have married Augustine Price.¹⁰⁹ Harness bought 320 acres of land at Draper's Meadows from James Patton in 1754, but it is not clear whether he lived there. His land had lapsed by November 1779, when it was resurveyed.¹¹⁰

The Draper's Meadows Massacre (30 July 1755)

In January 1753, James Patton wrote a letter to John Blair Sr., a member of the Virginia Council.¹¹¹ He described how in 1743 he had petitioned the Virginia government for 200,000 acres on the Western Waters in southwest Virginia but was told it could not at that time be granted "as [doing so] might occasion a Dispute betwixt them and the French who claimed a Right to the Land on those Waters." The council also felt that "as the distance was so great from any Part of the Alantick [Atlantic] Ocean, They could not conceive that any Benifit could arise to his Majesties Revenues or to the strength of this Colony by a handfull of Poor People that might Venture to settle there." Patton reminded Blair that he "was the first Brittish Subject that had petitioned for Land on sd. Waters which I Discovered at Vast Expençe" and that in April 1745 he was finally given a grant for 100,000 acres with the understanding that if he "complied with my Promise in settling of that, I could not miss of the other 100,000." He noted that "the great distance [his grant] was from any of the French Governments" would (if settled) be "a usefull Barrier...between the French, French Indians & Virginia." Patton then complained that he had "since complied with [the terms of the 1745 grant] by Paying his Majesties Rights, and settling above 100 families on sd. Land, as also returning the Plans [survey records] to the secretaries Office before the Day Refixed." Yet other land companies, namely the Ohio and Loyal companies, were acquiring grants in the Virginia backcountry for hundreds of thousands of acres more than he had received in 1745 and his own company had not yet been able to patent all of their land.

Unfortunately for James Patton, the French and Indian War began in North America in 1754.¹¹² At least as early as the spring of 1753, Indians had been seriously harassing settlers in the Virginia backcountry.¹¹³ In January 1754, having received word from George Washington that the French were determined to stay in the Ohio Valley, Governor Robert Dinwiddie instructed James Patton to "draw out the Militia of Y'r Co'ty [your county]."¹¹⁴ And in the summer of 1754, a Frenchman threatened to kill Colonel John Buchanan, who was then living at his plantation on Reed Creek at present-day Max Meadows in what is now Wythe County.¹¹⁵

As county lieutenant, Colonel James Patton was the highest ranking militia officer in Augusta County by 1754. Colonel John Buchanan and Major Andrew Lewis were his immediate subordinates. Although Patton was deeply concerned about his grant, this was the start of a turbulent period in which the activities of the land companies would be greatly curtailed, and he was forced to focus more heavily on protecting the frontier families who had settled there under his auspices.

In late July 1755, Colonel Patton made a final journey to the Draper's Meadows settlement with a convoy of militiamen, including Captain William Preston, to supply the community with ammunition for protection against the Indians, who had already attacked a number of settlers on the New River earlier in the month. For reasons that are unclear, Patton apparently visited the Draper and Ingles families alone, without a guard. On Wednesday, 30 July, according to William Preston,¹¹⁶ James Patton was killed by Indians, probably at the house of William and Mary Ingles,¹¹⁷ which may have stood somewhere in the vicinity of the Duck Pond and Solitude on what is now the VPI & SU campus (Figure 2).¹¹⁸

The Draper's Meadows Massacre was first reported publicly in the *Virginia Gazette* on 8 August 1755:¹¹⁹

By an Express this Morning from Augusta County, we have the melancholy Account of the Murder of Col. James Patton, who was killed by a Party of Indians, the last Day of July, on the Head Branches of Roanoke, and eight more Men, Women, and Children. Col. Patton was going out with Ammunition &c. for the Use of the Frontier Inhabitants, and stopping at a Plantation on the Road to refresh himself, the Convoy being about five Miles before, he was beset by 16 Indians, who killed, and stripped him, and then made off with his Horse &c.

Colonel Patton's murder on the Virginia frontier at the hands of French Indians (probably Shawnee) followed General Edward Braddock's death and disastrous defeat at the Battle of the Monongehela in Pennsylvania by less than three weeks.¹²⁰ Between August and October 1755, the same account of the Draper's Meadows Massacre that was printed in the *Virginia Gazette* on 8 August was reprinted in at least eight other newspapers in the American colonies and in England, as follows: *Boston Evening-Post*; *Boston Gazette, or Country Journal*; *Boston Weekly News-Letter*; *Gentleman's Magazine* (London); *Maryland Gazette*; *New-York Mercury*; *Pennsylvania Gazette*; *South-Carolina Gazette*.¹²¹

There is no doubt that the Indians scalped James Patton.¹²² The other massacre victims known to have been killed were Eleanor Draper and

her grandchild (the child of John and Bettie Draper) and Casper Barger. In addition, Mary Draper Ingles, Bettie Draper, and a man named Henry Leonard were taken captive. A man named James Cull was wounded in his foot during the attack.¹²³ William Ingles and John Draper escaped because it seems neither was present at his home at the time of the massacre.

Several excellent analyses of the Draper's Meadows Massacre have been published in recent years, so it is not necessary to give an exhaustive account of the event and its aftermath in this article.¹²⁴ There has also been some speculation as to where James Patton and the other people killed in the massacre were buried. Curiously, no record of their burial site(s) seems to have survived, even amongst the large number of extant documents written by William Preston and other members of his family. It would appear that descendants of those involved in the massacre never touched on the subject in writing. One wonders if the graves were intentionally left unmarked in 1755 and their location kept a secret by Preston and others close to him for many years. Perhaps as the years went by and after Preston and his immediate descendants had died or moved away, the grave sites were simply forgotten. We certainly know nothing of their whereabouts today.¹²⁵ Wherever these people are now resting will probably always remain a mystery unless some new documentation comes to light or construction projects on and around the VPI & SU campus disturb their graves.

A Fort at Draper's Meadows (1756)?

An initial attempt organized by Colonel John Buchanan during the first week of August 1755 to overtake the Indians who had attacked Draper's Meadows failed.¹²⁶ A much larger military expedition under the command of Major Andrew Lewis set out against the Shawnee from Fort Frederick on the New River during the winter of 1756. This expedition hoped to reach the Shawnee villages in the Ohio River Valley, but it, too, was unsuccessful.¹²⁷

On 8 September 1756, Governor Dinwiddie wrote to Colonel Clement Read asking him to "Give [Captain Samuel] Stalniker 100[£]...to qualify him to raise his Co. [company] and build a little Stockade F't [fort] at Draper's Meadow [*sic*]..."¹²⁸ However, there is no documentary evidence that the fort was ever built.¹²⁹

In 1916, the Allegheny Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) placed a monument in a field just above Tom's Creek along Shadow Lake Road (in a northern section of the greater Draper's Meadows tract). The monument's plaque states that this was the "Site of Barger's Indian Fort 1756." The official report of the DAR's dedication ceremony on 4 July 1916 stated only that the fort was

“commanded one time by Capt. Stalluaker [Stalnaker], and at another by Capt. John Floyd.”¹³⁰ This statement was probably based on the assumption that the fort Governor Dinwiddie wanted Captain Stalnaker to build at Draper’s Meadows in 1756 was what became known as the Barger Fort, which seems quite clearly to explain why the DAR chose the date 1756. The information about Captain John Floyd evidently came from David E. Johnston’s 1906 book about the New River settlements, in which Johnston suggested that Philip Barger and his family built a “fort” on Tom’s Creek in the 1770s. Without citing sources, Johnston also wrote that the Barger fort was commanded by Captain John Floyd in 1777.¹³¹

The author has been unable to find any primary source documentation of a fort having been located at the site marked by the DAR on Shadow Lake Road.¹³² In the author’s opinion, local tradition that a fort or fortified homestead was located at this place is credible, but the fort was probably not built until the 1770s and was not present as early as the 1750s. The DAR’s placing 1756 on their monument was due to their mistaken assumption that the fort Stalnaker was supposed to have built at Draper’s Meadows was what later generations referred to as the Barger Fort. It is important to note that Casper Barger’s 507-acre tract of land on the headwaters of Strouble’s Creek (deeded to him in 1754) did not include the land where the Barger fort is believed to have been located. The western border of Casper Barger’s tract was one mile from the later site of the Barger fort (see Figure 1) and there appears to be no documentary evidence that Casper’s immediate heir, Philip Barger, lived in that area as early as the 1750s.¹³³ Therefore, this fort has no history of being present before the 1770s, and it probably has no direct connection to Casper Barger, the Draper’s Meadows Massacre, or the fort Stalnaker was supposed to have built.

There is also believed to have been a fort built possibly during the French and Indian War by Michael Price at a large spring beside present-day Old Fort Road (about one mile south of Price’s Fork) on the 1,130-acre Price tract at Draper’s Meadows. This fort reportedly was used during the Revolutionary War (1775–1783) for militia musters in what was by then Montgomery County,¹³⁴ but there is likewise no direct evidence apart from local, oral tradition that it was built before the 1770s.

The Abandonment of Draper’s Meadows

The Draper’s Meadows settlement appears to have been abandoned soon after the Indian raids of 1755, as there is little indication in the surviving records that the area was occupied again until approximately the late-1760s. On 29 August 1755, about a month after the Draper’s Meadows Massacre,

Governor Horatio Sharpe of Maryland wrote the following in a letter to General William Shirley:

The Virg [Virginia] Assembly has granted £40,000 for the service & Govr. Dinwiddie speaks of raising 1,200 men therewith & sending them to build a Fort somewhere near the meadows or just over the Alleganny Hills, but I doubt he will scarcely execute such a scheme for it will require no small number of Men to protect the Frontiers of that Province which have been much infested by Indians since Generl Braddock's misfortune. The Inhabitants who dwelt in the distant parts of Virga [Virginia] on New River & that called Green Brier [Greenbrier River] have all left their Plantations.

Just how terrifying the frontier had become by this time is expressed poignantly in the reasons given by deputy sheriffs Samson Matthews and William Lusk for not executing warrants against men whom they believed were still living in the New River Valley. In March 1756, Matthews' warrant against Thomas Looney was "Not Executed by Reason I was informed it was Dangerous to go to New river." Lusk did not execute his warrant against Frederick Stern "by Reason of the murder Done on the New River by the Indians."¹³⁵

Summary

This article concludes the author's survey of the historical Draper's Meadows settlement between the years 1746 and 1756. The locality was still being called Draper's Meadows as late as the 1780s,¹³⁶ but by that time William Preston and William Black had both settled in the heart of the community around the headwaters of Strouble's Creek and the name gradually went out of use. Smithfield Plantation, the Town of Blacksburg, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and Price's Fork, are today the most commonly recognized names associated with Colonel James Patton's survey on the waters of Tom's and Strouble's creeks at Draper's Meadows.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix

The following is a transcript of the 1739 petition of George Draper described in the section *George Draper and Family in Pennsylvania (1730s)* above:

To the Honourable Justices of the Peace for the County of Chester at their Quarter sessions held at Chester for The sd County ye 28th of August Anno Dom 1739

The humble Petition of Georg Draper of the Township of Newton all in the sd County Sheweth That whereas Your petitioner Did in the year 1734 Lease a Certain Piece of Land belon'ing [belonging] To James Gibbons Containing Two hundred Acres whereon Your Petitioner is now Settled and have [*sic*] Made very Considerable Improvements Haveing near one Hundred acres Cleard a Good Hous [illegible] Barn and about five or six acres of meadow cleard. And whereas Some time after Your Petitioner's Setling There There was by Order of the Governer and Council a Provincial Road Laid through the Improve'd part of sd land and within a few Yards of Your petitioners hous which road Leads from Pexton To phil'ad [Philadelphia] and is very much usd by Travalers So that Your Petitioner (with his neighbours) have been much burdend with them, There not being aney Hous of Entertainment within Tenn [possibly Four] miles on sd Road. Therefore Your Petitioner Prays that You may be pleasd to recomend him to the Governer in Order for His obtaining a Lisance to keep a Publick hous of Entertainment for man and hors [horse] and your petitioner shall ever pray
George Draper

We whose Names are heareunto subscrib'd are of opinion There is Great need of a hous of Entertainment at the place above proposd That being the place That the Dutch and other Travalers Make Their Stage There not being aney Other Convenient place To Watter [water] a Team [of horses] &c. within maney miles of sd Place on the sd Road and we belive Your Petitioner to be an Honest Man and well Qualified for Keeping That purpos[e]. Therefore we pray your may be pleasd to Recomend Him according to his Request.

[Below George Draper's petition, and written by a different hand (apparently that of Thomas Edwards), is the following:]

These are to certifie whom it may concern that the Residence of this Petitioner [Draper] is a very proper place for a house of Entertainment, and the distance of Public houses on that Road is at Least 20 Miles, and that Place his lies near the Center where there is a general road for travellers to get Refreshment for man and horse, In testimony whereof I subscribe my name Tho: Edwards

[Then following Edwards' subscription to the petition are George Draper's other neighbors, whose signatures are also transcribed verbatim but separated by commas:]

Thos. Park, John Jackson, John Strode, Tho James, Samuel MaCue, Alex: [B]aillie, Antho Wayne, [illegible], Joseph Gibbons, Jon. Gibbons, William Trego, Abel Parke, James Porter, John Henderson, Samuel [illegible], [illegible], Willm: Darlinton, James Gardner, Thomas X [his mark] Nicklas, Jeremiah I [his mark] Peirsoll, David Thomas, Daniel Moore, Richard Pearsoll, John Pearsell, [illegible]

Endnotes

Abbreviations:

ACCH = Augusta County Courthouse, Staunton, Virginia

DM = Lyman C. Draper Manuscript Collection (Draper Manuscripts), State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin. Microfilmed by the Department of Photographic Reproduction, University of Chicago Library

FCCH = Frederick County Courthouse, Winchester, Virginia

FHS = Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky

LC = Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LVA = Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia

MCCH = Montgomery County Court House, Christiansburg, Virginia

QQ = Series QQ, Draper Manuscripts, Preston Papers. Citations include the series between volume and page number (i.e. 1QQ38).

PP-DM = Preston Papers, Draper Manuscripts, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

PP-VHS = Papers of the Preston Family of Virginia (Preston Family Papers), 1727–1896, Mss1 P9267f, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. Microfilmed by the Library of Congress

VHS = Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia

VPI&SU = Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia

WCC = Wytheville Community College, Wytheville, Va.

1. Ryan S. Mays, "The Draper's Meadows Settlement (1746–1756) Part I: George Draper and Family," *Smithfield Review* 18 (2014), 25–50. The author wishes to add here a record which he inadvertently omitted from Part I: This was Colonel John Buchanan's "List of Surveyors [Surveyor's] fees Act [Account] to Colo. James Patton Sheriff of augusta county" in which Buchanan listed George Draper among those owing fees. The amount Draper owed (or had already paid) is unknown because the document has a tear in it immediately following Draper's

name. However, most of the other men owed fees equal to 500 pounds of tobacco. On the back Colonel Buchanan wrote an acknowledgment dated 13 February 1745/46 of his having received from Colonel Patton for as many surveyors notes as amounted to 22,500 pounds of gross tobacco, for which he promised to account or return. This account is in Surveys c. 1735–c. 1740, 173 WFCHS, Box 2, James Wood Family Papers, Stewart Bell Jr. Archives, Handley Regional Library, Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society, Winchester, Virginia. It provides additional evidence that Buchanan or some other surveyor surveyed land for George Draper in western Virginia in the early 1740s.

2. This new record (see endnote 4) was found by Hugh and Gregory Campbell in May 2014.
3. It is not yet certain that this record refers to the Drapers who eventually lived at Draper's Meadows, but it seems that this was probably the case. The new information is consistent with John P. Hale's undocumented claim that George and Eleanor Draper migrated through the Valley of Virginia from the Philadelphia region, where he said they lived during the 1730s after immigrating from Ireland. John P. Hale, *Trans-Allegheny Pioneers: Historical Sketches of the First White Settlements West of the Alleghenies 1748 and After* (Cincinnati, Ohio.: The Graphic Press, 1886), 13.
4. Petition of George Draper, 28 August 1739, Tavern Petitions and Index (1700–1800) for Chester County, Pennsylvania, LDS Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, LDS microfilm no. 567051 (Index) and no. 567053 (Original Petition). At the top of the actual petition, the date appears to be 28 August 1789, but careful comparison of the construction of each digit clearly shows (as does the Index) that it is 28 August "1739."
5. Augusta County Will Book 1: 127–128, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 41.
6. Augusta County Court Case, Judgment May 1750, *John Baird vs. Eleanor Draper, Administratrix of George Draper*, File 388, ACCH.
7. Augusta County Court Case, Judgment August 1749, *George Draper vs. James Conly*, Account of George Draper against James Conly, File 387, ACCH; Augusta County Order Book 2: 370–371, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 62; Virginia Gazette, 10 January 1752, No. 54.
8. Augusta County Order Book 3: 209, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 62; Augusta County Will Book 1: 417–418, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 41.
9. Augusta County Will Book 1: 484, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 41.
10. Augusta County Court Case, Judgment August 1752, *Eleanor Draper vs. George Breckenridge, Administrator of James Conly*, File 391, ACCH.
11. PP-VHS, Folder 74, LC microfilm reel 2.
12. PP-VHS, Folder 78, LC microfilm reel 2.
13. Wood's River Land Entry Book 1745–1781, Preston Family Papers, 1658–1896, Davie Collection, Folder 52, Mss A P937d, FHS. The handwriting of these entries are, in the author's opinion, clearly those of William Preston and James Patton, but what appears to be the signature of Conrad Eakerd (in German script) is below the entry made by Preston, and the Harmans appear to have also signed themselves. It would seem that Eakerd was present when Preston recorded his entry for land, and that Patton later wrote down himself what the Harmans told him. The descriptions of Eakerd's land as being "out of that tract where Draper Lives" and "drapers survey" are undoubtedly referring to the larger 7,500-acre tract, which is further evidence that George Draper and family were considered its founding settlers. The entire area was simply called "Draper's Survey" at that time.
14. Bills of complaint by Jacob Lorton that Conrad Eakerd, "who has run away," was indebted to him about £10 Virginia money, written by Colonel James Patton 30 July 1753, Augusta County Court Case, Judgment August 1753, *Jacob Lorton vs. Conrad Eakerd*, File 396, ACCH.
15. PP-VHS, Folder 685, LC microfilm reel 4. Preston's transcript of Eakerd's survey is undated but it was written in a notebook with other surveys and notes dated April and May 1771.
16. The most complete biographical sketches of Buchanan so far published can be found in Frederick B. Kegley, *Kegley's Virginia Frontier: The Beginning of the Southwest, The Roanoke of Colonial Days, 1740–1783* (Roanoke, Va.: Southwest Virginia Historical Society, 1938), 368–371; Mary

- B. Kegley and Frederick B. Kegley, *Early Adventurers on the Western Waters: The New River of Virginia in Pioneer Days, 1745–1800*, vol. 1 (Orange, Va.: Green Publishers, Inc., 1980), 87, 200–202; and Donald W. Gunter, “John Buchanan,” in *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, vol. 2, Sara B. Bearss et al., eds. (Richmond, Va.: Library of Virginia, 2001), 367–368.
17. Augusta County Order Book 3:403, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 62.
 18. John Buchanan did not have a license to survey from the College of William and Mary, as was required by Virginia law: Thomas Lewis to William Preston, 11 August 1781, PP-DM 5QQ-97, Microfilm reel 111. However, Buchanan and Preston both produced identical plats of surveys on the Holston River, presumably run out by Buchanan, in November 1746 and February 1746/47, suggesting either that Preston was training under Buchanan or (less likely) that he copied the plats some years later: PP-VHS, Folder 23, LC microfilm reel 2. Similarly, John Poage was not officially commissioned a deputy surveyor of Augusta County until May 1760: Augusta County Order Book 6:350, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 4. But Poage had surveyed land for James Patton in 1751: Augusta County Surveyor’s Record 1:51–53, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 107. William Preston kept a notebook of surveys in 1751, and their courses and locations are in most cases nearly identical to those recorded by John Poage: PP-VHS, Folder 67, LC microfilm reel 2. This suggests that Preston helped Poage make the surveys. See also: Will of John Poage 1789, Augusta County Will Book 7: 140-143, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 45.
 19. Land Records and Survey Book of James Patton and William Preston, Circa 1751–1755, Preston Family Papers (1745–1915), Series 4, Folders 1 and 2, F. B. Kegley Library, WCC; PP-VHS, Folder 89a, LC microfilm reel 2.
 20. PP-VHS, Folder 74, LC microfilm reel 2.
 21. Land Office Patent Book 32: 178–181, LVA microfilm reel 30.
 22. Augusta County Order Book 6: 31–95, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 4.
 23. John Garrett, unpublished records and personal communication to the author in May 2014.
 24. <http://www.acme.com/planimeter/>
 25. W. Dale Carter, “Was Dr. Thomas Walker a Crook?,” *Retrospective: Journal of the Wythe County Genealogical and Historical Society* 4 (2008), 19–27.
 26. Kegley and Kegley, *Early Adventurers*, 1: 174, 247; Map of “William Preston Lands west of Blacksburg, part of James Patton’s 7,500 Acres ‘at a place called Draper’ ” by J. R. Hilderbrand, no date, Mary B. Kegley Papers, Folder 58, F. B. Kegley Library, WCC; John Garrett, former Field Supervisor for the Town of Blacksburg, Virginia, unpublished records; Sara B. Keough and Blaine Adams, “Smithfield Plantation: The Original Land Parcels,” *Smithfield Review* 6 (2002), 71–73; Hugh Campbell, unpublished records; Ryan S. Mays, unpublished records.
 27. Augusta County Surveyor’s Record 1: 37a, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 107; Mays, “The Draper’s Meadows Settlement,” 25–50.
 28. See, for example: Timothy Silver, *A New Face on the Countryside: Indians, Colonists, and Slaves in South Atlantic Forests, 1500–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 59–64.
 29. Construction of the Duck Pond was completed in the summer of 1937 according to Ralph M. Brown, “V.P.I. Historical Index 1872–1942,” *Bulletin of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute* 35 (1942), 5–62.
 30. “V.P.I. Will Have Big Drill Field: Monster Grading and Draining Task is Completed—Not Ready to Use,” *Roanoke Times*, 4 October 1928.
 31. Kegley and Kegley, *Early Adventurers*, 1: 174–280; Turk McCleskey, “The Price of Conformity: Class, Ethnicity, and Local Authority on the Colonial Virginia Frontier,” 213–226, in Michael J. Puglisi, ed., *Diversity and Accommodation: Essays on the Cultural Composition of the Virginia Frontier* (Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 213–226.
 32. PP-VHS, Folder 89a, LC microfilm reel 2.
 33. Augusta County Order Book 4: 3, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 63.
 34. Augusta County Court Case, Judgment March 1755, *John Adams vs. Adam Harman Sr. and Adam Harman Jr.*, 395, ACCH.

35. Kegley and Kegley, *Early Adventurers*, 1: 217–227.
36. A helpful published sketch of Casper Barger and his descendants can be found in Kegley and Kegley, *Early Adventurers*, 1: 190–192.
37. [http://www.werelate.org/wiki/Person:Casper_Barger_\(1\)](http://www.werelate.org/wiki/Person:Casper_Barger_(1)); I. D. Rupp, ed., *A Collection of Upwards of Thirty Thousand Names of German, Swiss, Dutch, French and other Immigrants in Pennsylvania From 1727 to 1776* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Leary, Stuart, & Company, 1898), 115.
38. Gibson Worsham, *Solitude Historic Structure Report* (Blacksburg, Va.: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1997), 8–12.
39. “A Register of the Persons who have been either Killed Wounded or taken Prisoners by the Enemy in Augusta County, as also of such as have made their Escape,” 1754–1758, compiled by William Preston, PP-DM, 1QQ83, Microfilm reel 110. Based on the appearance of the handwriting on this document, the author feels quite certain that Preston wrote it himself.
40. PP-VHS, Folder 3498, LC microfilm reel 13.
41. Augusta County Will Book 2:409, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 42.
42. Augusta County Will Book 2: 436–437, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 42.
43. Kegley and Kegley, *Early Adventurers*, 1: 190;
44. Kegley and Kegley, *Early Adventurers*, 1: 190–191; Montgomery County Deed Book D: 475–479, MCCH, LVA microfilm reel 3.
45. PP-VHS, Folder 346, LC microfilm reel 3; Barbara V. Little, “Augusta County Quit Rents,” *Magazine of Virginia Genealogy* 51 (2013), 310–314; List of Quit Rents of the Middle District of Augusta, Preston Family (Charles Peale Didier Collection) Papers, 1747–1897, Ms1985-020, Box 1, Folder 6, Special Collections, VPI & SU. Preston appears to have made a typographical error when he wrote in the account lists that this tract measured 307 (not the original 507) acres, but this is unclear. See also “A List of Bonds Due to the Estate of Colo. James Patton Decst [Deceased] Received from Mr. William Thompson the 23 of May 1766,” compiled by Colo. John Buchanan, PP-VHS, Folder 488, LC microfilm reel 3.
46. PP-VHS, Folder 468, LC microfilm reel 3.
47. Augusta County Deed Book 6: 96–98, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 4.
48. Augusta County Order Book 4: 126, ACCH, LVA Microfilm reel 63.
49. “Register,” 1754–1758, compiled by William Preston, PP-DM, 1QQ83, Microfilm reel 110.
50. Hale, *Trans-Allegheny Pioneers*, 13.
51. Augusta County Will Book 1: 127–128, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 41.
52. Augusta County Surveyor’s Record 1: 33b, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 107; Augusta County Deed Book 6:116–117, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 4.
53. Deposition of John Draper Sr., 5 April 1806, Augusta County Chancery Case No. 105 *Alexander Montgomery and wife vs. Elizabeth Madison*, LVA Index No. 1808-065; Lyman Chalkley, *Chronicles of the Scotch-Irish Settlement in Virginia Extracted From the Original Court Records of Augusta County 1745–1800*, vols. 1 and 2 (Rosslyn, Va.: The Commonwealth Printing Co., 1912), 2: 109–110.
54. “Register,” 1754–1758, compiled by William Preston, PP-DM, 1QQ83, Microfilm reel 110.
55. Mary B. Kegley, *Early Adventurers on the Western Waters: The New River of Virginia in Pioneer Days, 1745-1800*, vol. 2 (Wytheville, Va.: Kegley Books, 2003), 379–382.
56. http://www.werelate.org/wiki/Person:Jacob_Hermann_%282%29
57. http://www.werelate.org/wiki/Person:Jacob_Harmon_%2810%29
58. Kegley and Kegley, *Early Adventurers*, 1: 217–277.
59. Augusta County Order Book 3:314, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 62.
60. Augusta County Deed Book 6: 96–98, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 4; Augusta County Deed Book 14: 259–264, LVA microfilm reel 8; Kegley and Kegley, *Early Adventurers*, 1: 239–241.
61. PP-VHS, Folder 346, LC microfilm reel 3; Little, “Augusta County Quit Rents,” 310–314.
62. “Register,” 1754–1758, compiled by William Preston, PP-DM, 1QQ83, Microfilm reel 110.

63. Augusta County Will Book 3: 337–339, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 43.
64. McCleskey, “The Price of Conformity,” 213–226.
65. Augusta County Will Book 3: 341–343, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 43.
66. Chalkley, *Chronicles*, 1: 275.
67. Augusta County Court Case, Judgment May 1756, *Andrew Johnston vs. Jacob Harman Jr.*, Account dated 14 March 1755, File 395, ACCH. In papers filed in the lawsuit *Andrew Johnston vs. Humphrey Baker*, Augusta County Court Case, Judgment June 1756, File 390, ACCH, Johnston is identified several times as being a merchant.
68. http://www.werelate.org/wiki/Person:Jacob_Harmon_%2810%29
69. Kegley, *Kegley’s Virginia Frontier*, 194–195.
70. Augusta County Order Book 1:131, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 62.
71. Augusta County Surveyor’s Record 1:29b, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 107.
72. Hale, *Trans-Allegheny Pioneers*, 27.
73. Journal of Dr. Thomas Walker 1750, William C. Rives Papers, 1674–1939, MSS37937, Library of Congress; Lewis P. Summers, *Annals of Southwest Virginia 1760–1800* (Abingdon, Va.: L.P. Summers, 1929), 8–26.
74. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 26 February 1756, No. 1418; Roberta I. Steel and Andrew I. Steele, eds., *Escape from Indian Captivity: The Story of Mary Draper Ingles and son Thomas Ingles as told by John Ingles Sr.* (Radford, Va.: Roberta Ingles Steel and Andrew Ingles Steele, 1969, reprinted 1982); Patricia G. Johnson, *James Patton and the Appalachian Colonists* (Pulaski, Va.: Edmonds Printing, Inc., 2nd ed., 1983, first printed 1973), 201–208; Ellen A. Brown, “Portrait of a Survivor: The Long and Eventful Life of Mary Draper Ingles,” *Smithfield Review* 8 (2004), 55–69; Marion C. Harrison, “The Charmed Life of Mary Ingles,” *Virginia Cavalcade* 10 (1960), 34–41; Letitia P. Floyd, “Recollections of 18th Century Frontier Life by Letitia Preston Floyd, Introduction by Wirt H. Wills, Transcription by June Stubbs,” *Smithfield Review* 1 (1997), 3–16.
75. Kegley and Kegley, *Early Adventurers*, 1: 352–359.
76. Montgomery County Survey Book A:239, MCCH, LVA microfilm reel 33.
77. Land Records and Survey Book of James Patton and William Preston, Circa 1751–1755, Preston Family Papers (1745–1915), Series 4, Folders 1 and 2, F. B. Kegley Library, WCC.
78. PP-VHS, Folder 125, LC microfilm reel 2.
79. Montgomery County Survey Book A: 238, MCCH, LVA microfilm reel 33.
80. http://www.werelate.org/wiki/Person:Johan_Lingel_%281%29
81. PP-VHS, Folder 346, LC microfilm reel 3; Little, “Augusta County Quit Rents,” 310–314.
82. Chalkley, *Chronicles*, 1: 488; Augusta County Deed Book 15: 515–519, LVA microfilm reel 8; Kegley and Kegley, *Early Adventurers*, 1: 206.
83. Augusta County Court Case, Judgment March 1755, *John Adams vs. Adam Harman Sr. and Adam Harman Jr.*, 395, ACCH.
84. Rupp, *Thirty Thousand Names*, 121.
85. Augusta County Order Book 4: 9, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 63.
86. Memorandum of Adam Harman, Undated, Executive Papers, 1746–1776, Roads and Mills Papers, Section 9, Document 50, ACCH. At an Augusta County Court held 19 May 1749, it had been “Ordered that the former Overseers [including Adam Harman] of the Indian Road from Frederick County line to Tom’s Creek be continued until they clear the sd Road and set up Posts of Directions according to Law.” Augusta County Order Book 2: 126, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 62.
87. Augusta County Order Book 4:142, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 63. The Bingamin’s Ferry mentioned in the road order was on the New River at present-day Pepper in what is now Pulaski County, Virginia: Kegley and Kegley, *Early Adventurers*, 1: 193–194. Widow Draper was obviously Eleanor Draper.
88. Kegley and Kegley, *Early Adventurers*, 1: 194–198. Samuel Black willed his land at Draper’s Meadows to his sons, John and William Black. The Town of Blacksburg was named for William Black in the 1790s.

89. Land indenture (deed) between James Patton and William Leppard for 75 acres, Ms1985-020, Box 1, Folder 3, Preston Family (Charles Peale Didier Collection) Papers, 1747–1897, Special Collections, VPI & SU.
90. Montgomery County Will Book A:194, MCCH, LVA microfilm reel 33.
91. The information about Jacob Lorton all comes from an excellent sketch of the Lorton family in Kegley and Kegley, *Early Adventurers*, 1: 236–238, 261.
92. This information comes from William E. Lynch Jr., ed., *The Loy Family in America* (Baltimore, Md.: Gateway Press, Inc., 1984), 129–132, 191; Genevieve E. Peters, *Know Your Relatives: The Sharps, Gibbs, Graves, Efland, Albright, Loy, Miller, Snoderly, Tillman, and Other Related Families* (Arlington, Va.: G. E. Peters, 1972); Augusta County Deed Book 6: 84–86, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 4. The author also referred to the unpublished genealogical notes of Virginia Allen Loy Campbell, wife of Hugh Campbell, which include records found by the genealogist Louise W. Hutchinson of Winston-Salem, North Carolina (notes currently in the possession of Hugh Campbell in Blacksburg, Va.), and http://www.werelate.org/wiki/Person:Martin_Loy_%281%29
93. Montgomery County Survey Book A: 241, MCCH, LVA microfilm reel 33.
94. Anne H. Yates and W. Conway Price, *Increase in Prices: Some Descendants of David and Agnes (Hoffman) Price of 17th Century Germany* (Ridgecrest, Cal.: A. H. Yates, privately printed, 1985), x–xi, 128–131, 225, 312, 336.
95. Augusta County Chancery Case, LVA Index No. 1752-003, *Michael and Augustine Price vs. Israel Lorton and James Patton*, File 392, ACCH; Mays, “The Draper’s Meadows Settlement,” 25–50.
96. Rupp, *Thirty Thousand Names*, 115. Johann Michael Preisch (baptized Offenbach, Germany, 9 October 1718–died 1802, Montgomery County, Virginia) was the brother of Augustine, Daniel, Henry, and Anna Margaretha (Harless) Price. It is thought he settled in what is now Montgomery County in the 1750s but moved to the Peaked Mountain settlement in what is now Rockingham County during the French and Indian War. He purchased 750 acres from his brothers out of their 1,130-acre tract at Draper’s Meadows in 1770 and built his home near the eastern border of the tract. He and his wife are buried in the family cemetery at the end of present-day Hamilton Court off Price’s Fork Road. See: Kegley and Kegley, *Early Adventurers*, 1:261–264, and Yates and Price, *Increase in Prices*, 2, 128–131.
97. Augusta County Order Book 3:313, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 62.
98. Chalkley, *Chronicles*, 2:36. The author has searched repeatedly for this deposition (the original document) in the Judgment files at Augusta County Courthouse but cannot find it.
99. Lloyd D. Bockstruck, *Virginia’s Colonial Soldiers* (Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1988), 204.
100. In his will, Jacob Harman Sr. mentioned his granddaughter “Madlina Price”: Augusta County Will Book 3: 337–339, ACCH, LVA microfilm reel 43.
101. Montgomery County Will Book 1:1–2, MCCH, LVA microfilm reel 14.
102. Montgomery County Survey Book A:239, MCCH, LVA microfilm reel 33.
103. http://www.werelate.org/wiki/Person:John_Sharp_%2834%29
104. Rupp, *Thirty Thousand Names*, 120.
105. Montgomery County Survey Book A: 240, MCCH, LVA microfilm reel 33.
106. PP-VHS, Folder 126, LC microfilm reel 2.
107. http://www.werelate.org/wiki/Person:John_Sharp_%2834%29
108. http://www.werelate.org/wiki/Person:Ernest_Sharp_%282%29; Yates and Price, *Increase in Prices*, 312; Rupp, *Thirty Thousand Names*, 120.
109. Yates and Price, *Increase in Prices*, 312.
110. Montgomery County Survey Book A: 239, MCCH, LVA microfilm reel 33.
111. PP-DM, 1QQ77, Microfilm reel 110. The letter is undated but was estimated to have been written in January 1753 by Mabel C. Weeks, *The Preston and Virginia Papers of the Draper Collection of Manuscripts* (Madison, Wis.: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1915), 7. This was evidently a draft or a transcript of the letter actually sent to Blair because it is written in the hand of William Preston and is unsigned.

112. The French and Indian War is generally considered to have begun in 1754. See, for example: Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000). However, major hostilities did not begin in the Virginia backcountry until 1755. In 1775, William Preston wrote on the back of a memorandum written by James Patton on 22 February 1755: “the Indian War began in 1755,” PP-VHS, Folder 148.
113. Johnson, *James Patton*, 172–175.
114. Governor Dinwiddie to James Patton, January 1754, in Robert A. Brock, ed., *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie, Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony of Virginia, 1751–1758, Now First Printed from the Manuscript in the Collections of the Virginia Historical Society*, vol. 1 (Richmond, Va.: Virginia Historical Society, 1883): 50–51; Johnston, *James Patton*, 177–184; Richard Osborn, “William Preston: Origins of a Backcountry Political Career,” *Journal of Backcountry Studies* 2 (2007), 1–37.
115. Governor Dinwiddie to Richard Pearis, 2 August 1754, in Brock, *Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie*, 1: 266–268.
116. “Register,” 1754–1758, compiled by William Preston, PP-DM, 1QQ83, Microfilm reel 110.
117. Richard Osborn, “William Preston in the American Revolution,” *Journal of Backcountry Studies* 3 (2008), 1–97, especially pages 88–93.
118. William and Mary Ingles were probably living on their **255-acre tract** that William had purchased from James Patton in 1754. Local tradition has placed the site of the massacre, or at least the part of the massacre which occurred at the Ingles home, around the site of what later became known as Solitude on the VPI & SU campus. In 1910, a concrete memorial bridge with the inscription “The Draper’s Meadows Massacre July 8 [*sic*], 1755” was built over Strouble’s Creek at the request of then President Paul B. Barringer (1857–1941). This bridge is still present today at the northeastern end of the Duck Pond. President Barringer was very interested in the history of the massacre and the Draper’s Meadows settlement; he even wrote to an Ingles descendant, Mr. William Ingles of Radford, Virginia, in 1910 to ask him about the site of the massacre and the Ingles house. Only Barringer’s copies of his two letters to Ingles are extant. See: Paul B. Barringer Papers, 1913–1919, RG 2/6, Box 1, Folder 18, Special Collections, VPI & SU. Based on the information he received from Ingles and others, Barringer wrote the following short history: Paul B. Barringer, “Draper’s Meadows Massacre,” *The Virginia Tech* 8, Nos. 14 and 15 (18 and 25 January 1911), 7, 2, respectively. Here he reported that the massacre took place around Solitude and that the Ingles house stood a short distance west of the site of the concrete bridge. However, there is still no conclusive evidence of exactly where the Ingles, Draper, and Barger houses stood.
119. *Virginia Gazette*, 8 August 1755, No. 239.
120. Paul E. Kopperman, *Braddock at the Monongahela* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977).
121. *Boston Evening-Post*, 1 September 1755, No. 1044; *Boston Gazette, or Country Journal*, 1 September 1755, No. 22; *Boston Weekly News-Letter*, 4 September 1755, No. 2774; *Gentleman’s Magazine*, October 1755, 25: 474–475; *Maryland Gazette*, 21 August 1755, No. 537; *New-York Mercury*, 25 October 1755; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 21 August 1755, No. 1391; *South-Carolina Gazette*, 18–25 September 1755, No. 1109.
122. In a letter dated 30 August 1755 from Maryland Governor Horatio Sharpe to Frederick Calvert, Sharpe wrote that “We learn from Virga [Virginia] that one Coll. Patton of Augusta Cty [County] a very active & worthy man was lately scalped as he was proceeding to command a Party of Rangers on New River.” William H. Brown, ed., *Archives of Maryland, Correspondence of Governor Horatio Sharpe Vol. I. 1753–1757* (Baltimore, Md.: Maryland Historical Society, 1888), page 276–277.
123. PP-VHS, Folder 165, LC microfilm reel 2; “Register,” 1754–1758, compiled by William Preston, PP-DM, 1QQ83, Microfilm reel 110.

124. The best and most comprehensive modern-day accounts of the Draper's Meadows Massacre are Johnson, *James Patton*, 201–212; Osborn, “William Preston,” *Journal of Backcountry Studies* 2 (2007), 1–37, see especially pages 29–33; Osborn, “William Preston,” *Journal of Backcountry Studies* 3 (2008), 1–97, especially pages 88–93 (this and the preceding reference are extracted from Osborn's 1990 University of Maryland dissertation on William Preston); Ellen A. Brown, “What Really Happened at Draper's Meadows? The Evolution of a Frontier Legend,” *Smithfield Review* 7 (2003), 5–21.
125. For example, there is neither documentary nor observable evidence that James Patton is buried in the Smithfield Plantation cemetery, where William Preston and his family are buried: Laura J. Wedin, “The Preston Cemetery of Historic Smithfield Plantation,” *Smithfield Review* 7 (2003), 48–76. A strange and dubious account of Patton's burial site was given in Joseph A. Waddell, *Annals of Augusta County, Virginia From 1726 to 1871* (Staunton, Va.: C. Russell Caldwell, 1901), 114, but it is almost certainly nonsense. Waddell wrote: “He [Patton] was buried near the spot where he ‘resigned his last breath,’ and his grave was covered with loose stones. There is no slab or inscription. An idle report arose that a large amount of money was buried with the body, and the grave was desecrated a few years ago by vandals in search of treasure.”
126. Governor Robert Dinwiddie to Colonel John Buchanan, 11 August 1755, in Robert A. Brock, ed., *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie, Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony of Virginia, 1751–1758, Now First Printed from the Manuscript in the Collections of the Virginia Historical Society*, vol. 2 (Richmond, Va.: Virginia Historical Society, 1884), 154–155.
127. *Maryland Gazette*, 6 May 1756, No. 574; Otis K. Rice, “The Sandy Creek Expedition of 1756,” *West Virginia History, A Quarterly Magazine* 13 (1951), 5–19; Patricia G. Johnson, *General Andrew Lewis of Roanoke and Greenbrier* (Blacksburg, Va.: Walpa Publishing, 1980), 44–55; Clare White, *William Fleming, Patriot* (Baltimore, Md.: Gateway Press, Inc., 2001), 39–50.
128. Governor Robert Dinwiddie to Colonel Clement Read, 8 September 1755, R. A. Brock, *Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie*, 2:502–504. Dinwiddie also mentioned his having ordered Stalnaker to raise a company of rangers and build the fort at Draper's Meadows in a letter written the same day to Captain Hogg: R. A. Brock, *Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie*, 2: 504–505. For information about Samuel Stalnaker, see William T. Buchanan Jr. and Mary B. Kegley, “Stalnaker: the Elusive Frontiersman,” *Retrospective: Journal of the Wythe County Genealogical and Historical Society* 6 (2010), 2–24.
129. Buchanan and Kegley, “Stalnaker,” 2–24.
130. *Nineteenth Report of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, October 11, 1915 to October 11, 1916*, Document No. 710 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), 120.
131. David E. Johnston, *A History of Middle New River Settlements and contiguous territory* (Huntington, W. Va.: Standard Printing and Publishing Co., 1906), 62.
132. The author also examined papers in the following: Alleghany Chapter, National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution Records, 1890-2010, Ms1995-019, Box 10, Folder 21, Barger's Indian Fort 1756, Special Collections, VPI & SU; Lucy Lee Lancaster Papers, 1915–1989, Ms1990-069, Box 1, Folder 28, Folders 5–12, Barger Family, Barger Fort, etc., Special Collections, VPI & SU. Lucy Lee Lancaster conducted extensive research on the Barger family and the Barger Fort, and based on her work she wrote an article for the *Blacksburg-Christiansburg News Messenger* titled “Quaint and Mysterious Story of Barger Fort,” an undated photocopy of which can be found in Folder 21 of the collection Ms 1995-019 cited above. At the time of this writing, however, the author has been unable to locate this article in the newspaper in order to establish its date of publication. Nevertheless, it was evidently published in late 1976 as the thirteenth installment in a series of similar articles written by various authors at the request of the Montgomery County Bicentennial History Committee. In her article about the Barger Fort, Ms. Lancaster concluded that “[i]t was believed that this fort was erected in 1756 just after the Draper's Meadows massacre of 1755, but proof of such a belief has not been found by this author. Various statements may indicate that it was built at a later date.”

133. Evidence that Philip Barger was the heir of Casper Barger and that he inherited Casper's 507-acre tract is found in a deed of 9 November 1806 "between Daniel Helms and Catherine his wife, late Catherine Barger one of the heirs and Representatives of **Philip Barger deceased** late of Montgomery County of the one part and John Preston of said county of the other part" concerning **two tracts "on the head waters of Strouble's Creek** a branch of New River...one containing three hundred & ninety five acres and three quarters of an acre be the same more or less being part of a Larger tract of **Five hundred & seven acres** conveyed to Gasper Barger by deeds of Lease & release dated the 9th & 10th days of February 1754 by James Patton Gent deceased **which descended to the said Philip Barger as heir at Law to the said Gasper Barger deceased,**" Montgomery County Deed Book D: 475-479, MCCH, LVA microfilm reel 3.
134. Yates and Price, *Increase in Prices*, x.
135. Augusta County Court Case, Judgment August 1756, *William Pepper vs. Thomas Looney*, File 399, ACCH; Augusta County Court Case, Judgment June 1756, *Peter Wilky vs. Frederick Stern*, File 399, ACCH.
136. For instance, in 1782, Dr. Thomas Walker addressed a letter to "Colo. William Preston at Drapers Meadows." Dr. Thomas Walker to William Preston, 21 August 1782, PP-DM, 5QQ109, Microfilm reel 111.

Peter Harrison Whisner, D.D.

*Paul L. Nichols**

Introduction

Peter Harrison Whisner was a leader in the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.¹ He is best known around Blacksburg for his role in the beginning of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. This article will tell more about him – his family background and college years; what he did for the school in Blacksburg; later accomplishments in his 46-year career in the ministry; what is known of his personality and temperament; and what he once wrote about his faith in God, the Bible, and the Methodist Church.²

Background and College Years

Peter was born February 1, 1837, near Berkeley Springs, Virginia, in what is now part of West Virginia. Both his paternal and maternal ancestors had been farmers in Morgan County for several generations, and his parents were Methodists.³ He attended the Lick Run preparatory school and, with his mother's urging and the help of his older brother, Samuel, was able to attend Dickinson College, a Methodist school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.⁴ He entered in 1856, spent three months in their grammar school, and was able to finish his freshman year in only two months.⁵

An important event that is usually noted in biographies of nineteenth and early-twentieth century Methodist preachers is their "conversion" experience. Many years after his conversion, Peter recalled, "My presence often in Class Meetings and Love Feasts induced me to desire to know the joy I saw and heard as the experience of others, so that when about thirteen years of age I sought the Lord at a camp meeting. I was at the mourner's bench Sunday afternoon and night, and Monday morning, afternoon, and night; and on Monday night a new and blessed experience came to me, for which I have still to thank the Lord."⁶

But, he continued, "Because of personal hesitancy to tell the state of my mind to any one I had a very unsatisfactory condition from that time till

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I was about twenty years of age. Part of that time I could scarcely say I was a Christian at all, and sometimes I went forward as a penitent, seeking to know more of the blessed experience that I had lost. This state of indefiniteness disappeared when I was about twenty, while I was a student at college. Throughout much of my boyhood I had the impression that I ought to be a minister of the Gospel, an impression that never left me.”⁷

When Peter returned home in the summer of 1857, the preacher at his Berkeley Springs church granted him a license to exhort.⁸ The exhorter was sort of a lay preacher requiring little education, who was often expected to speak after the preacher. He returned to Dickinson for his sophomore year and took courses in Greek and Latin, as well as a religion course based on Paley’s theology.⁹ Peter took off the following year, most likely working with the preacher of the Berkeley Springs Circuit. In February 1860, he was officially given a license to preach by the circuit’s quarterly conference. When he went back to school that month, he was admitted as a senior, taking examinations to earn credit for the classes he had missed. Before he graduated, he began preaching in a church near the college. He ranked eighth in his 1860 graduating class of 24 students, even after being in college less than half the time usually required to complete the course.¹⁰



Figure 1. College graduation photo dated 1860, age 23. Photograph Archives, Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Methodists and the Slavery Issue

The Methodist Episcopal Church had split in 1845 over the issue of slavery.¹¹ Conferences in the North remained with the original Methodist Episcopal Church, while southern conferences became part of the new Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The Baltimore Conference was in a difficult position; its boundaries extended north into Pennsylvania, and south past Blacksburg in the slave state of Virginia. The preachers were very aware of the historic significance of the Baltimore Conference, where Methodism in America had its roots. Most of them, even those with southern sympathies, decided to stay with the Methodist Episcopal Church,

and the Conference remained intact. That could change, however, if the denomination took a stand against slavery.

In 1860, that is exactly what happened. The quadrennial General Conference, meeting in Buffalo, New York, added a passage to the *Book of Discipline* condemning slavery, and admonishing “all our preachers and people to keep themselves pure from this great evil, and to seek its extirpation by all lawful and Christian means.”¹² The following year, the Baltimore Conference had a memorable Annual Conference in Staunton, Virginia.¹³ Southern delegates were angry over the so-called new chapter on slavery; they pushed a vote through declaring the Baltimore Conference independent from the General Conference, but still part of the Methodist Episcopal Church. It was at this meeting that Peter Whisner was admitted on trial as a member of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.¹⁴

After the Civil War broke out, it was nearly impossible for preachers of the Baltimore Conference to travel between the northern and southern parts of their territory. So each year while the war raged there were two annual Conference sessions, one in the North and one in the South. But all appointments to local churches were still made by the bishop, who presided over the northern meeting. Peter’s first appointment in 1861 was as a junior preacher on the Rockingham Circuit in Virginia, which included Harrisonburg, Bridgewater, Mt. Crawford, Mt. Solon, Naked Creek, Fellowship, Wesley Chapel, and Dayton.¹⁵ Junior preachers were unmarried and traveled among the churches on horseback, with their clothing and books in their saddlebags. Known as circuit riders, they usually stayed in the homes of their parishioners.

In 1864, Peter was ordained as a deacon in the Methodist Episcopal Church; his first appointment as a preacher-in-charge was the church at Lewisburg, West Virginia, where he served for two years.¹⁶ By 1865, the Civil War had ended, and, although slavery was no longer an issue, many Baltimore Conference preachers with Southern sympathies believed that they would feel more at home in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. One of their leaders, Samuel Register, had delivered an impassioned speech inviting all of the preachers in the Conference to attend the first meeting of what would become the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, to be held February 7, 1866, in Alexandria, Virginia.¹⁷ The historic Baltimore Conference had finally split into northern and southern branches. Again preachers had to decide whether to remain with the Methodist Episcopal Church or join Samuel Register and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Although Peter Whisner had come from a Virginia county that did not become part of the Confederacy, had gone to a college in a northern state, and his Berkeley Springs mentor was a northern

sympathizer, all of his appointments had been in the southernmost part of the Conference in Virginia. At age 29, he transferred his allegiance to the newly formed Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Two weeks before the meeting, he married Louisa Ann Arey of Bridgewater, whom he had first met when he had been the junior preacher on the Rockingham Circuit.¹⁸

At the Alexandria Conference, the young Peter Whisner chaired the Committee on Seminaries, showing an early interest in Methodist educational institutions. He presented his committee's report, which began, "There never was a more favorable time than the present, for exerting ourselves in the great cause of education, with such immense advantage to our people, and such lasting good to the Church at large," the war having prevented the proper attention. "Of the Colleges and Schools under Conference control five years ago, we have today but one remaining, the Wesleyan Female Institute at Staunton; and of all the Seminaries looking to us for encouragement and support, and to which annually we sent our ministers as examiners, not one remains." The report continued, "The college building at Blacksburg, known as the 'Olin and Preston Institute' is unoccupied, and falling into decay. Immediate attention is asked to the matter, that all the money and labor expended on this enterprise of our Church may not be entirely swept away. As there is now no college in our territory, it becomes us to immediately provide for the wants of the sons of our people, either by reviving the Institute at Blacksburg, or founding one elsewhere."¹⁹ At the close of the Conference, Rev. Whisner was given his first appointment as a member of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: preacher-in-charge of the church in Lexington, Virginia.²⁰

The next annual Conference was held in Baltimore. Peter and his Committee on Seminaries reported that there were still no colleges under control of the Conference, and they had no progress to report on the Olin and Preston Institute in Blacksburg: the building was still decaying for want of occupancy and "serving no purpose whatever." The Committee could not agree on a plan, but stated, "The citizens of Blacksburg and the community are most anxious that the Conference should purchase the property at once, and make it our Conference college." The committee urged all the delegates to carefully consider whether the Conference should have a college in Blacksburg and "how shall we possess ourselves of this college and put it in successful operation."²¹ It was not even clear which branch of Methodism should be responsible for the school, but the local church now belonged to the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. No action was taken, and Peter Whisner was re-appointed to the church at Lexington.²²

The 1868 Annual Conference did take action. The minutes reported that the following resolutions were passed: first, “That the Baltimore Conference do appoint seven Commissioners to negotiate a loan for the purchase and repair of the building known as Olin and Preston Institute, with authority to mortgage said property for that purpose, and to secure a suitable Principal to put the School in successful operation as soon as possible”; and second, “That this Commission be constituted of the Presiding Elder of the Roanoke District and the preacher-in-charge of Blacksburg Station, and five Laymen, and that they have power to fill vacancies.”²³ The preacher-in-charge appointed to Blacksburg by the Baltimore Conference was the Reverend Peter Whisner.²⁴

Peter Whisner in Blacksburg

With his mandate from the Baltimore Conference, for which he was at least partly responsible, Peter was determined to do all he could to get the school reopened. After several months, in January 1869, Circuit Court Judge Robert M. Hudson issued a charter for a new school, new because it was now to be called the Preston and Olin Institute rather than Olin and Preston. John Lyle Jr., the owner of the property – five acres and one building – then sold it to the trustees.²⁵ The trustees included those appointed by the Conference and others appointed by the judge. Rev. Whisner was named president of the school, so his appointment was to be both preacher of the Blacksburg church and school president. The report of Literary Institutions in the 1869 annual Baltimore Conference journal includes the following, probably contributed by Peter Whisner: “The commissioners appointed by Conference at its last session, in reference to Preston and Olin Institute, at Blacksburg, Va, have been completely successful in compassing the end of their appointment. The school property has been secured to the Church at a cost *far below* expectation; and the school is in successful operation. The unexampled low rates of board and tuition, and its other solid merits, are bringing to this school a very encouraging patronage. It is a great necessity to our Church for all that portion of our Conference, and *fully deserves its confidence* and support.”²⁶

The Conference reappointed Rev. Whisner as preacher of the Blacksburg church and president of the school in 1869 and again in 1870.²⁷ The 1869–1870 Preston and Olin Institute catalog listed him as the school president, a member of the board of trustees, and as professor of English and moral philosophy.²⁸ It was said that Peter Whisner took great interest in the spiritual welfare of the students. A biographical sketch many years later of a preacher in the South Carolina Conference reported that John Shell

was converted in 1870 as a 17-year-old while attending the Preston and Olin Institute. John then joined the Blacksburg church and began working with the Young Men's Prayer Meeting. He later went on to have a long and successful career as a Methodist preacher.²⁹ Not much else is known about Peter Whisner's pastorate there. It is known that shortly before he arrived, the African-American members had left the church.³⁰

Before the war, many of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South churches, including the one in Blacksburg, had significant numbers of African American members. However, they generally played a subservient role, and most activities were segregated within the church. After the war ended, most preferred to form separate churches.³¹ In Blacksburg, the African-American members of the Methodist church formed their own congregation, which became affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal denomination.³² There is no record of Rev. Whisner's attitude toward this division. It is known that later in his life, he was deeply committed to the reunification of the Methodist Episcopal church, which had thousands of African-American members (albeit mostly in segregated churches within nearly 20 separate Conferences), and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which had almost no African American members. That remained a major obstacle to reunification.³³

In 1871, Peter Whisner's appointment to Blacksburg was as the institute president only. Figure 2 is an advertisement for the school that appeared in that year's Conference journal.³⁴ He is referred to as principal rather than president, the terms apparently having been used interchangeably. The school was said to be under the care of the Baltimore Conference, to have an able and full corps of instructors, and to be "unparalleled for cheapness."

Rev. Whisner's appointment was made with the understanding that he could be needed before the end of the year to take over the Rockville (Maryland) Circuit.³⁵ The preacher-in-charge of that circuit, Dabney Ball, was not well, and Peter Whisner was sent to Rockville in August 1871.³⁶ Before leaving Blacksburg, he learned that several Virginia schools were competing for the state's share of funds from the Morrill Land-Grant Act.³⁷ Although many of the other schools were much larger and better known, he and Dr. Harvey Black, another member of the Preston and Olin Board of Trustees, were able to convince members of the two houses of the state legislature to award two-thirds of the funds to the Preston and Olin Institute.³⁸ The amount of the appropriated funds was a huge windfall for the struggling little school, which the act renamed as well as reconfigured; Preston and Olin Institute became Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College.

ADVERTISEMENTS.	73
<h1>PRESTON & OLIN INSTITUTE,</h1> <h2>BLACKSBURG, VA.</h2>	
<hr/> REV. P. H. WHISNER.....PRINCIPAL. <hr/>	
<i>Public Attention is invited to the following facts :</i>	
That this Institute, under the care of the Baltimore Conference, has an able and full corps of Instructors—a thorough course of Study.	
<i>RATES OF TUITION</i> and other expenses, unparalleled for cheapness, together with ample accommodations and facilities for instruction.	
<i>For other information and for Catalogues, address,</i>	
THE PRINCIPAL.	

Figure 2. Advertisement for Preston and Olin Institute in the 1871 journal of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

Whisner had moved to Rockville by the time he signed the deed conveying the school property to the state of Virginia. The state school officially opened October 1, 1872. In 1896, “and Polytechnic Institute” was added to the name, shortened in 1944 to Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Finally, in 1970 “and State University” was added (a.k.a. simply Virginia Tech).³⁹ Today, with a student body of more than 30,000, the university is nationally known for its scholarship, research, and athletics. Would it even exist if not for the efforts of Peter Whisner?

Later Career

Baltimore Conference leaders had begun to recognize this young preacher’s talents and abilities, and the Rockville Circuit to which he had been appointed was an important one. He had been there only a few months when his wife, Louisa Ann, died suddenly at the age of only 27. An obituary in the *St. Louis Christian Advocate* indicated that she was endeared to the three congregations the couple had served: Lexington, Blacksburg, and Rockville. She was buried near her father at St. Michael’s Reformed Church Cemetery south of Bridgewater.⁴⁰ Two years later, Rev. Whisner

married Virginia Louisa Childs, who was living with her family near Norbeck in Montgomery County, Maryland. She was the daughter of one of his prominent parishioners in the Emory Methodist Episcopal Church, South, a point on the Rockville Circuit.⁴¹ There were no children from either marriage.

By the time he left the Rockville Circuit, its membership had increased by more than 50 percent to 431, making it the fifth largest circuit or church among 134 in the Baltimore Conference.⁴² His years on the Rockville Circuit were followed by increasingly responsible positions. Rev. Whisner's next appointment, which came in 1875, was presiding elder of the Moorefield District.⁴³ The presiding elder (now called district superintendent) supervised the churches in the district, participated in events such as camp meetings, and advised the bishop. In 1878, he was appointed preacher-in-charge of Central Church in Baltimore, and that year, he was elected by the Baltimore Conference members to be one of six clergy representatives to the upcoming General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.⁴⁴ The following year, he was elected trustee of Randolph-Macon College, a Methodist school in Ashland, Virginia. He then served three successive four-year terms as presiding elder, first in the Winchester District (1882–1886). While Rev. Whisner was serving in Winchester, Randolph-Macon College awarded him the Doctorate of Divinity, and he was elected delegate to his second General Conference in 1886.⁴⁵ After Winchester, he led the Baltimore District (1886–1890) and the Roanoke District (1890–1894). As presiding elder of the Roanoke District, he supervised the church in Blacksburg that he had served as preacher-in-charge 20 years earlier. In 1891, Dr. Whisner was a member of the executive committee that organized an Ecumenical Conference in Washington, D.C.⁴⁶ One of the purposes of this conference was to discuss the possibility of the reunification of various branches of Methodism.



Figure 3. Photo ca. 1898, age 60. From H. H. Sherman, *Souvenir History of Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 1913.

His final pastorate was for one year in Buena Vista, Virginia, followed by his last Baltimore Conference position, three years (1895–1898) as presiding elder of the Rockingham District.⁴⁷ That made a total of 18 years as presiding elder, a near record for the Conference.⁴⁸ Dr. Whisner was a delegate to the 1898 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and at that conference, he was elected corresponding secretary of the Board of Church Extension.⁴⁹ The purpose of this board, headquartered in Louisville, Kentucky, was to aid both new and existing churches in the purchase of church lots and the erection or securing of church buildings and parsonages. Eight years earlier, Peter Whisner had made a large contribution to the board (\$7,000, the equivalent of \$184,000 in 2014 dollars), but with characteristic modesty wanted it to remain anonymous.⁵⁰ For years, the fund was known simply as the “W. Loan Fund,” and it was said that few even of the Board members knew the identity of the donor.⁵¹ The Southern Methodist journal, *The Independent*, described the choice of Dr. Whisner as “a fit selection in every sense.”⁵² He resigned as Randolph-Macon trustee, left his last position within the Baltimore Conference, and moved with his wife, Virginia, to Louisville. She died there in April 1901, after suffering from cancer for two years. Virginia Whisner was buried beside her niece in the Forest Oak Cemetery in Gaithersburg, Maryland. The Forest Oak church was another point on the Rockville Circuit, which Peter Whisner had served from 1871 to 1875. The *Nashville Christian Advocate* published a tribute he had written in her honor, in which he said: “No man ever had a wife who suited him any better than mine suited me.”⁵³

In September 1901, not long after Virginia’s death, Dr. Whisner went to London to represent his denomination at another Ecumenical Conference. The following year, he was voted to be a delegate to his fifth General Conference, which re-elected him to another term as corresponding secretary of the Board of Church Extension.⁵⁴ At the General Conference, he served as chairman of the Committee on Federation, and moved the adoption of his committee’s report – expressing fraternal regard for the Methodist Episcopal Church, and resolving that the bishops of the northern and southern churches work together on the production of a new hymnal (the joint hymnal was completed in 1905).⁵⁵ Dr. Whisner did not live to see reunification; it would not be until 1939, nearly a century after the Methodist Church had split over the issue of slavery, that the northern and southern branches were finally reunited.⁵⁶

In his position on the Board of Church Extension, Peter Whisner traveled extensively throughout the southern and Atlantic states, updating the various Conferences on the work of the board and appealing for funds.

The *Washington Evening Star* gave this account of his report to the 1904 annual meeting of the Baltimore Conference: "Rev. Dr. Peter H. Whisner of the general church extension board addressed the conference, saying that there had been a gratifying increase in the money raised for church extension. . . . Dr. Whisner urged that assistance be provided for churches at various points, notably at Blacksburg, where many of the students of the rapidly growing Virginia Polytechnic Institute are Methodist young men."⁵⁷ After 33 years, he was still concerned about the spiritual welfare of the students at his former school.

Death and Remembrances

Peter Whisner never retired, but continued to work as Board of Extension secretary until his death on April 21, 1906, at age 69. The *Nashville Christian Advocate* reported that he had been suffering from a "complication of disorders," and his death was not altogether unexpected.⁵⁸ He died at the University of Maryland Hospital in Baltimore, where he had traveled two weeks earlier for treatment. Notices of his death reflected the esteem with which he was held: "He was one of the most beloved members of his church," according to one, and "He ranked among the ablest ministers of the Southern Methodist Connection," said another.⁵⁹

Professor Collins Denny's memorial tribute to Dr. Whisner provided some insight into his personality and character. Here are some excerpts:

Brother Whisner was in a high degree a sincere man. Free from conscious pretense, his character was marked with candor. When it was proper for him to announce his opinion or position, he announced it without the slightest concealment. He dug no tunnels. When he met you, either in opposition or in support, he met you in the open, like the true man he was. He never took part in an ambush. What he told you as to fact was as nearly true as the words at his command could express it. What he promised he would do was done up to the limit of his power.

His life was very simple, almost monotonously plain. He eschewed all superfluities, and was almost ascetic in the regulation of his own life, yet he was wholly free from the spirit of asceticism and perfectly tolerant in his judgment of brethren whose lives were not after the pattern he chose for himself. He seemed to judge no man. Whoever heard him speak evil of any man? He could and did speak the truth, and openly when duty demanded it; but no one offended him by differing from him in judgment. . . . Everyone of us can well afford to cultivate this strictness toward ourselves, this tolerance towards others.

He was a grave man. Seriousness of spirit was characteristic of him. He was wholly free from levity and foolishness. Frivolity froze in his presence. Wesley's charge to his preachers to do everything as in the immediate presence of God more than met the approval of Bro. Whisner; it was his constant practice. Though he was serious he was not morose. No one who knew the man could think of him in connection with anything coarse or vulgar. Whatever was innocent in wit and humor he could heartily enjoy, and his bright smile and quiet laugh showed his appreciation.

How tender he was! His courage had tenderness for a bride, and he was chivalrous and true to that bride. Children in homes in which he was a frequent guest drew near to this grave man, climbed with confidence into his lap, were not repelled by his dignity. In him those who suffered found sympathy; those who were needy, generous help. He was not a weak man in any sense of the word; on the contrary, he was a very strong man, one of the strongest in our Conference. Because he was a strong man, and when duty called could with emphasis, directness, and power meet troublesome and painful situations; those who saw him at only such times, or knew little of him except what could be discovered in these circumstances, might suppose him lacking in tenderness. The supposition would be erroneous. Strength and tenderness can combine in character, often do combine. They combined in him.

Funeral services were conducted in the new Grace Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Gaithersburg, Maryland, by his close friend and associate, Dr. Beverly W. Bond, other presiding elders of the Baltimore Conference, and Thomas J. Lambert, the local preacher.⁶⁰ He is buried next to his wife Virginia. The grave marker, which was replaced some time after his death, reads "Rev. Peter Harrison Whisner of the Baltimore Conference, M. E. Church, South." Three years later, the church in Gaithersburg lost a popular young preacher. In a memorial tribute, that young preacher's widow wrote: "His body rests in Forest Oak Cemetery beside the sainted Dr. P. H. Whisner and his wife."⁶¹

The church in Blacksburg did erect a new and larger building that was able to accommodate the growing number of college students. It was completed in 1907, the year after Peter Whisner's death, and was named the Whisner Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in honor of "this outstanding church leader and educator."⁶² Today the Blacksburg congregation has an even larger church, but the 1907 structure, now called the Whisner Building, is still in use as a fellowship hall.



Figure 4. Whisner Memorial Methodist Church, completed 1907, and named for Rev. Peter Whisner. Original photograph in Special Collections, University Libraries, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

Reflections

The Baltimore Conference Memoir includes some thoughts Dr. Whisner had written shortly after his wife Virginia died in 1901.⁶³ These lines may have come from a letter to Dr. Denny, but they are not among Denny's papers at the University of Virginia library.

I record my thanks to the Father of spirits for all His mercies to me and blessings bestowed upon me from my infancy to this hour. He has not forsaken me in any of my sorrows. I am alone. I believe God loves me, and means me no harm in these dispensations. He has made most of my life to be largely free from sorrow.

I thank Him for my parents, and especially for such a mother as He gave me, and allowed to live for me all through my childhood and youth. I thank him for my conversion, and for sparing me through all the years in which I gave him only a very defective service. I thank Him for not cutting me off in any of my sins. I thank Him for any faithfulness that I have been able to show in any of those years. I propose to trust in and love and serve my Savior while ever he shall keep me in the world.

I thank God for the Methodist Church, for its reasonable doctrines, its practical polity, and for the many faithful true men and women I have been associated with in the Church through all these years.

I accept every word of the Bible as true, and I propose by the help of divine grace to trust in my Lord and live in His service till He shall call me to join all the many loved ones gone before me in the presence of the ever blessed Lord.

Professor Denny concluded his memorial tribute,

His brethren of the Baltimore Conference join our brother in this thanksgiving, and add their thanks to God for giving us for long years this devoted servant of His Lord, this unsullied character, this faithful friend. He loved us and trusted us, and in turn was loved and trusted by us. Gratefully do we record that he was true to every trust committed to him, that in every circle he entered his action and manner were in harmony with his office as a minister of the gospel and his profession as a follower of our Lord Jesus Christ. We shall miss him in our annual gatherings, and the world will be forever poorer to those who were privileged to be his close friends.

Acknowledgments

The author would especially like to thank Clara B. Cox, former Director of University Publications, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, who first suggested this article. She furnished information on the early history of the university and offered many valuable insights and ideas. The anonymous reviewers offered helpful suggestions, as did Professor Peter Wallenstein after a particularly thorough reading of final manuscript. Any mistakes that remain are the responsibility of the author. Thanks also to Deborah Ege, Reference Associate, Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College, for locating Peter Whisner's college records. In addition, appreciation is expressed to the following archivists and librarians who contributed reference materials: the Reverend Von Unruh, Archivist, Tennessee Conference of the United Methodist Church; Tiffany W. Cole, Reference Coordinator, Albert & Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia; Mary Virginia Currie, Special Collections and Archives, McGraw-Page Library, Randolph-Macon College; and Jack Bales, Reference and Humanities Librarian, Simpson Library, University of Mary Washington.

Endnotes

1. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was one of the antecedents of today's United Methodist Church. The denomination in America dates to a 1784 organizing conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore. The term "episcopal" was used to indicate that bishops directed the Conferences into which the territory was divided.
2. The only known account of the life of Peter Whisner is the brief memoir in the Baltimore Conference journal published the year after his death: Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, "Rev. Peter Harrison Whisner, D. D.," *Minutes of the 123rd Annual Session, Baltimore Annual Conference* (Baltimore: Committee on Publications, Baltimore Annual Conference, 1907), 28, 77–81. Several of the details in this report as well as quotations from the author about Dr. Whisner and from the subject himself are taken from this memoir. At that time, memoirs were published anonymously, but it is now known that Whisner's was written by Dr. Collins Denny, a professor at Vanderbilt University and later bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Among Dr. Denny's papers deposited at the University of Virginia are several letters from Peter Whisner along with a draft of the Conference journal memoir (Collins Denny papers, Accession #2672-k, -l, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va., <http://ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaxtf/view?docId=uva-sc/viu03492.xml>). The memorial tribute was read at the Conference session by the Reverend Eldridge V. Regester. Hereafter cited as Memoir.
3. Memoir, 77.
4. Peter Harrison Whisner, information card, Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pa.
5. The information in Collins Denny's Memoir about the short time Peter Whisner spent in college is consistent with the Dickinson College records.
6. In the early Methodist church, the class was the basic unit of membership. The class meeting grew out of the English Methodist practice of dividing the local churches into groups with a leader to encourage financial support for the church. A love feast, or agape meal, is defined on the United Methodist Church's website: "A simple, ritual meal in the context of which hymns are sung, Scripture is read, and testimonies and stories of faith are shared. John Wesley instituted this after the Moravian pattern. All such meals derive from Jewish and early church meals such as are referred to by Paul, and they symbolize the unity of fellowship in the love of Christ which the saints at rest will share. Signs of the agape are the loving cup and bread." <http://archives.umc.org/interior.asp?ptid=1&mid=3096>.
7. Memoir, 80–81.
8. Ibid., 77.
9. Deborah Ege, personal communication; catalogs and material related to Peter H. Whisner's college studies, Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pa. The class Peter took was based on the well-known work by William Paley, *Natural Theology: or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity; Collected from the Appearances of Nature* (Philadelphia: H. Maxwell, 1802).
10. Memoir, 77.
11. Donald G. Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780–1845* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), and Homer L. Calkin, "The Slavery Struggle, 1780–1865," in *Those Incredible Methodists: A History of the Baltimore Conference of the United Methodist Church*, ed. Gordon Pratt Baker (Baltimore: Baltimore Conference Commission of Archives and History, 1972), 192–228.
12. The *Book of Discipline* contains the basic laws and doctrine of the Methodist Church. It is revised every four years after the quadrennial General Conference. The most recent edition (2012) is available online from Cokesbury, the United Methodist bookstore, <http://www.cokesbury.com/forms/DynamicContent.aspx?id=87&pageid=920>. For a contemporary account of the debate at the 1860 General Conference in Buffalo, see: *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/1860/06/02/news/religious-world-methodist-general-conference-slavery-question-decided-new.html>.

13. The capitalized term *Conference* may be confusing here, because it refers to both the Baltimore Conference, the territory into which the denomination is divided, as well as to the Annual Conference, the meeting at which business is conducted and appointments made.
14. Memoir, 77.
15. Baltimore Conference appointments, United Methodist Historical Society of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, card file at the Lovely Lane Museum, Baltimore, Md.
16. Ibid.
17. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, January 19, 1866, 1.
18. Memoir, 78.
19. Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, "Seminaries," *Annual Register of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Baltimore: James Lucas & Son, 1866), 27. The Conference journals cited in this article are available at the McGraw-Page Library, Special Collections and Archives, Randolph-Macon College, Ashland, Virginia, and at the Lovely Lane Museum, United Methodist Historical Society of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, Baltimore, Maryland.
20. Memoir, 78.
21. Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, "Seminaries," *Annual Minutes of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Baltimore: Selby and Dulany, 1867), 22.
22. Memoir, 78.
23. Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, "Report on Literary Institutions," *Annual Minutes of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Baltimore: King Brothers, 1868), 22.
24. Memoir, 78.
25. Duncan Lyle Kinnear, *The First 100 Years: A History of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University* (Blacksburg, Va.: Virginia Polytechnic Institute Foundation, Inc., 1972), 3.
26. Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, "Report on Literary Institutions," Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (Baltimore: J. Wesley Smith and Brothers, 1869), 31.
27. Baltimore Conference appointments.
28. Catalogue, Preston and Olin Institute, Session 1869 and 70, Blacksburg, Montgomery County, Va. (Baltimore: J. Wesley Smith and Brothers, 1870), 4–5. Held in Special Collections, University Libraries, Virginia Polytechnic and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.
29. Watson B. Duncan, Twentieth Century Sketches of the South Carolina Conference, M. E. Church, South (Columbia, S.C.: The State Co., 1914), 366.
30. The 1867 statistical report in the Baltimore-Washington Conference journal reported that the Blacksburg Methodist Episcopal Church, South, had 109 white and 89 African-American members. The next year's data, compiled before Peter Whisner was assigned to Blacksburg, showed 136 members, all white. The assertion that "The pastor who supervised this final exit of African-Americans from the white congregation was the Rev. Peter H. Whisner" is incorrect. Christopher Ross Donald, "Growth and Independence of Methodist Congregations in Blacksburg, Virginia," *Smithfield Review* 10 (2006), 66.
31. It has been argued that black initiative rather than white urging was decisive in the emergence of a pattern of racial separation in the southern churches; see, for example, Katherine L. Dvorak, *An African-American Exodus: The Segregation of the Southern Churches* (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1991).
32. The African Methodist Episcopal church was a separate denomination that had been started in the late 18th century by freed African Americans in the North and that had sent missionaries to start churches in the South.
33. Nolan B. Harmon, "Structural and Administrative Changes, 2. The Methodist Episcopal Church and Separate Negro Annual Conferences," in *The History of Methodism in Three Volumes*, ed. Emory Stevens Bucke (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), III: 11–17; Peter C. Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race, 1930–1975* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 3–4; and

- Morris L. Davis, *The Methodist Unification: Christianity and the Politics of Race in the Jim Crow Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).
34. Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Minutes of the Eighty-Seventh Session of the Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Baltimore: King Brothers, 1871), 73.
 35. Memoir, 78.
 36. Dabney Ball was a former Confederate army chaplain on the staff of J. E. B. Stuart. He was presiding elder of the Roanoke District that included the Blacksburg church when Peter Whisner was appointed there. Rev. Ball's next appointment was the Rockville Circuit, and while there, his already poor health became even worse. When he was transferred to a Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in San Francisco, California, in hope that his health would improve, Peter Whisner was called to take over the Rockville Circuit.
 37. Kinnear, *The First 100 Years*, 14.
 38. Harry Downing Temple, *The Bugle's Echo: A Chronology of Cadet Life at the Military College at Blacksburg, Virginia, The Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and The Virginia Polytechnic Institute. vol. 1 (1872-1900)* (Blacksburg, Va.: Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets Alumni, Inc., 1996), 9. The state legislature awarded two-thirds of the Land-Grant funds to Preston and Olin Institute and one-third to the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, a school established four years earlier for African Americans. In 1920, the land-grant program for Blacks was moved from Hampton Institute to Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute in Petersburg (today, Virginia State University). See Kinnear, *The First 100 Years*, 41.
 39. *A School of Many Names*. From Virginia Tech's website, http://www.unirel.vt.edu/history/historical_digest/index.html.
 40. Find A Grave website, Louisa Ann Whisner tombstone, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=74989027>, with notices copied from the *Lexington Gazette* and *St. Louis Christian Advocate*. The tombstone reads "Louisiana, beloved wife of Rev. P. H. Whisner."
 41. Find A Grave website, Nathan Childs tombstone (father of Virginia); photo, and comments by Rockville Circuit preacher Dabney Ball (primary source was the *St. Louis Christian Advocate* obituaries), <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=55135014>.
 42. Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, "Statistical Reports," *Minutes of the Ninety-First Session of the Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Baltimore: King Brothers, 1875), 74.
 43. Memoir, 78.
 44. Baker, *Those Incredible Methodists*, 506. Like the (northern) Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, had a General Conference every four years to determine policy and direction for the denomination. It was quite an honor to be elected one of the delegates from the Baltimore Conference to the General Conference. Peter Whisner represented the Baltimore Conference at five General Conferences.
 45. Temple (*The Bugle's Echo*, p. 13) referred to the Preston and Olin principal as Dr. Whisner, but it was not until 1883, 12 years after he left Blacksburg, that Randolph-Macon College awarded him the honorary Doctorate of Divinity. He never earned an advanced academic degree.
 46. Memoir, 78.
 47. Ibid.
 48. Gordon Pratt Baker, "Fragmentation," in Baker, *Those Incredible Methodists*, 271.
 49. E. E. Hoss, "Southern Methodist General Conference, Third Week," in Leonard Baker et al., *The Independent* 50 (May 26, 1898): 16 (688). Available online as an eBook, or as a 2012 reprint from Amazon.com.
 50. Church Extension Loan Funds (Board of Church Extension of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1916), 29, <https://archive.org/stream/27661702.emory.edu/27661702#page/n0/mode/2up>. Conversion from 1891 to 2014 dollars from The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, "Consumer Price Index (Estimate) 1800- ", <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/community/teaching-aids/cpi-calculator-information/consumer-price-index-1800>.

51. Memoir, 79; Dr. Denny wrote that Peter Whisner was economical and saved all he could, and gave all he had.
52. Hoss, "Southern Methodist General Conference," 16 (688).
53. P. H. Whisner, "Virginia Louisa Whisner," *Nashville Christian Advocate* 62 (June 27, 1901), 13.
54. Memoir, 78.
55. Carl Fowler Price, *The Music and Hymnody of the Methodist Hymnal* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1911).
56. Frederick E. Masur, "The Story of Unification, 1874–1939," in Bucke, *The History of American Methodism in Three Volumes*, III, 407–478.
57. *Washington Evening Star*, "Routine Proceedings," April 5, 1904, 12, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1904-04-05/ed-1/seq-12/>.
58. *The Christian Advocate* 81 (May 3, 1906): 645. "Personal" column includes a notice of the death of Peter Whisner, citing the *Nashville Christian Advocate*. Available as a Google eBook, <http://books.google.com/books?id=vi4xAQAAMAAJ>.
59. *Paducah Sun*, Paducah, Kentucky, April 24, 1906, p. 8, and *Shenandoah Herald*, Woodstock, Virginia, April 27, 1906, p. 3.
60. *Washington Evening Star*, "Gaithersburg News, Funeral of Rev. Dr. P. H. Whisner," April 25, 1906, 18, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1906-04-25/ed-1/seq-18/>. Grace Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was a successor to the Forest Oak Church, which had been outgrown by its congregation.
61. Mary Schey Burruss, *Harry William Burruss: A Memorial Tribute* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1909), 121.
62. Clarence Ambrose Turner, *Methodism in Blacksburg, 1798–1948: The Sesquicentennial, July 11–15, 1948* (Blacksburg, Va.: Whisner Memorial Methodist Church, 1948).
63. Memoir, 81.

**Olin and Preston Institute
and Preston and Olin Institute:
The Early Years of Virginia Polytechnic Institute
and State University**

Part I

Clara B. Cox

Introduction

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, popularly known as Virginia Tech, traces its official founding to 1872, when it opened its doors as Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College (VAMC).¹ That year, the Virginia General Assembly used provisions of the federal “Act Donating Public Lands to the Several States and Territories Which May Provide Colleges for the Benefit of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts” (popularly known as the Morrill Act or the Land-Grant College Act of 1862)² to appropriate land-grant scrip to the Preston and Olin Institute, a school for boys in Blacksburg, to become Virginia’s white land-grant institution.³

The state legislation required that Preston and Olin relinquish its name to become the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College. It also directed that the real estate belonging to Preston and Olin, which consisted of a three-story brick building and about five acres of land, be transferred to VAMC.⁴ Preston and Olin’s predecessor school, the Olin and Preston Institute, had been responsible for constructing the building and purchasing the land.⁵ The quest to secure the land-grant money that created VAMC had been led by officials of the Preston and Olin Institute.

Although Virginia Tech counts 1872 as the official year it started, an argument can be made that the university is actually a continuation of both the Preston and Olin Institute and the Olin and Preston Institute. This article looks at the first two decades of Virginia Tech history, which the university acknowledges as leading up to its founding but does not claim as part of its official existence.⁶ Part I of the article covers the university’s earliest years as the Olin and Preston Institute and includes short biographies of the men for whom that institute was named and its first principal. Part II, planned for

a later issue of the *Smithfield Review*, will relate the history of the Preston and Olin Institute and examine its conversion into the college known today as Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Secondary Schools Open in Blacksburg

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Virginia had begun to make advancements in the realm of education for its youths, aided by the establishment in 1810 of the Literary Fund, which provided money for public education throughout the commonwealth. Statewide, colleges were growing in number; academies were spreading; and schools for girls had already become well established, spurred by the changing roles of women in society, economics, and politics. Religious denominations contributed to the spread of educational opportunities, building seminaries and colleges.⁷ “Good academies were everywhere,” reported Alfred James Morrison, who examined the beginnings of public education in Virginia in a 1917 study.⁸

In Montgomery County, Virginia, education during much of the nineteenth century consisted primarily of (1) tutorial and private schools, which served the wealthier classes; (2) the state-supported primary system of schools, which mainly served the poor; (3) classes taught by itinerant teachers, who traded lessons for board and a small fee; and (4) the quasi-public, old field schools that operated on tuition fees and donations. A new mode of education was introduced in the county with the opening of the Blacksburg Female Academy, incorporated by legislative act on 13 March 1840, making it the county’s first recognized academy.⁹ The school’s trustees purchased land the following year¹⁰ and constructed more than one building on the site.¹¹

This educational institution most likely played a role in the establishment a decade later of a school in Blacksburg for boys. Certainly it would have focused attention on the lack of similar educational opportunities for male youths in the area, and around 1850,¹² several Methodist leaders in Blacksburg, some—or most—of whom were trustees of the female academy,¹³ joined the widespread fervor to establish a seminary of learning “wherein youth might be instructed within a Christian atmosphere.”¹⁴ According to the 1926 historical notes of Ellen Tyler McDonald, building the school “was then considered a very important event” in Blacksburg, and although it was a Methodist school, citizens of the town contributed to the effort.¹⁵

G. F. Poteet, who examined secondary education in Montgomery County, reported that these education-oriented Methodist leaders bought land from Jacob and Mary Keister on 5 March 1850,¹⁶ which would have gotten the boys’ school off to a start similar to that of the female academy. According to the deed filed in the Montgomery County Courthouse in

Christiansburg, Virginia, however, the land transaction actually was recorded ten years later on 5 March 1860, five years after the trustees had constructed a school building (see below). This purchase of land, made as much as a decade into the life of the institute, calls into question the original location of the school.¹⁷ Based on court records in Montgomery County, the 1860 land purchase was not the first property acquired by the trustees, although no records of additional deed transfers seem available. It is possible that a deal was made with the Keisters to purchase their land but was not recorded until much later, although records indicate that the Keister plot abutted another lot previously acquired by the trustees.¹⁸

Regardless of its original site, the new school was christened the Olin and Preston Institute. Its founders selected the name “Olin” to honor the popular Methodist preacher and educational leader Stephen Olin, who had been the first president of Randolph Macon College, another school in Virginia that was founded by the Methodist Church, this one two decades earlier. Since the citizens of Blacksburg had contributed to the local educational project, they were allowed to determine part of the new school’s name. They selected the name “Preston” to honor William Ballard Preston, a native son and respected community leader who was a well-known politician, businessman, and lawyer.¹⁹

Biographical Sketches of Olin and Preston

Little has appeared locally about Stephen Olin, one of the two men for whom the new school was named, other than to identify him as a “beloved Methodist minister”²⁰ and “the first president of Randolph Macon College.”²¹ Consequently, a short biography of this man follows, as does a brief look at the life of William Ballard Preston, about whom more has been published locally, especially in the *Smithfield Review*.

Stephen Olin

A sickly man with weak lungs most of his life, yet a charismatic speaker and prolific writer, Stephen Olin was born in 1797 in Leicester, Vermont, to Lois Richardson Olin and Henry Olin, at various times a congressman, a lieutenant governor of Vermont, and a judge. Stephen was the fifth of nine children and the couple’s first son to survive infancy.²²

Educated at Vermont’s Middlebury College, Stephen Olin taught²³ at a new seminary in Abbeville District, South Carolina, planning to commence legal studies, a goal for him held by his father. However, he experienced a religious conversion, determined to become a Methodist preacher, and commenced preaching in 1823 at different churches in the area where he

lived. Twenty-six-year-old Olin relinquished his teaching job and received a station in Charleston, South Carolina, as a traveling minister,²⁴ becoming known almost immediately, according to biographers James Grant Wilson and John Fiske, “as one of the most powerful and fervent preachers in the denomination.”²⁵ In 1826, he was named a professor of belles-lettres at Franklin College (today’s University of Georgia) in Athens, Georgia, and at the beginning of 1827, he started his new duties.²⁶ He continued to preach, however, writing to a friend after two months in Athens: “I am now in much better health than I have been since I first lost my health in 1824. I have not missed one duty; I have preached every Sabbath but one, and on one occasion twice upon the same day, without any permanent injury.”²⁷

Olin married Mary Ann Bostick, a native of Georgia, in 1827 when he was 30 years old and his bride was probably around 35.²⁸ The following year, he was ordained an elder in the Methodist Episcopal Church. He maintained his connection with Franklin College for seven years, according to the Rev. Dr. Wightman, “in bad health most of the time; nevertheless, he was a brilliant professor, and has left the impress of his mode of instruction on the institution to this day.”²⁹ Because of his poor health, Olin moved back to Vermont, and he and his wife lived in a room at the rear of his father’s house. During the fourteen months they spent there, his poor health rendered him unable to preach, write, read, or study.³⁰

In late 1832, the same year in which he received an honorary Doctor of Divinity from Middlebury College, the trustees of Randolph Macon College, a new Methodist institution located in Boydton, Virginia,³¹ elected Olin,

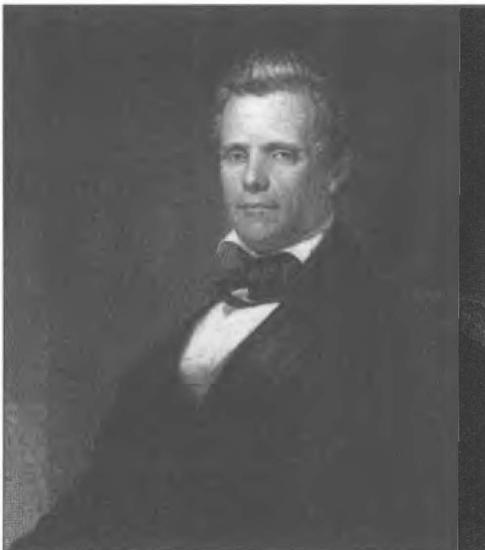


Figure 1. Stephen Olin, for whom Olin and Preston Institute was named, in part, was a minister, the first president of Randolph Macon College, and a president of Wesleyan University. This engraving of him by J. F. E. Prudhomme appeared in the *Randolph Macon Monthly*, April 1882. Courtesy of Mary Virginia Currie, Randolph Macon College.

then 35 years old, to become the school's first president, but he declined the appointment because of his delicate health. However, the trustees appealed to him to withdraw his resignation and accept the position, and with the added urging of his friends, he finally consented, with the caveat that he could spend several months annually in Vermont during the hotter part of the year if necessary for his health. He resigned his professorship at Franklin College, effective Christmas 1833, and delivered his inaugural address at Randolph Macon three months later. That fall, he began writing a series of articles for the *Christian Advocate and Journal*. The following year, both the University of Alabama and Wesleyan University conferred honorary Doctor of Divinity degrees upon him.³²

In 1836, with his health remaining poor after his return to the college from his customary stay in Vermont, he decided to travel abroad, where he anticipated receiving the best medical advice. He left Randolph Macon—his last commencement there was in June 1836—and he and his wife embarked on their long journey in February 1837. His wife died in 1839, during the trip, and was interred in an English cemetery near Naples, Italy.³³ While still abroad, Olin was elected the second president of Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, but he postponed the appointment while he attempted to recover his health, and another man filled the position until he could accept it.

According to William North Rice, writing about Wesleyan University in 1876, when Olin finally arrived at the school in 1842—by then he was the third president—his

fame as a pulpit orator, and his previous success in similar institutions, caused him to be greeted with an enthusiastic welcome. His health was so feeble as never to allow him to devote himself as he wished to the work of the institution. He was, however, successful in improving the financial condition of the university, and especially in extending its reputation, and his noble and commanding character was itself an inspiration to all the students under his charge.³⁴

In addition to putting the university back on track financially, Olin consolidated the curriculum and won the respect of the students. During his presidency, he continued to preach and debate, gaining support for the university, both monetary and otherwise.³⁵

Olin had owned slaves while living in the South, but during his presidency at Wesleyan, he was the 1844 delegate from the slavery-opposing New York Conference to the Methodist Episcopal General Conference. In

James M. Buckley's history of Methodism, the author noted that Olin gave the only speech at the conference that exhibited "a full comprehension and just estimate of all sides of the subject."³⁶ Working to avoid a schism in the church, Olin served on a committee trying to find "a basis of agreement for the pro-slavery and anti-slavery groups." Following the conference, he led a movement to secure fraternal relations between the two factions.³⁷

In 1843, at the age of 46, Olin married again, this time to 29-year-old Julia Matilda Lynch of New York. The couple had two sons, Stephen Henry and Lynch. Lynch died on 29 July 1851 at the age of two. Always in delicate health, Olin was profoundly affected by his child's death, which precipitated his own fatal illness and death on 16 August 1851, less than a month later, at the age of 54.³⁸

Olin published several works during his lifetime, and after his death, his widow used his letters as the basis of a two-volume autobiography, *The Life and Letters of Stephen Olin*.³⁹ His trip abroad provided material for his *Travels in Egypt, Arabia, Petra, and the Holy Land*, published in 1843.⁴⁰ Two of his baccalaureate sermons at Middletown were published in 1846 and 1851, soon after each was delivered, and, after his death, in a single volume entitled *Youthful Piety* (1853).⁴¹ Other posthumous publications included *Greece and the Golden Horn*, edited by his widow,⁴² and *College Life, Its Theory and Practice*.⁴³ These publications undoubtedly contributed to Olin's widespread fame, even after his death.

William Ballard Preston

The man honored with the second part of the institute's name, William Ballard Preston, was born at Smithfield Plantation in Montgomery County, Virginia, in 1805 to James Patton Preston and Ann Taylor Preston. He was the second child born to the couple and the first of three sons. Four daughters of James and Ann Preston died young, including their first-born child, who lived only a few months; a fifth daughter survived long enough to marry but died in childbirth.⁴⁴

William Ballard Preston, known as "Ballard," studied at Hampden-Sydney College in Prince Edward County, Virginia, from 1821 to 1824 and began studying law at the University of Virginia the following year. He was admitted to the bar in 1826 at the age of 21 and successfully practiced law in the commonwealth. The son of a three-term governor of Virginia, he soon entered politics and served as a delegate and then as a senator in the Virginia General Assembly before his election as a Whig to Congress, where he served a two-year term beginning in 1847. President Zachary Taylor, also a Whig, named him secretary of the navy, and from 8 March 1849 to 22 July 1850,

Preston was a member of the president's cabinet. Upon Taylor's death in 1850, the 45-year-old Ballard Preston withdrew from politics for several years.⁴⁵

The 34-year-old Preston married Lucinda Staples Redd, who was 20, in 1839, and the couple had six children. After his father died in 1843, Ballard and his family moved into the original Smithfield manor, which he shared with his mother, and he farmed the section of the plantation that he had inherited. Although he had spoken against slavery during his days in the Virginia legislature, he became a large slaveholder.⁴⁶ According to Preston biographer William Harris Gaines Jr., in addition to engaging in politics and farming, Ballard again practiced law, quickly winning "a statewide reputation as a defense attorney."⁴⁷

According to Laura Jones Wedin, who has completed part one of a three-part article on Smithfield and the Prestons for the *Smithfield Review*,⁴⁸ Ballard Preston "understood the importance of education and its link to prosperity in the area" and was a trustee of the Montgomery Female Academy in Christiansburg, Virginia,⁴⁹ a school for girls that opened in 1852 and was supported by the Montgomery Presbytery.⁵⁰ After the founding of the Olin and Preston Institute, he, along with his brother Robert T. Preston, became a trustee of that school as well.⁵¹ By 1854, the two men's brother, James F. Preston, had joined them on the board at Olin and Preston.⁵² Since Ballard's name appears first in several lists of trustees of Olin and Preston, he most likely was president of the board.⁵³ Thus, the Preston brothers, and particularly Ballard, likely played crucial roles in the operation of Olin and Preston Institute.

In 1858 and 1859, Ballard Preston visited France as a commissioner representing a project to establish a direct line of commercial steamers between Norfolk, Virginia, and Le Havre, France. The specter of war as the United States struggled with issues of slavery and states' rights, however, doomed the project.⁵⁴

As war loomed, Preston was elected a delegate to the Virginia convention considering secession, which he initially opposed. The convention appointed a delegation, which included Preston, to meet with President Abraham Lincoln to discuss his policy regarding the South. With Lincoln resolved to hold the forts in the South, the delegation returned to Richmond. There, Preston submitted an ordinance of secession—the Preston Resolution—and the convention reversed its decision, voting in favor of secession after Confederate troops fired on Fort Sumter in South Carolina and President Lincoln called for volunteers to put down the rebellion. Ballard Preston was elected a senator from Virginia to serve in the first Confederate Congress, which met on 22 February 1862. He died at Smithfield nine months later—on 16 November 1862—at the age of 57.⁵⁵

The First Principal of Olin and Preston Institute

In addition to naming the Blacksburg school for two nationally prominent men, the founders of Olin and Preston Institute tapped William Ryland White, who later became a well-known educator and pioneering educational leader in West Virginia, as the first principal, or president,⁵⁶ of the institute.⁵⁷ Likely, the actual appointment of White, who had previously been a Methodist minister, came from the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The man named to guide the new academy was born in Georgetown, D.C., in 1820⁵⁸ and, according to his friend, Thomas C. Miller,

enjoyed exceptional advantages for that day. His father was an educated man who had been in some of the best schools of Ireland, and had come to this country in his early manhood to enjoy the freedom of the then young republic. Young William's early training was with reference to the law as a profession, but afterwards he chose the ministry and began his preparation for this work at Dickinson College.⁵⁹

White graduated from Dickinson, a school in Pennsylvania, in 1841 and entered the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844 at the age of 24, becoming "one of the best known and most distinguished men in the Methodist ministry" in what later became West Virginia.⁶⁰ He earned that reputation while serving as the pastor of various churches in the Baltimore Conference from 1844 until 1852.⁶¹

According to Miller, when White's voice began failing him, he "relinquished ministerial work for awhile, and naturally turned to the education field."⁶² At the age of 32, he moved to Blacksburg, Virginia, to serve as the principal of Olin and Preston Institute, beginning in 1852 and remaining until 1855, in what apparently was his first job in education. According to Frankie Davis Lucas, who reported on schools in southwestern Virginia in 1935, White also taught classes.⁶³ It was most likely during his three years in Blacksburg that he met and married Cecelia Leavitt Kent,⁶⁴ a sister of Mary Irby Kent Black, wife of Dr. Harvey Black, whose role in the founding of Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College in 1872 will be discussed in part II of this article. Although new to the field of education, the preacher-turned-educator reportedly was "held in the highest esteem by all" while working at the fledgling school for boys. Many years later, after White had died, a Blacksburg resident told Miller, "[H]is memory is very precious to many of us."⁶⁵

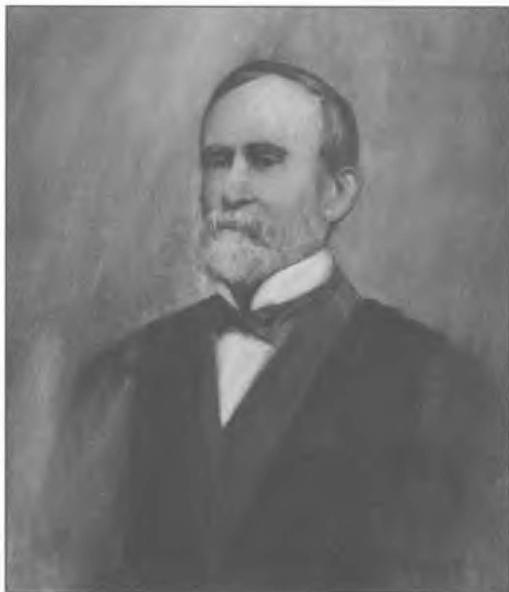


Figure 2. William R. White served the Olin and Preston Institute as its first principal (1852–1855) and later became the first superintendent of free schools in the new state of West Virginia. Photograph by Cynthia Staley of a portrait of White. Courtesy of Amy Baker Pellegrin, Fairmont State University.

In 1856, by which time White had moved to Fairmont, Virginia (West Virginia after 1861), he commenced an eight-year term as principal, or president, of the Fairmont Male and Female Seminary (or Academy),⁶⁶ reportedly establishing “a seminary of high grade” there. While working at the seminary, he was an advocate of the new state government of West Virginia.⁶⁷

White became the first superintendent of free schools for West Virginia, elected to the position for a two-year term by the state legislature in 1864.⁶⁸ He began working to put the new school system into operation and “so well did he do this that he won for himself the title ‘the Horace Mann of West Virginia.’”⁶⁹ As superintendent, White led the movement to establish normal schools (schools that taught students how to teach) and other institutions of higher education in the state, reporting to the legislature at one point, “It would be better to suspend the schools of the state for two years and donate the entire school revenues for that time to the establishment and endowment of a state normal school than to have none at all.” Through his efforts, West Virginia had three normal schools by 1867 and added another three in 1872.⁷⁰

White worked to improve the education of both the black and white races. After he stated during his first year in office that “Negroes deserved educational assistance from the state,” the West Virginia legislature amended its original free school law, which it had passed in 1863, to authorize “township boards of education to establish separate schools for Negroes

between six and twenty-one years of age.” White assured the Freedmen’s Bureau in West Virginia of the desire of West Virginians and state authorities “to secure to the colored youth, the same educational advantages that the whites enjoy.”⁷¹

According to Miller,

As State Superintendent, he had many discouragements, everything being new and untried, and yet within five years [the] system was well under way, free schools had been organized in all sections, the Normal Schools had been established, and much done to popularize the work throughout the State. Probably Professor White’s most efficient service as Superintendent was in traveling over the State and addressing the people on educational topics. In the transition from the old to the new much prejudice had to be over come, and in many communities the estrangements caused by the Civil War produced a great deal of friction. All these obstacles he labored earnestly to remove, and no man in the State could have succeeded better in the effort.⁷²

The two-year appointment as state superintendent that began in 1864 stretched into five years, lasting until 1869,⁷³ when White resigned to become the first principal of the West Virginia normal school at Fairmont—Fairmont Branch Normal School, now Fairmont State University—one of the schools he had helped found. When the school year ended in 1870, he resigned his position to become the West Virginia agent of the American Bible Society.⁷⁴

In 1875, White returned to the ministry, working as a religious leader in various Methodist Episcopal churches in West Virginia. He was stationed as pastor in Morgantown in 1875, moved back to Fairmont in 1877 for a similar position, and went to Wheeling to fulfill that role for a year beginning in 1878. He then served as presiding elder in the Buckhannon district from 1879 to 1883. In 1884, he returned to his ministry in Fairmont for two years and then went back to Morgantown for three years, beginning in 1886, the same year that the Allegheny conference conferred the degree Doctor of Divinity upon him.⁷⁵ A history of the Wesley United Methodist Church in Morgantown, where White had already served twice, listed him as the church’s minister again in 1891.⁷⁶

In 1892, White returned to education, serving as principal of Buckhannon Public Schools. By the time he died on 11 November 1893 at the age of 73, he had been named superintendent in charge of all schools in the Fairmont district.⁷⁷ According to his obituary, he “was a ripe scholar and an able preacher.”⁷⁸

Four years after White's death, Miller described the character of the man:

In thinking of an old instructor and personal friend, Professor White, I recall very distinctly his strong personality, his critical accuracy, his dislike for sham and pretense, and his emphatic views and actions upon all moral and social questions. As a teacher he came very nearly being the ideal English rector of olden times, who was a moral, a social and a spiritual guide for the entire community. Professor White served respectively as a teacher, pastor, lecturer, moral and social reformer, and as an acknowledged leader in every patriotic and benevolent enterprise.⁷⁹

Olin and Preston Opens

The new institute in Blacksburg led by William R. White was “founded under the guardianship of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church”⁸⁰ with “support and cooperation from members of other denominations.”⁸¹ Olin and Preston “was officially made the men’s college of the Baltimore Conference of the [Methodist Episcopal Church, South]” in 1853,⁸² but the year that the school opened its doors to students could not be determined because of conflicting dates reported by historians. Jenkins M. Robertson, a Virginia Tech historian, wrote that it opened in 1855.⁸³ Anson Watson Cummings, author of *The Early Schools of Methodism*, and Christopher Ross Donald, who delivered a series of lectures on Blacksburg Methodist churches, identified an 1853 opening,⁸⁴ but other historians have reported that it opened in 1851.⁸⁵ Regardless, the first principal did not begin



Figure 3. Student Abraham Hogan used this textbook at the Olin and Preston Institute in 1855. His great-grandson, Dr. David Minichan Jr., loaned the book to Virginia Tech in 1997 for use in a display. Photograph by William E. Cox.

working at the school until 1852.⁸⁶ It is possible that the founders spent the year 1851 organizing the institute and soliciting money for its operation. It is also possible that the school began operating without the services of a principal.

Where the school held its classes once it did open is uncertain, but accommodations must have been made to house its classes. No records could be found of any building projects early in the school's existence, perhaps because the Baltimore Conference had advised the trustees not to initiate a building program without sufficient financial backing. The Committee on Seminaries, the educational oversight committee for the conference, recommended that the trustees "take no steps toward erecting buildings for educational purposes, until they have secured on subscription at least three-fourths of the sum necessary to build—and in the failure to use such precaution, it will be fruitless to look to this conference for aid."⁸⁷ Apparently, the trustees ignored this advice when they constructed a school building a few years later (see below).

In addition to a principal, Olin and Preston had an agent, and the first one reported in the records of the Baltimore Conference was J. N. Davis, appointed by the conference in 1852.⁸⁸ An "agent," according to Robert Shindle, archivist of the United Methodist Historical Society of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, "was used as sort of an all-purpose term for someone acting on behalf of the denomination or one of its boards. . . . Agents appointed by the conference to get a project under way were usually fairly prominent and persuasive clergy or lay members who could manage the project and convince others to get behind it."⁸⁹

In 1853, the Baltimore Conference failed to identify an agent.⁹⁰ Operating without such an official apparently hampered the financial operations of Olin and Preston since the institute reported to the Committee on Seminaries that it needed the conference to provide it with one. Based on the entire report from Olin and Preston and on reports from two other schools supported by the Methodists, the committee made five recommendations, including the following four:

1. *Resolved*, That [the other schools] and Olin and Preston Institute, Blacksburg, Va., institutions under the patronage of this Conference, are hereby commended to the confidence and support of our church, and of the public generally.

2. *Resolved*, That we recommend the appointment of an agent from among the members of the Conference, to travel and collect funds for [the other schools] and Olin and Preston Institute, all single men if practicable.

3. *Resolved*, That the bishop be requested to appoint visiting committees for the Institutions named above, for the ensuing year, each committee to consist of three members of Conference.

5. *Resolved*, That each of the Seminaries under the control of the Conference be requested to send a general statement of its condition and prospects to the Conference at every annual session thereof, to be placed in the hands of the Committee on Seminaries, to aid them in making out their report.⁹¹

Olin and Preston Constructs a Building, Becomes Incorporated

The year 1854 was an important one for Olin and Preston Institute, a high-water mark in its history. William R. White continued to run the daily operations of the school, and a newly assigned agent, John T. Stansbury, raised money for it.⁹² The Baltimore Conference's Committee on Seminaries reported that Olin and Preston "promises to be a flourishing school and an efficient auxiliary to the interests of the Church in the section of the country where it is located."⁹³

The report possibly reflected two significant events that occurred that year. First, the trustees of Olin and Preston Institute commenced a building program, entering into a contract (see Figure 4) on 6 February 1854 with Samuel H. Stokes and Alden Pusey, partners who were carpenters and house joiners, and John N. Lyle and O. Alexander, partners who were brickmasons, to construct a building for \$8,500 (nearly \$243,000 today⁹⁴). According to the contract, the builders were to "erect a college building on the land purchased by the said institute" following plans attached to the contract and using materials specified in another attachment and "done in workmanlike manner." It also gave permission to the builders to make the bricks needed in the construction "on the lot purchased by the Institute."⁹⁵ The contract specified 1 August 1855 as the final completion date.⁹⁶ The facility erected by Stokes & Alden and Lyle & Alexander was a three-story brick building 100 by 40 feet and was located on a hill near today's intersection of Alumni Mall and Main Street. This project was to play an important role in both the demise and rebirth of the school, but at the time, it gave the institute the capability to accommodate about 100 students.⁹⁷

Another important event in the life of the school occurred on 28 February 1854 when the Virginia General Assembly passed an act to incorporate the Blacksburg school for boys, designating it as "a seminary of learning for the instruction of youth in the various branches of science and literature,



Figure 4. Page three of the 1854 contract to construct a building for the Olin and Preston Institute includes signatures of the school's trustees and the contractors they engaged. The trustees agreed to pay \$8,500 to erect the building. Scan by Sarah A. Nerney, Library of Virginia senior local records archivist working at the Montgomery County Courthouse. Courtesy of the Office of the Clerk of Court, Montgomery County Courthouse, Christiansburg, Virginia.

and useful arts, and the learned and foreign languages.” The legislature also officially recognized the name as “Olin and Preston Institute.”⁹⁸

The act of incorporation listed the institute's trustees as William Ballard Preston; E. R. Anderson; M. R. White (this probably should have been “W. R. White,” the principal); James R. Kent; David G. Douthat; Joseph Cloyd; W. A. Wade; Harvey Black; James F. Preston; John R. Philips; Benjamin L. Brown; David Barnett; N. M. Ronald; John Wall; Waller R. Staples; William H. Snidow; M. Goheen; A. Buhman (two 1860 newspaper articles listed an “A. Buhrman” as a trustee,⁹⁹ and an “A. Burman” was included in a list of trustees in the 1860 land transaction documents for the school,¹⁰⁰ so the name probably was misspelled in the act of incorporation; “Buhrman” most likely was the correct spelling); J. R. Wheeler; and Giles J. Henderson. It also listed the following men who had also served as trustees of the Blacksburg Female Academy: Robert T. Preston, Edwin J. Amiss, William H. Peck, and Alexander Black. The act delineated the powers these men would hold as trustees, named the officers they could hire to operate the school, and granted them the power to confer degrees.¹⁰¹

In 1855, only White's name appears in the minutes of the Baltimore conference as an official of Olin and Preston¹⁰² in what was to become his last year at the school. Although no agent is identified in the conference records, Edmund B. Snyder served in that capacity that year. Snyder's agent's book, held in Special Collections in Newman Library on the Virginia Tech campus, lists the trustees in 1855 and provides other information about financial supporters of the school. Six of the trustees at the time of incorporation—Cloyd, Wall, Goheen, Buhiman (Buhrman or Burman), Wheeler, and Henderson—apparently had left the governing board since their names do not appear in Snyder's list, and two men—John Hale and A. L. Pitzer—had been added.¹⁰³ Although it could not be determined if the Baltimore Conference appointed trustees to the board on a regular basis, it did so on at least one occasion¹⁰⁴ and most likely selected the various Methodist ministers who served in that capacity during the life of the school.

The agent's book also lists subscriptions, which Shindle defined as "a pledge of support, a written promise by someone to give a certain amount of money within a certain timeframe." Institutions, he continued, "were often built 'by public subscription,' meaning that they were built on the pledge of support by presumably trustworthy people (such as church members)."¹⁰⁵

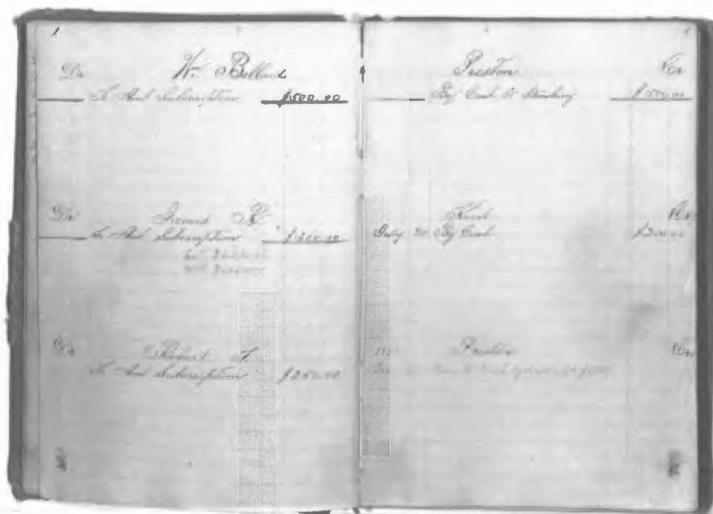


Figure 5. This two-page spread from the record book kept by Olin and Preston's agent for 1854, John T. Stansbury, shows three subscriptions made in support of the institute, including one for \$500 from William Ballard Preston and another for \$250 from Robert T. Preston. Courtesy Special Collections, University Libraries, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va.

Many of the initial names listed in the agent's book as subscribers (see Figure 5) are those of the trustees, with William Ballard Preston subscribing the greatest amount: \$500¹⁰⁶ (just over \$13,500 today), making him a—if not the—principal supporter of the school that bore his name.

Financial Difficulties Surface

Another agent—Joshua M. Grandin—was working on behalf of the school in 1856¹⁰⁷ but left by 1857, and the Baltimore Conference minutes that year reference financial difficulties for the first time, even while praising the institute's site, its facilities, and Grandin's work:

The *Olin and Preston Institute* is beautifully located in Blacksburg, Montgomery County, Virginia. It possesses every facility for the instruction of those who may be committed to its care. The satisfactory statement, which has been presented to the committee by the recent efficient agent Rev. J. M. Grandin, justifies the prediction that *a high and honorable destiny awaits it* [emphasis added]. The only difficulty which at present seems to interfere to any extent with its prosperity, is a *financial* one, which however, we regard not a *serious* embarrassment; but with a view to its removal, and at the request of the Trustees of the institution, the committee recommend the appointment of an agent for the coming year.¹⁰⁸

Grandin's prediction of "a high and honorable destiny" for the institute took a number of years to realize. Meanwhile, Jacob Montgomery succeeded him in the position as agent.¹⁰⁹

In 1858, the academy hired Charles A. Smith, a graduate of the University of Virginia, to teach mathematics. Perhaps he replaced William Henry Dawson, who reportedly was the school's first math teacher. Since Dawson has also been identified as the person in charge of the "primary" department,¹¹⁰ he may have moved into the latter position when Smith was hired. The principal succeeding White could not be determined, but Ellen Taylor McDonald, who in 1926 recorded some historic notes of the area, reported that the school in 1859 was "in the care of Mr. Gilmore and Rev. Mr. Smith. Then Mr. McNeice and the Rev. Mr. Graham."¹¹¹ However, Mrs. S. A. Wingard claimed in her 1939 history of Blacksburg that the principal in 1859 was Gilmore Smith, a combination of the two names given by McDonald. Wingard also listed a "Mr. McNeele" and a "Reverend Graham"—the first name similar to the one reported by McDonald and the second name the same—as having taught at the institute.¹¹² More than likely, Wingard incorrectly reported information that came from McDonald or that she had heard locally.

The year that Smith was hired to teach at Olin and Preston, the Baltimore Conference named a visiting committee to the Blacksburg boy's school.¹¹³ The Committee on Seminaries again called for "the attention and support" of the Baltimore Conference for the institute, expressing its belief that such support would help it become "a first class college":

To thus elevate this Institution should be one of the special aims of the Conference, as a college is no where more earnestly demanded by our interests than in [southwestern] Virginia. As we have no literary Institute of first order in all that section, the colleges under the patronage of other churches receive the support of our people.

We therefore recommend [Olin and Preston Institute] to the patronage of our preachers and people, and to the public generally.

Especially we recommend that the preachers of Rockingham, Lewisburg and Roanoke districts, call the attention of the public to this Institution, and make earnest efforts to procure for it sufficient patronage.¹¹⁴

That call for financial support may have been spurred by a lawsuit filed by Stokes & Pusey and Lyle & Alexander in January 1858 to recover money promised them in the contract to construct the Olin and Preston Building. The suit, which was filed against each individual member of the board of trustees, alleged that the trustees failed to make any of the payments delineated in the contract: \$1,500 on 1 May 1854, \$2,000 on 1 November



Figure 6. This three-story brick building, completed in 1855, was the subject of a long-running lawsuit filed against Olin and Preston Institute by the contractors who built it and remained unpaid. Courtesy Special Collections, University Libraries, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va.

1864, \$2,500 on 1 April 1865, and \$2,500 in three annual installments from completion of the building.¹¹⁵ On 22 July 1858, Lyle met with the board of trustees and agreed to a settlement on behalf of the builders. According to the minutes of that meeting, he accepted \$2,946.16 (around \$84,000 today) “as the balance due to the contractors for the said building.” In return, he agreed to dismiss the action that he had brought in circuit court.¹¹⁶

However, on 8 February 1859, Lyle was forced to file another suit against the trustees, this time collectively rather than individually, for the money that had been agreed upon at the July 1858 board meeting. According to the suit, the institute had refused to pay that settlement. The suit was continued for years, with the final conclusion not reached until after Lyle had died and the Civil War had ended.¹¹⁷

In 1859, perhaps again reacting to the suit in the courts, the Committee on Seminaries noted that Olin and Preston deserved and required

at this time the special attention and cordial support of the church. A just and proper care of this Institution may, at no distant day, elevate it to the character of a first class College. This, your Committee think, should be one of the special aims of the Conference, as our interests in [southwestern] Virginia imperiously demand such an Institution.

Your Committee heartily endorse the Institution, and cordially commend it to public confidence.¹¹⁸

In 1860, the Baltimore Conference appointed the Reverends John S. Martin, William F. Speake, and C. W. Dalrymple to form a committee of visitation to the Blacksburg school. Additionally, it named S. Register, Speake, A. Buhrman, H. A. Gaver, J. C. Dice, and W. S. Edwards as trustees.¹¹⁹

In other action in 1860, a committee appointed by the conference to receive money for educational purposes mentioned a resolution passed “at the last session” to take up “a collection for educational purposes” that was to be equally divided among four schools supported by the conference, including Olin and Preston. The total amount raised was \$422.34, making Olin and Preston’s portion almost \$105.59¹²⁰ (about \$3,000 today). However, holdings in Special Collections at Virginia Tech include a photocopied receipt for \$136.78 from Thomas Myers, chairman of a committee, presumably the Committee on Seminaries, for “the share of the educational collection for Olin and Preston Institute,”¹²¹ which might be the portion actually received by the Blacksburg school—or it could constitute an additional amount collected to support the academy.

The money raised by the Baltimore Conference may have gone toward the 1860 purchase of land from Jacob and Mary A. Keister. Those representing the institute on the deed were “Wm B. Preston, E. J. Amiss, Wm H. Peck, Robert Preston, Jas. F. Preston, James R. Kent, D. G. Doughit, E. R. Anderson, Harvey Black, and N. M. Ronald all of the county of Montgomery and state of Virginia and Wm F. Speak, J. S. Martin, A. Burman, J. E. Armstrong, J. R. Wheeler Ministers of the Methodist Church of the Baltimore Conference,” who were named as trustees of Olin and Preston. The amount of land purchased was four acres, “adjoining George Keisters (sic) tanyard lots.” One of the borders ran “to a stake passing through [indistinguishable word] Jacob Keister’s land back of the college building,” then ran “to a stake at the edge of the Salem and Pepper’s Ferry turnpike.” The Keisters received \$650 (just over \$18,500 today) from the trustees for the parcel.¹²²

Although the Blacksburg school now had land and a building, the ongoing suit by Lyle, weak support from the Baltimore Conference, and heightened tensions leading to the Civil War forced Olin and Preston to close its doors. While a number of historians have reported that the institute closed during or at the end of the war,¹²³ a Preston and Olin Institute catalogue produced in the late 1860s stated that Olin and Preston was “successfully conducted until the commencement of the late war [Civil War].”¹²⁴ Thus, it had already been closed for a few years when, on 11 May 1864, Major General George G. Crook established his headquarters in the vacated Olin and Preston Building as he and his Union troops made their way back to West Virginia following the Battle of Cloyd’s Mountain in Pulaski County.¹²⁵ But like a phoenix, the school rose once again after the war to be rechristened the Preston and Olin Institute, which later became Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, known today as Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Acknowledgments

The author is deeply indebted to Sarah A. Nerney, the Library of Virginia’s senior local records archivist, who is currently working on a project in the Montgomery County Courthouse, for locating deeds and other court records pertaining to the Olin and Preston Institute. Appreciation is also expressed to the knowledgeable staff in Special Collections, University Libraries, at Virginia Tech for their invaluable help in locating resources and suggesting others. Furthermore, the author thanks Paul L. Nichols, historian of the Grace United Methodist Church in Gaithersburg, Maryland, and Mary Virginia Currie, special collections librarian at Randolph Macon College, for providing scans and citations from the records of the Baltimore Conference. In addition, Paul provided the author with definitions of words

used by the Baltimore Conference, and Mary Virginia sent other information held in her college's special collections that pertain to Olin and Preston Institute, for which the author is most grateful. Special thanks also go to Amy Baker Pellegrin, director of marketing and branding at Fairmont State University, for submitting a photograph of a William R. White portrait and for providing information on the life of Dr. White.

Endnotes

1. Duncan Lyle Kinnear, *The First 100 Years: A History of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University* (Blacksburg, Va.: Virginia Polytechnic Institute Educational Foundation, Inc., 1972), 41; Clara B. Cox and Jenkins M. Robertson, *History and Historical Data of Virginia Tech* (Blacksburg, Va.: University Relations, Virginia Tech, 2010), www.unirel.vt.edu/history/; and Stephen O'Hara, "The War of the Colleges and the Birth of the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College," *The Founding of Virginia Tech*, www.vt.edu/landgrant/essays/founding-virginia-tech.html.
2. The act provided each state with 30,000 acres of federal land for each member of the state's congressional delegation. The states then sold the land "to fund public colleges that focused on agriculture and the mechanical arts" ("Primary Documents in American History: Morrill Act," *The Library of Congress Web Guides*, www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Morrill.html). Because Virginia had seceded from the Union, it did not take advantage of the provisions of the act for a decade after its passage.
3. *Acts and Joint Resolutions Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Virginia at Its Session of 1871-'72* (Richmond, Va.: R. F. Walker, Superintendent of Public Printing, 1872), 312-15; "The Land Scrip—The Question Finally Disposed Of," *Bristol News* (Bristol, Va. and Tenn.) 7, no. 346 (5 April 1872), 1; "The Educational Land Scrip," *Daily State Journal* (Alexandria, Va.) (14 March 1872), 4; Cornelius Jacob Heatwole, *A History of Education in Virginia* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 204; and Cox and Robertson, *History and Historical Data of Virginia Tech*. Preston and Olin received two-thirds of the scrip; the other third went to the Hampton Normal and Agricultural School—today's Hampton University—to serve as the commonwealth's black land-grant college. In 1920, the state legislature transferred the black land-grant school designation to what is now Virginia State University ("The University History, Virginia State University Undergraduate Catalog 2006-2008," vsu.edu/files/docs/academics/undergraduate-catalog-2006-2008.pdf, 4).
4. *Acts and Joint Resolutions, 1871-'72*, 312.
5. Isaac Edwards Clarke, "Part IV: Art and Industry," *Congressional Serial Set 7* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1898), 600; William H. Ruffner, J. R. Anderson, and W. T. Sutherlin, "Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College," report from the committee planning organization and instruction, presented to the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College Board of Visitors, 14 August 1872, Yellow Sulphur Springs, Va., published in pamphlet form and adopted by the board as its annual report to the Virginia General Assembly (no publication information given), 2-3; and Cox and Robertson, *History and Historical Data of Virginia Tech*.
6. According to "The University Shield" in Virginia Tech's online *Factbook: About the University* (www.vt.edu/about/factbook/about-university.html), the numerals 1872 in the shield "recognize the year the university was founded."
7. A. J. Morrison, *The Beginnings of Public Education in Virginia, 1776-1860: Study of Secondary Schools in Relation to the State Literary Fund* (Richmond, Va.: D. Bottom, Superintendent of Public Printing, 1917), 15; Foney G. Mullins, "A History of the Literary Fund as a Funding Source for Free Public Education in the Commonwealth of Virginia" (Ed.D. diss., Virginia Tech, 2001), scholar.lib.vt.edu/theses/available/etd-04262001230201/unrestricted/Mullins_Foney.PDF; Courtney Hoffberger, "Nineteenth Century Reform Movements: Women's Rights,"

- Teaching American History in Anne Arundel County Program, Maryland, n.d., [www.umbc.edu/che/tahlessons/pdf/Nineteenth_Century_Reform_Movements_Womens_Rights\(PrinterFriendly\).pdf](http://www.umbc.edu/che/tahlessons/pdf/Nineteenth_Century_Reform_Movements_Womens_Rights(PrinterFriendly).pdf), 11; and Kinnear, *First 100 Years*.
8. Morrison, *Beginnings of Public Education in Virginia, 1776–1860*, 15.
 9. Clara B. Cox, “Blacksburg Educates Its Children, 1740s–1990s,” in *A Special Place for 200 Years: A History of Blacksburg, Virginia*, ed. Clara B. Cox (Blacksburg, Va.: Town of Blacksburg, 1998), 82.
 10. *Deed Book N*, 11 and 12, Montgomery County Courthouse, Christiansburg, Va.
 11. “Virginia Legislative Petitions Database Index, 1776–1865,” Library of Virginia, Richmond, box 172, folder 69, reel 132.
 12. Christopher Ross Donald, “Growth and Independence of Methodist Congregations in Blacksburg, Virginia,” *Smithfield Review* 10 (2006), 52, reported that the year was 1851 “when the leaders of Blacksburg’s MECS [Methodist Episcopal Church, South] and town leaders established the Olin and Preston Institute.”
 13. Kinnear, *First 100 Years*, 11, wrote that most of the Methodist leaders who started Olin and Preston “were trustees in the Blacksburg Female Academy.” A comparison of the trustees who signed the 1860 deed to purchase land for Olin and Preston and the institute’s trustees listed in the 1854 act of incorporation with the trustees who signed the 1840 deed for the Blacksburg Female Academy, however, indicates that only four men were trustees of both. Since the female academy had been in operation for about 20 years by the time the Methodist leaders recorded the land deed, other Olin and Preston trustees may have served terms as Blacksburg Female Academy trustees during that time.
 14. Kinnear, *First 100 Years*, 11, and Harry Downing Temple, *The Bugle’s Echo*, (6 vols., Blacksburg, Va.: Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets Alumni Inc., 1996), 1: 11.
 15. Ellen Taylor McDonald, “Notes on Draper’s Meadows and Blacksburg and Vicinity” (1926), Special Collections, University Libraries, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va.
 16. G. F. Poteet, “Secondary Education in Montgomery County 1776–1936” (M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 1937), 142. Kinnear, *First 100 Years*, 12, implied that the land was purchased before 1851.
 17. For a discussion of a possible location, see Mrs. J. B. Lucas [Frangie Davis Lucas], “The Schools of Southwestern Virginia” (Blacksburg, Va., 1935), manuscript in Special Collections, Virginia Tech, 11–12. Lucas reported that she had not been able to learn the location of the male academy organized in Blacksburg in 1850 but said, “There is some indication that it was the building across the street from the Odd Fellow’s hall.”
 18. *Deed Book Q*, 503–504, Montgomery County Circuit Court, Christiansburg, Va.
 19. McDonald, “Notes on Draper’s Meadow and Blacksburg”; Kinnear, *First 100 Years*, 12; Temple, *Bugle’s Echo*, 1: 11; C. A. Turner Jr., “Methodism in Blacksburg, 1798–1948” (Blacksburg, Va.: n.p., 1948), Special Collections, Virginia Tech; and “History,” Randolph Macon College, Ashland, Va., www.rmc.edu/about/history.
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 21. Kinnear, *First 100 Years*, 11.
 22. Stephen Olin, *The Life and Letters of Stephen Olin, D.D., LL.D.*, ed. Julia Matilda Olin (2 vols., New York: Harper & Brothers, 1853), books.google.com/books?id=HBZZAAAAAYAAJ&prints_ec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false, 1: 9–137, and “Biographical Sketch – Stephen Olin, D.D., L.L. D.,” The George Washington University, www.godrules.net/library/gorrie/147gorrie_b20.htm.
 23. However, he is designated the school’s “principal” by Anson Watson Cummings, *The Early Schools of Methodism* (New York: Phillips & Hunt; Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe, 1886), books.google.com/books?id=JOBDAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA428&lpg=PA428&dq=Olin+and+Preston+Institute+1853&source=bl&ots=J7Cc4qJMHL&sig=kilikbKDeeKRGSTn1ZSQViqUjwQ&hl=en&sa=X&ei=QllqVO-hBrOasQSV64DIDA&ved=0CB4Q6AEwAA#v=snippet&q=Preston&f=false, 84.

24. Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1: 9–137.
25. James Grant Wilson and John Fiske, eds., *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (6 vols., New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1898), books.google.com/books?id=u8JBAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA74&lpg=PA74&dq=James+Grant+Wilson+and+John+Fiske,+eds.,+Appletons'+Cyclopaedia+of+American+Biography+vol.+IV&source=bl&ots=ARPGSd1OqW&sig=RCbkZwqsbULziUkAZppJs1vckWs&hl=en&sa=X&ei=XurLVNrnLseZNuiDgvAB&ved=0CDoQ6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q=Stephen%20Olin&f=false, 4: 571.
26. Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1: 9–137, and Adam Bermudez, “Stephen Olin,” *Bronx Chronicle* (Bronx, N.Y.), 29 October 2014, thebronxcharinicle.com.
27. Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1: 139.
28. Ms. Bostick was probably born around 1792; see “Bostick Family,” oursouthernuncousins.com/BOSTICK%20FAMILY.pdf, 21, and Ancestry.com (records.ancestry.com/mary_ann_bostick_records.ashx?pid=23190618).
29. Rev. Dr. Wightman (only last name given), writing in Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1: 140.
30. Wightman in Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1: 143–46, and Wilson and Fiske, *Appleton's Cyclopaedia*, 4: 571.
31. The college was moved to Ashland, Va., in 1868 (“R-MC’s History of Success,” Randolph Macon College, www.rmc.edu/about/history).
32. Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1: 154–77.
33. Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1: 177–266, and Robert Paine, *Life and Times of William M’Kendree: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (2 vols., 1869; Nashville, Tenn.: Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1922), books.google.com/books?id=mn5HAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA123&lpg=PA123&dq=mary+ann+bostick+olin&source=bl&ots=XYzRcVtsWO&sig=4b1UwH0z2RmZUvK8HHnLsNxVQ_Q&hl=en&sa=X&ei=VyLBVImI0ZDcgwSu54OoBg&ved=0CEkQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q=mary%20ann%20bostick%20olin&f=false, 2: 124.
34. William North Rice, “Wesleyan University,” *Scribner's Monthly* 12, no. 5 (September 1876), books.google.com/books?id=D6_PAAAAMAAJ&pg=PR4&lpg=PR4&dq=william+north+rice+scribner%27s+monthly+1876&source=bl&ots=hAQmJER5XK&sig=la_iGL4ZRcVn1hQnG1HgPaRkPIU&hl=en&sa=X&ei=DIfSVMKApDagwT7qIS4DA&ved=0CCYQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=william%20north%20rice%20scribner's%20monthly%201876&f=false, 652.
35. “Wesleyan’s Third President,” Office of the President website, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Conn., www.wesleyan.edu/president/pastpresidents/olin.html.
36. “Olin,” *Dictionary of American Biography*, www.mocavo.com/Dictionary-of-American-Biography-Volume-14/647349/28, 14, quoting from James M. Buckley, *A History of Methodism in the United States* (2 vols., New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1897), no page numbers.
37. “Olin,” *Dictionary of American Biography*, 14.
38. Wilson and Fiske, *Appleton's Cyclopaedia*, 4: 571; Olin, *Life and Letters*, 2: 453; and “Web Family Cards,” olinfamilysociety.org/webcards/wc16/wc16_103.html.
39. Olin, *Life and Letters*.
40. Stephen Olin, *Travels in Egypt, Arabia, Petra, and the Holy Land* (2 vols., New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843).
41. Stephen Olin, *Youthful Piety: Discourses Addressed to the Graduating Classes of Wesleyan University, A. D. 1845 and 1850* (New York: Carlton & Phillips, 1854).
42. Stephen Olin, *Greece and the Golden Horn*, ed. Julia Matilda Olin (New York: J. C. Derby, 1854).
43. Stephen Olin, *College Life, Its Theory and Practice* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1867).
44. Lyon Gardiner Tyler, ed., *Encyclopedia of Virginia Biography* (5 vols., New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1915), 3: 43; Laura Jones Wedin, “A Summary of 19th–Century Smithfield, Part I: The Years Before the Civil War,” *Smithfield Review* 18 (2014), 81–82, 90; “Preston, William Ballard (1805–1862),” *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodyisplay.pl?index=P000518; and “William B. Preston (1850 [sic]–1850)

- Secretary of the Navy,” *American President: A Reference Resource*, millercenter.org/president/fillmore/essays/cabinet/261.
45. Tyler, *Encyclopedia of Virginia Biography*, 3: 43; Wedin, “Summary of 19th–Century Smithfield,” 84; *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*; and *American President: A Reference Resource*.
 46. S. W. Brown, “Eminent West Virginians: A Sketch of the Life of Charles James Faulkner,” *West Virginia School Journal* 6, no. 3 (March 1887), 5; Wedin, “Summary of 19th–Century Smithfield,” 83, 85, 89–90; L. Diane Barnes, Brian Schoen, and Frank Towers, eds., *The Old South’s Modern Worlds: Slavery, Region, and Nation in the Age of Progress*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 182; Junius P. Rodriguez, ed., *Slavery in the United States: A Social, Political, and Historical Encyclopedia* (2 vols., Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC–CLIO, 2007), 1: 496; Ballard C. Camp and Jeff Forret, “Slavery in the United States,” *Issues and Controversies in American History*, ed. Jeff Forret (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2012), 204; Christopher Michael Curtis, *Jefferson’s Freeholders and the Politics of Ownership in the Old Dominion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 144.
 47. William Harris Gaines Jr., “William Ballard Preston,” *Biographical Register of Members: Virginia State Convention of 1861, First Session* (Richmond, Va.: Virginia State Library, 1969), 64.
 48. Wedin, “Summary of 19th–Century Smithfield,” 79–95.
 49. *Ibid.*, 90–91.
 50. “Montgomery Female College Collection, 1875–1892,” Special Collections, Virginia Tech, *ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaxtf/view?docId=vt/vibl/v00343.xml*.
 51. Wedin, “Summary of 19th–Century Smithfield,” 90–91.
 52. “Schools and Academies,” *Virginia Acts of Assembly, 1853–54*, 67–68.
 53. Ballard Preston’s name is listed first in the act of incorporation, in the contract to construct the Olin and Preston school building, in the 1855 Agent’s Book for Olin and Preston Institute, and in the 1860 land purchase record.
 54. Wedin, “Summary of 19th–Century Smithfield,” 91.
 55. Wedin, “Summary of 19th–Century Smithfield,” 91–92; Tyler, *Encyclopedia of Virginia Biography*, 3: 43; Barnes et al., eds., *The Old South’s Modern Worlds*, 182; and Lawrence M. Denton, *Unionists in Virginia: Politics, Secession and Their Plan to Prevent Civil War* (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2014), books.google.com/books?id=YUAmBQAAQBAJ&pg=PT15&lpg=PT15&dq=william+ballard+preston+and+slavery&source=bl&ots=9MAYFNXqSM&sig=5y_-JUKI94bd0nJt77OIniH6MVw&hl=en&sa=X&ei=mDfBVM2pLMGngwTpnlCoBg&ved=0CCcQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=william%20ballard%20preston%20and%20slavery&f=false, no page numbers.
 56. The terms “president” and “principal” seem to have been interchangeable. Some sources use “president,” e.g., James Edward Armstrong, *History of the Old Baltimore Conference: From the Planting of Methodism in 1773 to the Division of the Conference in 1857* (Baltimore, Md.: Printed for the Author by King Brothers, 1907), digital edition printed 26 October 1998 by Holiness Data Ministry (no page numbers). Others use “principal,” e.g., “Baltimore Conference Appointments,” *Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Va.) 4, no. 125 (18 March 1854), 1. Minutes of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church call White the “principal.”
 57. “Dr. W. R. White Dead,” *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer* (Wheeling, W.Va.) 42, no. 69 (11 November 1893), 1; Kenneth M. Plumer, *A History of West Virginia Wesleyan College, 1890–1965* (Buckhannon, W.Va.: West Virginia Wesleyan College Press, 1965), www.archive.org/details/historyofwestvirOOplum, no page numbers; Kinnear, *First 100 Years*, 12; Temple, *Bugle’s Echo*, 1: 12; McDonald, “Notes on Draper’s Meadow and Blacksburg”; and Armstrong, *History of the Old Baltimore Conference*.
 58. Armstrong, *History of the Old Baltimore Conference*, in Appendix A, “Clerical Sketches,” gives the year of birth for White as 1829, but other sources list his birth year as 1820: “Dr. W. R. White Dead”; “Necrology: Dr. William Ryland White, the First State Superintendent of Free

- Schools of West Virginia,” *Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Free Schools of the State of West Virginia for the Years 1893 and 1894*, Virgil A. Lewis, State Superintendent of Free Schools (Charleston, W.Va.: West Virginia, State Department of Education, 1894), 36; and Plumer, *History of West Virginia Wesleyan College*.
59. Thomas C. Miller, “William Ryland White,” *Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Free Schools of West Virginia for the Two Years Ended June 30, 1900*, J. R. Trotter, State Superintendent of Free Schools (Charleston, W.Va.: State of West Virginia, 1901), 9, reprinted from Thomas C. Miller, “William Ryland White,” *West Virginia School Journal* 17, no. 1 (April 1897), 1–2.
60. “Dr. W. R. White Dead.”
61. Plumer, *History of West Virginia Wesleyan College*.
62. Miller, “William Ryland White,” 11.
63. Lucas, “Schools of Southwestern Virginia,” 11.
64. “Cecelia Leavitt Kent,” Ancestry.com, [records.ancestry.com/cecelia_leavitt_kent_records.ashx?pid=169003764](https://www.ancestry.com/cecelia_leavitt_kent_records.ashx?pid=169003764).
65. Miller, “William Ryland White,” 11.
66. “Dr. W. R. White Dead”; “Necrology,” 37; and Plumer, *History of West Virginia Wesleyan College*. An anonymous author reported in *The History of Education in West Virginia*, revised edition (Charleston, W.Va.: State of West Virginia, 1907), 42, that White succeeded Doctor Alexander Martin as principal of Northwestern Virginia Academy and had served twelve years when he was elected the West Virginia State Superintendent of Free Schools. That time, however, conflicts with his principalships at Olin and Preston Institute and the Male and Female Seminary in Fairmont, Virginia (later West Virginia), and can thus be assumed to be incorrect.
67. Miller, “William Ryland White,” 11.
68. “West Virginia Legislature,” *Daily Intelligencer* (Wheeling, W.Va.), 17 February 1864, 2.
69. Anonymous, *History of Education in West Virginia*, 46–47.
70. *Ibid.*
71. John E. Stealey III, “The Freedmen’s Bureau in West Virginia,” *Magazine of the Jefferson County Historical Society* 68 (December 2002), 39, 41.
72. Miller, “William Ryland White,” 11.
73. “Dr. W. R. White Dead”; “Necrology”; and Plumer, *History of West Virginia Wesleyan College*.
74. William P. Turner, *A Centennial History of Fairmont State College* (Fairmont, W.Va.: Fairmont State College, 1970), excerpt from the book, without page numbers, sent to the author by Amy Baker Pellegrin, Director of Marketing and Branding, Fairmont State University, 21 January 2015; Jo Ann Lough, Retired Professor, Fairmont State University, information related to Pellegrin and forwarded by Pellegrin to the author, 21 January 2015; and Miller, “William Ryland White,” 13.
75. “Dr. W. R. White Dead”; “Necrology”; and Miller, “William Ryland White,” 13.
76. “Historical Timeline of Wesley Church, Morgantown, W.Va.,” Wesley United Methodist Church, www.wesleymorgantown.org/about/History.htm. In addition to listing White as having served there as church minister from 1886 to 1889, the timeline lists his first year as the church minister as 1877.
77. “Necrology,” and Miller, “William Ryland White,” 13.
78. “Dr. W. R. White Dead.”
79. Miller, “William Ryland White,” 9.
80. Temple, *Bugle’s Echo*, 1: 11.
81. Goodridge Wilson, “The Southwest Corner,” newspaper unknown, page number unknown, scan of article provided to the author by Mary Virginia Currie, Special Collections Librarian, Randolph Macon College, 30 October 2014.
82. Donald, “Growth and Independence of the Methodist Congregations in Blacksburg, Virginia,” 52.
83. Jenkins M. Robertson, “In and Out of Context: Blacksburg’s ‘Roots,’” *Context* 11, no. 2 (1977), spec.lib.vt.edu/bicent/recoll/roots.htm, no page numbers.
84. Cummings, *Early Schools of Methodism*, 428, and Christopher Ross Donald (in conjunction with Gunnar Teilman), “Blacksburg Methodist Churches: Blacksburg Methodist Episcopal

- Church, South and the Beginnings of St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church,” 16 April 2005 lecture, Blacksburg United Methodist Church, Blacksburg, Va., www.joepayne.org/MethodisminBlacksburg.pdf, 3.
85. Temple, *Bugle's Echo*, 1: 11; Kinnear, *First 100 Years*, 12; Donald, “Growth and Independence of Methodist Congregations in Blacksburg, Virginia,” 52; Jenkins Mikell Robertson, comp. and ed., “Historical Data Book, Centennial Edition,” *Bulletin of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University* 65, no. 4 (Blacksburg, Va.: Virginia Tech, 1972), 6; and “Blacksburg United Methodist Church,” www.blacksburghistory.org/?page_id=2301.
 86. “Dr. W. R. White, Dead.”
 87. Photocopied final report of the Committee on Seminaries (n.d.), Preston and Olin Institute Records, Ms1964–001, Special Collections, Virginia Tech.
 88. *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1852* (New York: Carlton & Phillips, 1852), books.google.com/books?id=GpdAAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA162&lpq=PA162&dq=baltimore+methodist+conference+olin+and+preston&source=bl&ots=gqBQ9v6mzD&sig=YxvFj20BK11CfzphPXgOmmEr3d8&hl=en&sa=X&ei=5EMTVJ2kGMLgsAS-pILoCA&ved=0CDQQ6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q=baltimore%20methodist%20conference%20olin%20and%20preston&f=false, 6.
 89. E-mail correspondence from Robert Shindle, Archivist, United Methodist Historical Society of the Baltimore–Washington Conference, to Paul L. Nichols, Historian of the Grace United Methodist Church, Gaithersburg, Md., forwarded electronically from Nichols to the author, 23 October 2014.
 90. *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1852–55* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1856), 162, and Mrs. R. B. Lancaster to Lucy Lee Lancaster, 3 July 1963, Special Collections, Randolph Macon College.
 91. “Report of the Committee on Seminaries,” *Annual Register of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Baltimore: Armstrong and Berry, 1853), 21.
 92. “Baltimore Conference Appointments,” *Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Va.) 4, no. 125 (18 March 1854), 1.
 93. “Report of the Committee on Seminaries” (1854), Preston and Olin Institute Records, Ms1964–001, Special Collections, Virginia Tech.
 94. www.davemanuel.com/inflation-calculator.php was used throughout the article to convert 1800s money to modern-day values.
 95. The author uncovered no land transactions prior to one in 1860, although the trustees had apparently purchased property before.
 96. Common Law, A–4861, *Lyle & Alexander Co. vs. William B. Preston et al.* (1858), Montgomery County Courthouse, Christiansburg, Va. The files for this suit include the original construction contract, but two attachments mentioned in the contract are missing from the file.
 97. “General Information: Historic Statement,” *Catalogue, Preston and Olin Institute, Session 1869 and 70* (Blacksburg, Va.: Preston and Olin Institute, n.d.), Special Collections, Virginia Tech, 11.
 98. “Schools and Academies,” *Virginia Acts of Assembly, 1853–54*, 67–68.
 99. “Closing Session. Winchester, Va., March 8, 1860,” *Daily Exchange* (Baltimore, Md.) 5, no. 633 (9 March 1860), 1, and “Proceedings of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Winchester, Va., March 6 (sixth day),” *Daily Exchange* (Baltimore, Md.) 5, no. 632 (8 March 1860), 1.
 100. Deed Book Q, 503–504, Montgomery County Circuit Court.
 101. “Schools and Academies,” *Virginia Acts of Assembly, 1853–54*.
 102. *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1852–55*, 498.
 103. Edmund B. Snyder, “Agents Book for the Olin and Preston Institute” (1855), Special Collections, Virginia Tech.
 104. “Closing Session,” *Daily Exchange*.
 105. E-mail correspondence from Robert Shindle, to Paul L. Nichols, forwarded to the author 23 October 2014.
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106. Snyder, "Agents Book."
107. "Virginia Appointments of the Baltimore Conference," *Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Va.) 9, no. 67 (24 March 1856), 1, and *Minutes of the Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1856–57* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1857), 10.
108. *Annual Minutes of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, held in Light Street Church, Baltimore City, Maryland, March 4–18, 1857* (Baltimore: Armstrong & Berry, 1857), 35.
109. *Minutes of the Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1856–57*, 199.
110. *Daily Exchange* (Baltimore, Md.) 1, no. 146 (11 August 1858), 1; Nadine Allen, "House is Oldest in Blacksburg on Original Site," *News Messenger Bicentennial Edition*, 1 July 1976, p. H8; and McDonald, "Notes on Draper's Meadow and Blacksburg."
111. McDonald, "Notes on Draper's Meadow and Blacksburg."
112. Mrs. S. A. Wingard, "History of Blacksburg, Virginia" (1939), spec.lib.vt.edu/bicent/recoll/wingard.htm.
113. "Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Wesley Chapel, Washington, D.C.," *Daily Exchange* (Baltimore, Md.) 1, no. 17 (12 March 1858), 1.
114. "Seminaries," *Annual Register of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Baltimore: Armstrong and Berry, 1858), 29.
115. Common Law, A-4861, *Lyle & Alexander Co. vs. William B. Preston et al.* (1858), Montgomery County Courthouse.
116. Common Law, A-5087, *John N. Lyle vs. Trustees of Olin and Preston Institute* (1859), Montgomery County Courthouse. The records include the minutes of the meeting in which a settlement was reached by the plaintiffs and defendants.
117. *Ibid.*
118. "Seminaries," *Annual Minutes of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Baltimore: Armstrong and Berry, 1859), 24.
119. "Proceedings of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church," *Daily Exchange*, and "Closing Session," *Daily Exchange*.
120. "Report of the Committee to Receive Educational Money," *Annual Minutes of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Baltimore: William M. Iness, 1860), 29.
121. Photocopied receipt signed by J. W. Marshal, Winchester, Va., 3 March 1860, Preston and Olin Institute Records, Ms1964-001, Special Collections, Virginia Tech.
122. Deed Book Q, 503-504, Montgomery County Circuit Court.
123. McDonald, "Notes on Draper's Meadow and Blacksburg"; Cox and Robertson, *History and Historical Data of Virginia Tech*; Temple, *Bugle's Echo*, 1: 12; Turner, "Methodism in Blacksburg," 10; Poteet "Secondary Education in Montgomery County," 142; Kinnear, *First 100 Years*, 13; and Mrs. J. B. Lucas [Frangie Davis Lucas], "Early History of Whisner Memorial Church" (1939), Special Collections, Virginia Tech, 5.
124. *Catalogue, Preston and Olin Institute, Session 1869 and 70*, 11.
125. Dorothy H. Bodell and Mary Elizabeth Linden, "Blacksburg during the Civil War," in Cox, ed., *A Special Place for 200 Years*, 27.

A Sketch of Letitia¹ Preston Floyd and Some of Her Letters*

Jim Glanville and Ryan Mays

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Introduction

This article demonstrates that Letitia Preston Floyd (1779–1852) of Smithfield Plantation, Thorn Spring Plantation, and Burke’s Garden, was a remarkable woman whom history has badly neglected.²

As evidence of that neglect, the authors are unaware of any published encyclopedia entry devoted to her, and note that even in today’s Internet age of abundant online resources, it is impossible to find an adequate electronic biography of her.³ Furthermore, the principal genealogical source for her is almost entirely devoted to her husband’s biography.⁴ Surprisingly, despite many efforts to find one, there is no known picture of her.

Letitia Preston Floyd wrote many letters, very few of which have been published. Some of her letters are published here for the first time while others are reprinted from obscure and little-known sources. Her letters reproduced in this article will give the reader a firsthand opportunity to assess the strength of the lady’s character, her abilities, and her historical significance.

A contemporary assessment of the quality of her character comes from her grand niece Sally Campbell Preston McDowell (1822–1895), who wrote of the Preston family in an 1856 letter to her future husband, John Miller, that “the women were clever & the men handsome” and added that “Aunt Floyd [Letitia Preston Floyd] was a wonder.”⁵ Edward Pollard wrote in *Lee and His Lieutenants* that “Letitia Preston, daughter of William Preston the surveyor, [was] a lady widely noted for extraordinary intellectual gifts and attainments.”⁶ This article presents some evidence in her own words for just how “wonderful” Mrs. Floyd was.

Letitia Preston (Mrs. Floyd) was born at Smithfield Plantation, Montgomery County, Virginia, on September 29, 1779. She was the tenth child of William and Susanna Preston. She married John Floyd Jr., the son of

*This is one of three articles about Letitia Preston Floyd that appear in this issue of the *Smithfield Review*. The companion articles are an article about the relationship she and her husband had with the Catholic church and an article that describes her as a “Pioneer Catholic Feminist.”

her father's "best beloved friend," and lived successively at Christiansburg (circa 1807–1818), Thorn Spring in present-day Pulaski County⁷ (circa 1818–1840), and as a widow at Burke's Garden in Tazewell County (1840–1852). She was the mother of twelve children, seven of whom survived to adulthood and lived to be married.⁸ Three of her children died very young, two after a few months and one after a year and a half, and two died as young children (aged 6 and 11) of scarlet fever at Thorn Spring Plantation in 1833. Her child-bearing years lasted from 1805 to 1827 or from the age of 25 (one month short of her 26th birthday) to the age of 47 and a half years.

Because her husband enjoyed a successful career as a Virginia congressman and governor, she had a ringside seat for some of the most important political events of the 1820s and 1830s. This was the time of the Nullification Crisis and the controversial presidency of Andrew Jackson, as well as the period during which arose the great American question of the balance between the powers of the federal government and the separate states. Letitia for a few years was a part of significant American history. Necessarily, much of her life was occupied by the mundane daily business of child-rearing and plantation-running. In contrast, for a year or two in the early 1830s she lived amidst the high drama of the great national political discussion of states rights during the Nullification Controversy, which was "one of the more dramatic events in United States history."⁹

This article is organized chronologically into six principal periods of her life:

- Childhood and marriage
- Her first thirteen years of marriage, during the latter part of which her husband served in the Virginia General Assembly
- Her twelve years as wife of a United States congressman
- Her four years as wife of the governor of Virginia
- The period of her husband's final illness at Thorn Spring Plantation, during which she served as his political and business adviser
- Her years of widowhood, passed in relatively isolated Burke's Garden

The article includes transcripts of fourteen of her letters including at least one from each of these six periods of her life. Twelve of the fourteen letters are here printed for the first time in the body of historical literature.

Following our examination of the sixth period of her life comes a critical discussion of the newly uncovered (in January 2014) *original* copy of Letitia Preston Floyd's only well-known letter, written in 1843 and

addressed to her son as “My Dear Rush.” The final section of the article offers a discussion of library repositories and other places where additional letters written by Letitia Preston Floyd may reside or may come to light.

Childhood and Marriage (1779–1804)

At the time of Letitia Preston’s birth, the outcome of the American Revolution was still undecided. The summer of 1779 had been a troubling time for her father William Preston (1729–1783). Parties of Tories were in the neighborhood and her father’s life was under threat. She was, however, too young to remember any of this, or to remember her father, who died suddenly two years after the Revolution had been won.¹⁰

Today, visitors who tour the restored Smithfield Plantation house are shown the upstairs bedroom in the west wing of the house, which is interpreted as the children’s room. Very likely, it was while sleeping here in this room that Letitia Preston grew to womanhood. Her mother, the widowed Susanna Smith Preston (1740–1823), ruled the household with a firm hand, supported by Letitia’s older brothers, the eldest of whom, John,¹¹ was 15 years older than she was. Daily operations of the plantation were conducted by overseers, who would have managed and supervised the many plantation slaves. While no direct evidence seems to have survived, we may speculate that Letitia was partly raised by the house slaves at Smithfield Plantation.

In keeping with the strong Preston family and Presbyterian tradition of giving their girls a good education, Letitia would have been well taught and tutored at Smithfield. While again we lack direct evidence, the circumstantial evidence is that Letitia’s likely first instructor was the Irish-born Peter Byrns.¹² He was a teacher at Smithfield from 1780 to 1793 (and perhaps until a year or two later). Letitia may well have been under his instruction into her middle teenage years. Another possible teacher of Letitia at Smithfield was Aaron Palfreyman.¹³

The authors have found only a single document related to Letitia’s youth and childhood¹⁴ and none of her letters. The first letter of hers we know of is one written in November 1803, when she was two months past her 24th birthday. This 1803 letter, reproduced below in full, was written by Letitia Preston from Franklin County, Kentucky, to her mother Susanna at Smithfield, from the home of her brother-in-law Nathaniel Hart. Hart, who was raised in North Carolina, in 1797 married Letitia’s older (by six years) sister Susanna Preston (1772–1833). The couple moved to Kentucky soon after their marriage and lived there for the rest of their lives.¹⁵

In the letter, Letitia repeatedly apologizes for her delay in returning from Kentucky to Smithfield, offers the explanation that she has been

detained in Kentucky by her sister's "critical situation at this period," and explains that Mr. Hart will return with me "as soon as she [her sister] is recovered." However, Letitia also told her mother that she had met John Floyd, the son of her father's "best beloved friend," and a man of good mind, person, and "equality of station." Letitia's father, and the father-in-law she would never know, had a many-year correspondence which has recently been published.¹⁶

In distant Kentucky, Letitia had fallen in love and found the man she planned to marry. He was four years younger than she was, but their marriage would indeed prove to be one of equals. Here is what Letitia wrote:¹⁷

Mr. Hart's, Novr. 30th 1803

To what shall I appeal but to maternal tenderness for the extenuation of an offence against that tenderness? Is not the bosom of a parent the safest and only tribunal for a child to trust its cause and feelings to? From the conviction that it is, let me ask of my Mother its operation in favor of her remaining orphan daughter. Oh! shall I confess that her protection is forsaken for that offered by a newly found friend, and then beg her to receive that friend as a Son, whose wishes, whose virtues, aspire to the choice? His evident claims of mind, person, equality of station, added to the circumstance of being the Son of my Father's best beloved friend Colo Floyd, will I trust place this request beyond the imputation of indiscretion. And yet farther, will I trust place this request by the consent and presence of my dear, dear Mother. This event (should it meet your approbation) will necessarily be postponed until my return to Virginia. In the meantime it will be my sincere desire that a strict silence be observed even to my brothers and sisters, from the fear that some incident may occur which would place me on an unpleasant footing and Besides, the possibility of its getting, through channel, to the ears of some¹⁸ of my relations in this Country who would enjoy a feind-like [*sic*] pleasure in destroying every prospect that tended to the promotion or advancement of my happiness in any degree whatever. I shall rely on your goodness in this point as in every other where the welfare of your child is at stake. And now a pardon for my breach of promise in not returning home at the time appointed. But the causes of my detention were unforeseen and are such as humanity compelled me to listen to. Susanna's critical situation at this period and a promise from Mr. Hart to return with me as soon as she is recovered, left me no alternative but that of staying. This conclusion has cost me much. To be deprived of your society at a time when it would be most cordial, is a loss I am scarcely able to sustain. A few weeks more will restore me to the bosom of my beloved

Mother. When I hope to receive her blessing and approbation to a measure that will secure my happiness on the solid basis of domestic endearment and confidence. Let me have it from your own hand that you are well and that I shall be remembered by you. May God bless you my dear parent and grant you health and tranquility, and make the evening of your life as happy as the morning has been prosperous.

Wishing it in sincerity I remain affectionately

Your Daughter

L. Preston

[ps] Susanna joins in love to the family.

The First Thirteen Years of Marriage (1804–1817)¹⁹

On May 13, 1804, Letitia Preston married John Floyd in Franklin County, Kentucky. According to Nicholas Floyd, family tradition holds that John and Letitia Floyd were married with both being dressed in black satin.²⁰ She was 24, he had just turned 20. She returned to Virginia, so that she could be near her immediate family, while he entered the University of Pennsylvania to complete his study of medicine. In addition to a brief period as a student at Dickinson College, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Floyd had earlier read medicine with a Dr. Ferguson in Louisville, so after marrying was able to graduate as a doctor in a relatively short time in 1806. We can infer from one of her letters that Letitia must have spent some time in Philadelphia while her husband was a student there, but we do not exactly know either when she was there or how much time she spent there.

After graduation, Dr. Floyd took up a short-lived medical practice in Lexington, Virginia, but soon moved to Christiansburg, Virginia, where, Charles Henry Ambler says, “he soon acquired a wide and favorable reputation as a physician.”²¹ We do not know exactly where the couple was living during the first six years of their marriage. However, we can get some notion from the birthplaces of Letitia’s children: Susanna Smith Floyd was born at Smithfield in March 1805; John Buchanan Floyd was born at Smithfield in March 1806; George Rogers Clark Floyd (who died in infancy) was born in Montgomery County in November 1807; William Preston Floyd was born in Christiansburg in January 1809; George Rogers Clark Floyd (the second child so-named) was born in Christiansburg in September 1810; and Benjamin Rush Floyd was born at Smithfield in December 1811. Dr. Floyd was appointed a justice of the peace of Montgomery County in June 1807.

Dr. Floyd was a surgeon in the Virginia Militia from 1807 to 1812, and was later appointed a surgeon with the rank of major to Lieutenant Colonel James McDowell’s Flying Camp²² during the War of 1812. John Floyd’s

political career began in 1814 with his election to the Virginia House of Delegates as a representative for Montgomery County. He served only one term in the state legislature, at the sessions of 1814 and 1815. It was during these years that Letitia must have grown accustomed to the prolonged absences of her husband on military or political duties which came to be a feature of their marriage until the final four years of her husband's life, when he finally gave up public office.

Ambler states that before Dr. Floyd entered the General Assembly in 1814, the Floyds moved to Thorn Spring Plantation in Montgomery County (in present-day Pulaski County), where he continued to practice for a number of years, and earned "a warm place in the hearts of the country folk who knew him." Nicholas Floyd notes:

Returning to reside in the home State of his ancestors the young couple made their home in Pulaski County on a beautiful estate known—or named by them—Thorn Spring.²³ Here Dr. Floyd soon won distinction in his profession to such an extent that within five years his home and all suitable buildings on the plantation were converted into an impromptu sanitarium to meet the requirements of patients from a distance, who needed and demanded protracted medical or surgical treatment. And here one of the two youngest sons of his Uncle Charles' numerous family (Nathaniel, ten years his junior), joined him to read medicine and assist in the dispensary of the sanitarium.²⁴

The land at Thorn Spring was a bequest to Letitia from her father. He left her 900 acres of land at Thorn Spring in the 1781 codicil to his will.²⁵ When the Floyds moved there in 1814 there was a residual 400 acres. Over half of Letitia's land had been sold nine years earlier on 5 November 1805 in a deed from "John Floyd and Letitia his wife late Letitia Preston of the County of Jefferson and Commonwealth of Kentucky" to Samuel Caddell for 500 acres "being the upper [northern] part of a larger tract of nine hundred acres."²⁶ Presumably, the Floyds sold a substantial portion of the Thorn Spring tract to finance the medical education of the doctor. Letitia Preston Floyd, the seventh child of Letitia and John Floyd, was born "near Blacksburg" in March 1814. Eliza Lavalette Floyd, their eighth child, was born at Thorn Spring in December 1816.²⁷ These dates suggest that the Floyds took up permanent residence at Thorn Spring in the latter part of 1814. This was to remain their home and base of operations for over twenty years. It was John Floyd's last home (for 23 years until his death), and Letitia's home until 1839.

After the death of their father at the relatively young age of 52, Letitia's brother, John Preston,²⁸ became the *de facto* male head of the Smithfield

Plantation. John Preston served in both the Virginia Senate and House of Delegates and as a major general in the Virginia militia. The following letter to him from his sister illustrates the frequent geographical separation of wives (such as Letitia herself) from husbands who took up military and political positions. Here is her 1807 letter which tells him of the death of his daughter in his absence:²⁹

My dear Brother

Oh how unable am I to fulfil the task imposed on me. I am requested by [y]our afflicted wife to tell you your precious little Mary died this morning about 3 o'clock. I cannot offer any consolation [for this] senslas [senseless] situation has convinced me nothing but time can quiet that agony of grief which as parents we feel in the death of promising and beloved children. Support it my dear Brother as becomes the father & Husband. Polly will delay the interment until your return which we expect on tomorrow evening. Sister Madison will be with her at Smithfield tomorrow evening. With the fullest sympathy for your misfortune.

I am Dr. Brother your affect[ionate and] honorable Sister L Floyd
Roanoke Sepr. 24th 1807.

The daughter, Mary, was only a few months old. The Polly referred to in the letter was Mary Radford Preston, the first wife of John Preston. She bore him seven children and died before reaching the age of 30. We do not know the exact significance of the letter being annotated as written from "Roanoke."

Despite John Floyd's medical practice and militia service, during the years 1807–1812 he and his wife were able to occasionally travel together. Thus in May 1811, he wrote to John Preston telling of their arrival in New York City.

Sir, We arrived here yesterday, all safe, except a good deal sea-sickness and flea bites but they were not the worst bites we have met with, but that's no surprise; I am however fearful that our expedition has not been or will be attended with such consequences as were to be [] as Letitia complains very much today particularly of her breast³⁰ and appressed respiration but we still hope for better prospects ... Laetitia desires her love to you and your lady and the rest of our friends in Richmond. I am sir, respectfully yours John Floyd.³¹

Strangely, while we have no picture of Letitia Floyd, we do know that one day at the age of 32 she was flea-bitten and suffered from "appressed respiration." In 1811, travel was an ordeal even for the wealthy.

Letitia Preston Floyd wrote the following letter from Christiansburg to her brother John Preston in Richmond on July 26, 1812. At this time, her brother had served for two years as the treasurer of Virginia, an office that he was to hold for a decade.³² In the letter, she inquires about medicines for which she had paid, and asked her brother to give a box of bones to Dr. Barton that her brother had apparently failed to transmit.

[torn] Previous to your leaving this County I had enclosed the check you furnished me to Mr. Cartson Radford with a list of the medicines wanted. As I have not heard from him since I feel apprehensive he has not received my letter. I am therefore compelled [torn] you about the matter and beg of [torn] to make some enquiry respecting it and [] know the result by the first opportunity [torn] is likewise a Letter here from Dr. Barton about his box of Bones which I pray you to convey him--Doctor Floyd has not yet returned but expected every hour--Brother Frank's family left this yesterday on their way to the Springs. Mother continues [failing?]. Nancy much as she was [torn] anxiety for your arrival now [torn] is advancing we hope nothing will prevent your comin[g] [torn] your family along. My love [torn] believe me dear Brother to be your affectionate Sister L Floyd.³³

As noted above, Letitia's husband Dr. John Floyd had received much of his medical training in Pennsylvania, and part of it as a student of the American founding father Dr. Benjamin Rush.³⁴ Rush was a Pennsylvania physician and chemistry professor, and a Revolutionary era patriot who signed the Declaration of Independence, served as a Pennsylvania delegate to the Second Continental Congress, and as Surgeon General for the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. Rush died on April 19, 1813.

Dr. Rush's namesake, Benjamin Rush Floyd, was the sixth child of John and Letitia Floyd, born on December 10, 1811, at Smithfield Plantation. Some time before the baby reached the age of two years, Mrs. Floyd had apparently communicated with Dr. Rush and told him that her young son was named after him. That knowledge prompted Rush to send a charming letter to his namesake. It is reproduced as the second letter below.³⁵ Later, three months after Dr. Rush died, Mrs. Floyd sent his letter, accompanied by a transmittal letter, to the editor Hezekiah Niles of *The Weekly Register*, a Baltimore-based weekly news magazine.³⁶ The editor published both letters. The transmittal letter is reproduced in full immediately below, followed by the reply from Dr. Benjamin Rush to his namesake.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE WEEKLY REGISTER. SIR—Convinced of the importance of the enclosed letter on the conduct and prospects of a beloved son, I thought the best deposit I could make of so rich a legacy for him, was to obtain a place for it in your *truly American* paper. To attempt to eulogize the character of its illustrious author, would be an undertaking far beyond my capacity. The simple story of gratitude may be told in a few plain words. To the friendship and skill of the immortal Doctor Rush, my little family owe the lives and health of both parents. An impulse of a mothers heart prompted me to name a very promising child after the idolized friend of my husband.—Hearing of this circumstance, that truly benevolent and great man addressed the subjoined letter to my son. “He thus, though dead, does still befriend.”

With much esteem, I am sir, your constant reader. LÆTITIA FLOYD.
Christiansburg, Va. July 7th, 1813.

Dr. Benjamin Rush’s reply:

PHILADELPHIA, APRIL 21, 1812
To Master Benjamin Rush Floyd

My dear name-sake!—Your father has conferred a name on you which one of the dictionaries says is “proverbially worthless.” But it is possible for you to remove the ideas that are naturally associated with it, by your good conduct, in which respect I hope you will be more successful than I have been. May you be kept by a kind Providence from all the errors and follies that characterized my youth, and from the controversies and bitter persecutions that attended my middle life, and may your old age be blessed as mine has hitherto been with good health, a faithful Wife, dutiful children, and a competency of the good things of this world. For the attainment of these blessings permit me to advise you to begin in childhood, to honor and obey your parents, to learn your catechism, and to commit passages in the Bible to memory. As you advance in life, go constantly to a place of worship; avoid bad company, and be very attentive to your studies.

The less time you spend in fishing and hunting and other youthful amusements, the better. In reviewing my life I have often felt pain in recollecting the many innocent birds I killed for mere sport, for I had flesh enough and of a better kind than theirs to eat at any time I pleased, both at home and at the country school at which I passed my youth. I have been ashamed likewise, in recollecting how much time

I wasted when a boy in playing cat and fives and steal-clothes, &c. all of which consumed so many precious hours that might have been more profitably employed in getting my lessons, or reading instructing books.—In middle life avoid propagating new and unpopular opinions; but if you are impelled by a sense of duty to do so, never reply to anything that may be said to your disadvantage upon the account of them, for scandal will die much sooner of itself than you can kill it. Live temperately, that is, eat sparingly of simple food, and avoid tasting spirituous liquors in every part of your life. To a conformity to this advice I owe much of my present health, and pleasure in business and study, and probably the prolongation of my life. Adieu! my dear boy. May God bless you, and make you a comfort to your parents and an ornament to society!

From your friend and name-sake,

BENJAMIN RUSH

We reproduce below the fourth and final letter from this period of Letitia's life, which she wrote on June 20, 1815, to her oldest brother, the treasurer of Virginia. The letter came from Solitude, a Preston family property that still stands much restored as the oldest remaining structure on the Virginia Tech campus.³⁷ In the letter, she asked her brother to assist in getting a pension for the old soldier Nicholas Reeder, to whom she had been extending credit to purchase grain.³⁸

Solitude June 20th 1815. Dear Brother Sometime in April last Nicholas Reeder got Dr. Floyd to draw an order on the Treasury for his pension with the intention of sending it down by Barger or Ballard. Neither of them going down as expected the order was retained. The Doctor expected to see you on your way down and give it to you then. Failing in these calculations Reeder has been much pushed for money and insists on my making the application to you to procure the pension for him and send it by some private conveyance. If it is not out of your line of business or duty to do so, it will confer a favor on me as well as the poor old soldier in as much as I have advanced money to him (to buy grain) on the Faith of his pension—Enclose the money to me in small notes by the earliest private opportunity and at his request pay yourself out of it the postage of the present letter—Your Family are all well and are at Smithfield to day with the intention of hearing Sam [Thichell] preach in Blacksburg. James Preston's Family have been very ill with a fever and the youngest I think is in eminent danger—Your Friends, except them are all well in this quarter—with a sincere wish for the preservation of your health I am your affet Sister L Floyd

The Congressional Years (1817–1829)

For a student of history, these sixteen years of Letitia's life are interesting because of her involvement through her husband at an extremely high level at the very center of American political life.

How much time did she spend in Washington City and how much at Thorn Spring? We cannot answer that question with any certainty, but from the available evidence it seems that she spent most of her time at home on the plantation while making only occasional visits to Washington City. Similarly, it seems that her husband made only occasional visits home. The Oregonian historian John Schroeder says that Floyd was living at Brown's Hotel in Washington in 1820.³⁹



Figure 1. The site of the Thorn Spring Plantation house located on private property in modern-day Pulaski County near the intersection of Old Oregon Trail (a modern name) and Newbern Road. All that remains today is bare soil and a few decrepit outbuildings. The Thorn Spring lies in the valley just beyond the buildings. Photograph by Jim Glanville, March 2014.



Figure 2. The Thorn Spring. When the authors visited in March 2014 the spring was producing an estimated 600–800 gallons per minute. Photograph by Jim Glanville, March 2014

In this section we present three of Letitia's letters: In 1821 she wrote to her sister-in-law, Caroline H. Preston, in Louisville, Kentucky. In 1822 she wrote to her brother John Preston at nearby Horseshoe Bottom Plantation,

which was situated at the present-day site of the Radford Arsenal, about six miles west of Smithfield and fifteen miles northeast of Thorn Spring. In 1829 she described her experience at the inauguration of President Andrew Jackson.

The first letter⁴⁰ went to her sister-in-law telling of the death of her sister-in-law's husband, William Preston, at Smithfield, and was written by Letitia from Thorn Spring on January 25, 1821. It is published here for the first time.

My dear Sister,

The painful task has devolved on me of communicating to you the afflicting intelligence of the death of your devoted Husband.⁴¹ This sad misfortune took place on Tuesday, the 24th at 15 minutes past nine o'clock at night. His entire confinement since the first of November terminated in a dropsy⁴² which closed his unparalleled sufferings without a struggle or groan. Never a sigh or word betrayed aught of diminished fortitude. He died as he lived, satisfied with the justice and goodness of his Creator. A friend to all honest men and the foe of scoundrels, his remains will be taken to Smithfield tomorrow and interred by the side of our Father, at his special request. An increasing wish to see you and Hancock [Caroline's seven year old son] occupied many of his agonized moments.

... For the sake of his children he directed me to enclose to you a list of those friends and neighbors that visited him constantly. He wishes them to keep it in mind. They were his friends and to show them respect accordingly. Oh my Sister what a shield and stay his precious family have lost. I hope God will enable them to bear this sad bereavement.

His beloved remains are still, in our house. Tomorrow they will be taken to Smithfield accompanied by many friends and on Sunday be committed to their parent earth.

Sister Madison begs her love to you and dear Daughters. Accept the same from

Your afflicted Sister
Letitia Floyd

The next of Letitia's letters (transcribed below) was written at Thorn Spring Plantation on September 15, 1822 and sent to her brother John Preston at his plantation at Horseshoe Bottom.⁴³ From this letter we learn the names of some of the Preston/Floyd family slaves (Emanuel, Lucius, Nancy, Cynthia, Amy, and Sally, and possibly Armistead). Such knowledge is rare. We also learn that Dr. Floyd was absent, with the slave Lucius, on a trip to Kentucky. In sum, the letter gives a brief glimpse of life on a busy, working plantation.

Dear Brother

Manuel arrived a few hour ago in verry low [state?]. I fear part recovery. My Husband left home this day two weeks with Colo. McDowile⁴⁴ for Kentucky.⁴⁵ I am sincerly sorry it has so happened I can [illegible] do little for your Slave but as the poor creature is so solicitous to stay I have thought it right to indulge him and will make an experiment of the remedies Dr. Floyd has treated dropsy so successfully with. In order to do so it is necessary to have a gallon of Hard Cider. There is no fruit in this neighborhood and I have directed Armistead to bring it up tomorrow with a handful of parsley roots and [toss] with a quantity of Horse radish roots. The drugs necessary I will furnish. I must state the fact of my present situation to you and let you know that I am unable to do for Emanuel what his low condition requires. Dr. Floyd took Lucius to Kentucky—Nancy is the only Servant I have whose time is much taken up with my poor little sick Baby⁴⁶ Cynthia has to milk, churn, wash, and feed my Beeves. Amy cooks—Manuel will want clean clothes every other day and his Seaton [?] and Blisters dressed twice a day and his drinks handed at least three times a night to him. If you will send his Aunt Sally to nurse I will give him all possible attention. If you have time to spare it will give me sincere pleasure to see you here. I have heard nothing from Jas. McDowell but dread the worst. Sister Madison is with me. Accept the affection of your Sister—Laetitia Floyd

We now turn to briefly discuss the congressional career of Letitia's husband, Dr. John Floyd.⁴⁷

John Floyd entered Congress in April 1817 as the representative of Virginia's fifth congressional district.⁴⁸ He went on to serve six consecutive two-year terms in Congress before declining to seek reelection in 1828.⁴⁹ Over the entire course of his congressional career, Floyd was a supporter of Andrew Jackson but in the end lost his hoped-for reward for his devotion. Ambler says that Floyd declined congressional reelection in 1828 with the expectation that he would be invited to join Jackson's cabinet,⁵⁰ or be called to "some higher place in the federal service."⁵¹ However, as we learn from Letitia's letter reprinted below, her husband was offered only the territorial governorship of Arkansas, which he declined. Floyd's disappointment in failing to secure a prominent position in the Jackson administration was one factor in soon making him a bitter opponent of the president. Historian Charles Pinnegar said that the election of Andrew Jackson as president in 1828 was "pivotal to Floyd's career" and that in its wake Floyd "began a five year tirade against the administration."⁵²

Schroeder has provided an assessment of John Floyd's twelve-year congressional career.⁵³ Oregon historians have been long interested in Floyd, who bears the sobriquet "Father of the Oregon Country," which originated in the title of Ambler's biography of Floyd. Schroeder wrote that in Congress, Floyd had honest intentions and liked tackling gigantic projects. Because he sincerely espoused consistent states rights principles, in domestic matters he often inflexibly adopted narrow and extreme positions. In contrast, in matters of foreign affairs, his zeal and imagination led him to advocate ambitious and bold measures. His commitment to expanding the United States to the Pacific was, says Schroeder, "a result of his aggressive personality and frontier heritage."

Genealogist Nicholas Floyd summed up Dr. Floyd's congressional career by saying, "During his term in Congress his brilliant speeches on the Northwest Boundary question aroused the entire country, the North as well as the South, to the importance of taking some decisive action looking to the safeguarding of our territorial rights in that distant region. And it is to his untiring efforts, largely if not chiefly, and to the tenacious and comprehensive grasp of his mind upon the subtle intricacies of the subject, that we are indebted for the fact that the American flag floats over every foot of the 'Oregon Territory.'"⁵⁴

Charles Henry Ambler characterized Dr. Floyd's congressional years as a period when he served as a "Spokesman of the Frontier." Ambler wrote that after the American Revolution the new nation centered its interest "in the West, in the Indian wars, our relations with Spain, and our efforts to acquire and settle new territory," and that "[a]s a spokesman of these interests, if for nothing else, Floyd deserves a place in history."⁵⁵

John Floyd had become a supporter of Andrew Jackson in 1818, when the general came under congressional censure for his unauthorized military incursion into Spanish Florida to attack Indian raiders based there. Floyd, no doubt recalling the death of his own father at Indian hands, became one of Jackson's staunchest defenders.⁵⁶ Both men wanted Spain to transfer Florida to the United States, a transfer that occurred through negotiations in 1819. A decade later, Floyd took a prominent part in Jackson's successful presidential election campaign, calling Jackson "the only man capable of bringing the government back to true states rights principles."⁵⁷

President Andrew Jackson was inaugurated for the first time on March 4, 1829 and that day held a reception at the White House. In the letter⁵⁸ reprinted below, sent from Washington City to Captain Benjamin Howard Peyton⁵⁹ and dated March 13, 1829, Letitia describes attending the reception and meeting the president. Later that day the reception brought a

surging crowd of rowdy Jackson supporters to the White House and events got somewhat out of hand.⁶⁰ While there, Letitia was impressed by “[s]o many courtesies—so many greedy applicants—so many beautiful women.”

Dear Howard—

I designed writing to you some days ago but from the hurry of trifles I have put it off until this time. I can only say that I wished every friend I have had been present at the Inauguration. Never could I have imagined such a spectacle. The interchange of feeling between the people and President surpassed description. The old Hero was appalled at the majesty of the multitude.

We followed in the train to the Presidents house. Gen. Jackson received me kindly—he has offered your Uncle the Government of Arkansas which Dr. Floyd has declined accepting.

Since I came here I became acquainted with Mr. Herst from Louisville, Mrs. M. Popes Lawyer—he tells me Maria refuses to confirm her Mothers sale. Judging you would be glad to get her share in the Tract I told Herst I knew a man that would give her two thousands dollars for her share. I now write to apprise you of the matter. You had best consider of it and I will see Herst this evening and converse with him so as to put the business on such a footing as to enable you to get the Land.

I have visited Mrs Jessup who received me like a sister. How much difficulty false friends occasion poor Marias tale to her notorious Uncle was likely to deprive me of the Friendship of the Clarks, a family I always loved and valued.

Our young Folks went up to see Mary Robinson in the Staunton Hospital. She was entirely composed—very pale and reduced—she was making hair Plaits of her fine long hair which had been cut off, her bosom was full of them. She fastened one on Letitia’s wrist and one on Susannas. They continue to wear them. Dr Boys says she will be restored in six months. Old Green had been painting—he knew George and enquired about his corn potatoes and walnuts. Wm Peyton has not been well he is going to his Farm near the Warm Springs. Your Uncle was at Court.

I wish sincerely you had been with us to witness the management of this place—So many courtesies—so many greedy applicants—and so many beautiful women.

General Jackson’s Cabinet does not give entire satisfaction to his Friends.

I rejoice my Husband has retired before another storm sets in.

Give my sincere love to cousin Agatha, and for yourself accept the best wishes of your

Affectionate Aunt

Letitia Floyd

During her husband's congressional years, Letitia managed and operated Thorn Spring Plantation and gave birth to six more children, while raising the four born earlier.

The Gubernatorial Years (1829–1834)

This section includes two of Letitia's letters. In 1830 she wrote to Sally Buchanan Preston, who three weeks earlier had married Letitia's son John Buchanan Floyd. In 1833 she wrote a remarkable letter to Dr. Floyd giving her highly unflattering opinion of President Andrew Jackson (in office 1829–1837). If Letitia Preston Floyd were to be known for nothing else, she should be known for this letter.

Letitia's involvement with American political life was particularly intense during this period when her husband was at the center of a political maelstrom revolving around slavery, the abolition of slavery, the question of states rights, and indeed the very basis of the American Union. During his years as governor, her husband irregularly kept a diary that Ambler published in 1918.⁶¹ The diary deals not only with the great issues Floyd was dealing with, but also with his wife Letitia and their domestic business.

After resigning from Congress and departing Washington a disappointed man, Dr. Floyd briefly practiced medicine in Montgomery County, Virginia.⁶² He used his spare time to "enjoy the love and confidence of a large family of children and a devoted wife and to retrieve his declining fortunes ... [and] his children shared with him the pleasures of the chase and the violin."⁶³ However, he would not be long back home at Thorn Spring and out of politics. In October 1829, a Virginia Constitutional Convention convened in Richmond; after much debate it approved a new constitution on January 15, 1830, by a vote of 55 to 40.⁶⁴ The delegates were a glittering array, including two former United States presidents (Madison and Monroe) and United States Chief Justice John Marshall. John Floyd was not among them—Montgomery County was represented by Gordon Cloyd.⁶⁵ The principal issue that occupied the constitutional debate was what categories of white men should be entitled to vote. The delegates divided broadly into two camps of eastern and western interests, with the westerners, who favored

rapid economic development of their region and a reduction of the influence of the slave-owning easterners, seeking to broaden the electorate to include all white men.⁶⁶ While this convention was still sitting, Virginians elected a new governor, still using the old election system whereby the legislature elected the governor.

On January 9, 1830, less than a year after he had left Congress, John Floyd was elected Governor of Virginia. The vote was 146 for Floyd to 66 for his opponent, Peter V. Daniel, of Stafford County. Ambler suggests⁶⁷ that Floyd was chosen because of his states rights position and because he was a westerner and thus someone who could speak for the entire state of Virginia in the impending Nullification Crisis.⁶⁸ Nullification was the political doctrine that a state was sovereign within its own borders and could within its borders declare null and void Acts of the federal government. The Nullification Crisis arose in 1829 in South Carolina as a protest against the 1828 federal tariff to protect northern industrial interests to the detriment of the South and was anonymously articulated by the sitting vice-president from South Carolina, John C. Calhoun. Inherent in the crisis were the issues of states rights and the abolition of slavery. The crisis was exacerbated by the failure of the newly elected President Andrew Jackson to relieve the tariff as his supporters had promised in 1828.

Floyd was unanimously reelected⁶⁹ on February 11, 1831, to a three-year term of office, but was thenceforward term-limited, under the provisions of the new, soon-to-be-ratified, Virginia Constitution. During Floyd's four years as governor, between March 4, 1830, and March 31, 1834, momentous American political developments occurred, and Floyd used his position as Governor of Virginia to play a major role in them. Because of his actions during his governorship, Charles Henry Ambler (by choosing the phrase for his 1918 book subtitle) labeled Dr. Floyd "The Apostle of Secession."

As was the case during her husband's congressional service in Washington City, Letitia remained at home at Thorn Spring during much of the time he was in Richmond—her letter that follows demonstrates this situation. She wrote it on June 27, 1830, about three months into her husband's first term of office as Virginia governor.⁷⁰ This hitherto unpublished letter was rediscovered in January 2014.⁷¹ The letter transcribed below was postmarked Newbern, Virginia, and addressed to Mrs. Sally B. Preston at Abingdon, Virginia. The letter is dated three weeks after Sally's marriage, on June 1, 1830, to her first cousin and the future Virginia governor John Buchanan Floyd in Washington County. Among other things, Letitia tells her daughter-in-law that the governor will be returning to Thorn Spring in two weeks from Richmond with some of their children. She also reminds her son that he

has promised her to get serious about his legal studies. The recipient of the letter, Sarah “Sally” Buchanan Preston (1802–1879) was born at the Preston Salt Works in Saltville, and was a daughter of Francis Preston (brother of Letitia Preston Floyd) and his wife Sarah Buchanan Campbell.

My dear Sally

Let me embrace you cordially as a child, as the beloved wife of my first-born son — In this union may a gracious God spare you the vicissitudes and trials of our short and feverish Life. May the affections of your Husband remain undiminished and the moral force of his character sustain you in the hour of adversity.

The allotted time for your undivided pleasures (a month) being nearly out. I wish now to make a claim on you both to return home. This I hope will not be delayed any longer. My Husband and children will return by the 10th of July at farthest and I wish you all to be with me to welcome that return. Maria and Ellen Preston I hope will accompany you and either or both of your cousins the Miss Thompsons. We can have a happy family party. I think Sister Preston is compensated now for all maternal anxieties by seeing two thirds of her Family happily and respectably married she deserves also the enjoyment of life and bestows in her children as I never knew a more vigilant [?] affectionate [faded or water damaged] mother. My brother is the most indulgent of fathers, and I trust amongst the happiest

Say to my dear John I hold his bond now for the executions of his promises to me, namely the pursuit of his profession he has been gratified in that possession of the object of his wishes. [H]e must now resume his studies an[d] confirm his views to that pursuit most industriously.

I am happy to tell you brother James wife is better that we are also well but my poor little Mary⁷² whose situation here gives me much anxiety.

Remember me sincerely to my kindred and say to sister Peggy Preston I will write to her Husband that I would do it often but my eyesight is getting so worn out that I have difficulty in writing legibly.

God bless you my dear Daughter is the unceasing wish of your ever affectionate mother

Letitia Floyd

From Dr. Floyd's diary we can see that Letitia did sometimes visit him in Richmond. For example, the diary records that the Floyds spent the first half of July 1831 traveling from Richmond to Thorn Spring, stopping various places en route, including at Smithfield Plantation, so she must have been in the capital in June 1831. Similarly, for November 4, 1831 the diary records "This day my wife arrived and her children, John and his wife, William, Lavalette, Nicketti, Coralie, and Woushippakniga."⁷³

Letitia's second letter from this period contained much political content, reflecting the times in which she lived. Momentous issues Dr. John Floyd dealt with while governor were the so-called rights of southern states, the institution of slavery, and the movement for its abolition.

There had been for many years antislavery sentiment in Virginia, and when Floyd took office in 1829 as governor, there were strong Virginia voices calling for slavery's abolition. The year 1830 has been described as "the high watermark of antislavery feeling in Virginia."⁷⁴ The following year came the Nat Turner insurrection⁷⁵ of August 1831 in Southampton County. During the insurrection, the insurgents killed over 50 white people, including many women and children in their beds. In suppressing the revolt, white patrols killed at least 100 blacks, including dozens who were not rebels. The amount of sheer slaughter on both sides helped account for the extreme reactions among whites, whether for abolition or for stricter regulation. In the wake of these events, Governor Floyd urged the December meeting of the General Assembly to revise "all the laws intended to preserve in due subordination the slave population of our State."⁷⁶ In early 1832 a great debate took place in the House of Delegates over slavery's future in Virginia. Subsequently, increasing resentment against radical abolitionist propaganda from the North shifted collective Virginia opinion from decrying slavery to defending it as a vital factor in the state's social order.

What, we wonder, did Letitia and John Floyd say to one another during these events? Elizabeth Varon, in her book describing the role of elite Virginia women in antebellum Virginia, says that some of these women adopted an antislavery stance motivated by "sympathy and even affection, for blacks, whom they understood to be the victims of brutal oppression." An overt, political manifestation of this opposition came in the form of petitions ("memorials") to the General Assembly urging it to take steps to abolish slavery. Notable among these memorials were those from Fluvanna and Augusta counties. The Augusta memorial came with 215 signatories and was docketed with the title "Memorial of the Ladies of Augusta to the Gen^l Assembly of Virginia Praying the adoption of some measure for the speedy extirpation of Slavery from the Commonwealth." In addition

to their memorials, Virginia women organized the Virginia Colonization Society, as a branch of the American Colonization Society, which had been organized in 1816 with the objective of promoting the emigration of free blacks to Africa. Varon's book mentions many Virginia women by name, but Letitia Preston Floyd is not among them. Varon observes, however, that "[Governor] Floyd seems to have grasped what many contemporary historians have overlooked—that the political battle over slavery in Virginia which Turner's rebellion sparked was a battle for the hearts and minds of white women as well as men." One wonders if perhaps the governor's grasp of that situation had something to do with his wife.⁷⁷

Nat Turner was executed on November 11, 1831, in Jerusalem, Virginia. In his diary on December 21, 1831, Floyd wrote: "Before I leave this government, I will have contrived to have a law passed gradually abolishing slavery in this State, or at all events to begin the work by prohibiting slavery on the west side of the Blue Ridge Mountains."⁷⁸ Of this plan, John Alexander Williams wrote: "With the governor's encouragement, a group of 'talented young westerners' led by his nephews William Ballard Preston and James McDowell moved for the gradual abolition of slavery in the commonwealth, provoking a famous debate that went on in the General Assembly for more than a week. Eventually the motion failed, and the group did not put forward Floyd's fallback position of abolishing slavery only in western Virginia."⁷⁹ This fallback position grew from Governor Floyd's view that western Virginia was well-deserving of economic development and his belief that slavery was a wasteful, inefficient labor system.

Floyd took the position that the slave insurrection was the direct consequence of provocation in Virginia by Northern abolitionists. He laid out his opinions in a well-known November 19, 1831, letter to South Carolina Governor James Hamilton in which he blamed the "spirit of insubordination" on the "Yankee population" in general and Yankee peddlers and traders in particular; these travelers shared Christianity with the slaves and taught them that all are born free and equal, and told the slaves (in Floyd's words) "that white people rebelled against England to obtain freedom, so have blacks a right to do." Floyd placed the blame for masterminding the plan on the church leaders, but he believed that all the discussions about freedom and equality led to the uprising.⁸⁰ Incidentally, Nat Turner was a lay minister/preacher who moved around his home area a good deal because his owner hired him out to neighboring plantations and towns to do carpentry work.

In the presidential election of 1832 in which Andrew Jackson was reelected with 55 percent of the popular vote, John Floyd was awarded the

eleven (out of a total of 219) electoral college votes of South Carolina. David Ericson comments that the South Carolina electors “wasted” their ballots on Floyd rather than vote to reelect Jackson.⁸¹

The Nullification Crisis had brought America to a critical point in late 1832 and the threat of civil war loomed. Floyd pointed out the threat of civil war in a message to the Virginia House of Delegates on December 13, 1832. He told the delegates “On you now depends in a high degree the future destiny of this republic. It is for you now to say whether the brand of civil war shall be thrown into the midst of these states—and our fireside *altars* bathed in blood—or whether, trusting to the wisdom and integrity of the people, you will appeal to the states of the union for the maintenance of that harmony, and those states rights in which they have an equal interest with ourselves, and avert if possible the impending calamity of civil war. That your deliberations upon this important subject may result in a friendly and final settlement of the limitations of power, in imparting new life and vigor to the constitution, and in restoring the lost harmony of the country, is the ardent and sincere wish of your fellow citizen. John Floyd.”⁸²

Arguably, the single most historically important letter written by Letitia Preston Floyd was the one that she wrote to her husband on New Year’s Day of 1833.⁸³ The letter is notable because she comments on the political scene of the day and describes President Andrew Jackson as a “bloody, bawdy, treacherous, leacherous villian.”⁸⁴ The letter was published by Ambler almost a hundred years ago and is reprinted here with annotations. These annotations demonstrate that Letitia, despite being sojourning at the relatively remote Thorn Spring Plantation, was both highly knowledgeable of and remarkably well-informed about current political events.⁸⁵ The letter reads:

God bless you my dear Floyd—a happy, happy New Year to you. What will be its close? Will the alarming state of our country break up the enjoyments of our plentiful, peaceful home? Merciful Father! Is there not honesty enough in our government to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s? I rejoice to see you hold out to the people. I can not be patient at the possibility of a gallant enlightened community being sacrificed to the passion of a bloody, bawdy, treacherous, leacherous villian. Oh my husband, how prophetic has your friend Col. John Williams⁸⁶ been as to yours and Calhoun’s⁸⁷ fate, I fear power will crush you both. There is an universal indignation amongst the women of the country at the President’s course “for letting the negroes loose upon us.” Do you think such a thing is possible? Ritchie⁸⁸ I observe has got his cue from the Albany, Regency.⁸⁹ You are to be sacrificed. Have you no personal

or political friend to aid you In these attacks? I advise you at once to discontinue your subscription to Niles Register,⁹⁰ upon the principle that I would not pay any man for abusing me. Surely it has come to Ritchie's and Crosswell⁹¹ to meet out the same justice. Crosswell has forwarded a statement of your dues to him which I will send by Nathan Hart⁹² to you, which please discharge and stop the Albany Argus. If money is to be given let it be to our own side. Duff Green has lately had his arm broken for the cause; strengthen it by giving him that which has pampered Ritchie and Crosswell.

Letitia's comment "Duff Green has lately had his arm broken for the cause" refers to an attack by South Carolina United States House of Representatives member James Blair. Green was the editor of the *United States Telegraph*, a newspaper that early strongly backed President Andrew Jackson.⁹³ Former president John Quincy Adams' diary for December 24, 1832, records "I met a man on the street, who accosted me and said there had been a battle. That General James Blair, a member of the House of Representatives had knocked down and very severely beaten Duff Green, Editor of the Telegraph and printer to Congress."⁹⁴ It is noteworthy, and indicative of her high acumen, that Letitia was fully acquainted on January 1, 1833 with Blair's attack on Green that had taken place only eight days earlier. She obviously read the newspapers closely and stayed on top of current events.

The months of January and February of 1833 were particularly dangerous for America, with the "specter of Disunion stalking the land."⁹⁵ The South Carolinians, meeting in recent convention, had declared for nullification effective February 1, 1833, and in response "the old hero" Andrew Jackson had reinforced the federal forts in Charleston harbor and dispatched his leading general there.⁹⁶

Calling attention to a premonition of events to come in 1861 at the beginning of the Civil War, Nicholas Floyd explained "During Mr. Floyd's incumbency as Governor of Virginia the trouble growing out of South Carolina's nullification of an unfair tariff act of the Congress, caused President Jackson to make a tentative threat of coercion of that State by military force. This was so violative of Governor Floyd's idea of State sovereignty and political comity, that he sternly gave the President, his personal friend, to understand that no armed Federal soldier would be permitted to encroach upon the territory of Virginia with hostile intent upon a sister State."⁹⁷

However, "[a]s the nullifiers continued to make their own military arrangements, Jackson fixed his attention on the impending conflict. In mid-January he fully expected to hear that civil war had broken out in South

Carolina, and he considered the possibility of arresting John Floyd the governor of Virginia should the passage of federal troops through Virginia be obstructed.”⁹⁸ In this heated climate, many leaders worked quietly toward a compromise and Henry Clay helped the passage of a lowered tariff. These actions allowed the crisis to pass, and thereby averted civil war for thirty years.

Political and Business Adviser (1834–1837)

On April 17, 1834, the *Richmond Whig* reported: “Yesterday Governor Floyd left for his residence in Montgomery carrying with him the hearty good wishes of the great bulk of this population for his happiness and prosperity.”⁹⁹ In retirement, writes Ambler, “his wife became his most trusted political and business adviser.”¹⁰⁰

Dr. Floyd suffered a stroke soon after he left office¹⁰¹ and was in poor health for the remaining years of his life. No doubt, even with her husband back home permanently at Thorn Spring Plantation, Letitia carried on running the place as she had been doing for many years. There were no longer any small children at the plantation, with Mary Lewis Mourning Floyd, her last child, having died in the summer of 1833 at the age of six. Letitia’s daughters Lavalette, aged 18 and unmarried, and Nicketti, aged 15 and unmarried, were probably resident at Thorn Spring in 1834. Perhaps her two youngest sons, George Rogers Clark Floyd (aged 24) and Benjamin Rush Floyd (aged 23), were there part of the time, although lured by the cotton boom they left Virginia in 1834 to go to Swan Lake, Arkansas.¹⁰² During his waning years, Letitia and the children would have no doubt taken good care of the now invalided Dr. Floyd. From Letitia’s letter written from Thorn Spring on January 25, 1821, and reprinted above, we know the names of some of the Thorn Spring slaves. There were apparently twelve of them in 1831.¹⁰³

The letter that we reprint in this section was written during a visit that Letitia and her husband made to New Orleans in early 1837.¹⁰⁴ The letter is dated January 30, 1837, and is addressed to her niece “Miss Sarah E. Lewis, Charlottesville, Albemarle, Virginia. To the care of Mr. John Cochran.”¹⁰⁵ The letter probably began “My Dear Niece,” but the corner of the letter where that would have been written is missing because someone cut the stamps off it. In the letter, speaking of her husband’s health, Letitia notes that Dr. Floyd looks as well as he has for the past two years and is able to walk on his own a short distance. Apparently they stayed for some months in New Orleans and Letitia told her niece that she would have been quite content with the place, except that her “poor old gentleman” had got the idea that he should travel to Cuba to help his recovery. Here is her 1837 letter:

[My dear?] Niece

I have waited so long for the arrival of Letitia & Lavalette, whom I expected would write to you that I am out of patience, and determined I would scrawl something myself that would give you the intelligence of our condition. In the first place I would state that we have been nearly two months at this place, that your Uncle has recruited¹⁰⁶ more than I ever expected he would. [H]e walks the distance of 300 yards without any assistance, has measurably recovered his flesh, and but for the stoop in his shoulders (produced I think by the leation [lesion] in his neck) looks as well as he has done for two years. We left our two oldest Daughters at Louisville on the first of December, they promising to join us by Christmas. We have had not a line or letter of news from them. John Floyd¹⁰⁷ and his family came as far as Arkansas with us, where they landed. I have heard but once from him. Saley [Sally] was sick then. Tom Taylor from South Carolina saw Wm Floyd and your brother William, three weeks ago in Montgomery, Alabama. They purpose exploring the upper part of the State of Mississippi and then coming down here. On arriving at the City of New Orleans we were invited [by, clipped] Preston¹⁰⁸ to locate ourselves at his residence, [across, clipped] from town. We have been at his house during the winter. I find his wife a generous warm hearted Lady with many pleasing qualities, no formality, no forged grandeur of wealth or Style — (bye the bye her style is better than the most of our Folk), but a constant desire to give happiness to all around her. I should have been entirely content here, but for the unfortunate notion, my poor old Gentleman took in his head of going to Cuba. This desire, has harassed me because the course our children have taken has put it out of my power to gratify him. I feel spared all the amendment his disease, can ever [abate?] has been effected here, as well as it could have been done at Havanna. We hope to be at the Thorn Spring in May, what route we shall take home I cannot now say.

Saw [?] for an account of this Country, nothing short of one of Col. Bentons most gorgeous smiles [swells?] could give you an idea of it. The river so vast, the soil so fertile, the climate so delicious, the people so numerous such variety of colors and nations, their great wealth, their incredible industry, their striking want of education and cultivation, their scathelessness [?], and want of humane feelings for each other.

[tear] [m]uch surprised at the over proportion of men to the females. The City abounds with well draped, fine looking gentlemen – very few ladies. The Theatres are very splendid and much resorted to. Nicketti has spent much of her time in the Town with Mrs Grayson, the wife

of John Breckinridge Grayson a kinsman of ours, who is a very elegant gentleman. Nicketti is greatly pleased with the society of the place. I have passed an anxious winter on account of my dear old Sisters health – I hear that [Mr] Madison has been quite unwell – I have not heard a wo[rd from] my Sister McDowell, what her determination is, as to her [tear] residence. I see by the papers that old Mrs Peyton is dead what an even tenor her long life has been – How unlike your Aunt Madison who has checquered hers by her warm sympathies for others. I wish my darling Sarah you would write every thing to me and direct [it] to Helena, Arkansas to the care of my son John. Kiss little John Cochran for me, tell Lynn I love her and her most excellent Husband very sincerely. God bless you. Ever your most affectionate Aunt
Letitia Floyd

Dr. John Floyd died on August 21, 1837, while visiting his daughter Letitia Preston Floyd Lewis at her home at Lynnside at Sweet Springs in Monroe County (now West Virginia). He is buried there.



Figure 3. The Lynnside House and property in Sweet Springs, Monroe County, West Virginia. Governor John Floyd died here at the home of his daughter Letitia Preston Floyd Lewis. Governor John Floyd and his wife Letitia Preston Floyd are buried in the cemetery at the snow line on the hill behind the house. Photograph by Jim Glanville, February 2014.



Figure 4. The graves of Governor John Floyd (bottom) and his wife Letitia Preston Floyd (top) at Lynnside. Photograph by Jim Glanville, August 2014.

Widowhood (1837–1852)

Letitia Preston Floyd remained at Thorn Spring Plantation for only a year or two after her husband died. On December 12, 1839, soon after Pulaski County had been established, she and six of her children appeared at the courthouse at Newbern and sold and signed over to David Cloyd for \$15,000 the Thorn Spring land “that was devised to the said Letitia Floyd by her father the late Colonel William Preston deceased.”¹⁰⁹ She then moved to Burke’s Garden in Tazewell County, to a log cabin built by Samuel Sayers situated on 800 acres.¹¹⁰ She called her new home “Cavan.” George Gose asserts the name derived from the numerous caves on the property, but this seems fanciful.¹¹¹ Certainly, the cabin was situated on a low cliff above a large spring near the junction of Blue Spring Creek and Rhudy Branch, and at a place strongly resembling the setting at Thorn Spring.



Figure 5. Burke’s Garden, Tazewell County, Virginia. This view is looking north from the Burke’s Garden Central Cemetery behind the modern-day Lutheran Church. The stream is Rhudy Branch. The authors judge that Letitia Floyd’s widowhood home was behind the big tree on the left, on the far bank of the branch, and overlooking a big spring. Photograph by Jim Glanville, June 2014.

Her move was to land already owned by her son George Rogers Clark Floyd, who operated a store in Burke’s Garden in conjunction with his brother, John Buchanan Floyd.¹¹² John Buchanan Floyd had been swept up in the excitement of the 1837–1838 cotton boom and had ventured to Arkansas to try to make his fortune. In the outcome, the cotton growing enterprise was a failure and he grew dangerously unwell. He therefore abandoned Arkansas and returned to his family at Burke’s Garden, where he spent a considerable time recuperating. After regaining his health, he once again took up the successful practice of law at Abingdon, Virginia.¹¹³

Ralph Mann has provided us with an excellent picture of what daily life was like in Burke’s Garden during this final period of Letitia Preston Floyd’s life.¹¹⁴ New information, presented in one the companion papers, however, reveals that she was actively promoting a Catholic settlement in Burke’s Garden and corresponding widely to make that happen. Mann’s work and the new information provide quite a good picture of what her life was like as a widow.

Squabbles about money occur in many, if not most, families. Here is a letter from Letitia Preston Floyd written on January 27, 1845, at her home at Cavan complaining to her attorney that money promised her and her late husband for an expensive gold watch was never paid.¹¹⁵

Cavan Burks Garden Jany 27 1845
Mr Samuel Pack

Dr [Dear] Sir

A few weeks since I received your Letter relative to the Suit, I wished you to bring in Montgomery for me I sent the Letter to my son Rush who failed to return it, which is the cause of my not answering it earlier. I now reply from memory of it contents – My mother was in possession of Bank stock many years previous to her death which took place in June 1823. She made a will giving the Bank Stock to her Daughter as all her other property, estimated So I heard at twenty five hundred dollars. Then desired her Sons, Francis & James to act as her Executor – they refused to do so The sisters wished Mrs Madison the eldest of the Sisters to administer on the Estate, for the purpose of distribution she did so and gave the security required. There was some money on Lands and Bonds, amongst the Bonds was one from Govr. Floyd for one hundred and fifty six dollars I stated to Judge McComas the incidents growing out of that Bond. Who told me a Physicians accounts were legal offsets for indebtedness. Dr. Floyd's accounts amounted to upwards of three hundred dollars which made him a Creditor rather than a Debtor. Mrs Madison in the year 1826 or 7 paid me ten dollars interest on my share of the Bank Stock for which I gave a receipt – I often applied to her for my portion of the Estate, which she withheld pleading the neglect of the parties to make settlements. In 1831 Govr. [James Patton] Preston paid me ten dollars more interest on the Bank Stock as Mrs Madison again for which I gave him a receipt. In 1834 Mrs Madison, Mrs M Dowell, Mr Nathaniel Hart, Col. John Preston and myself win[?] at Abingdon. Genl Frans Preston proposed buying out our Interest, all sold but my self refusing to do because I thought Genl. Preston had affirmed a right as an Executor of my Father transfer a sum of money due me as a Legatee of Col Prestons from the Loyal Company, which was not the full amount of my interest and that money was taken out of my Hands for the benefit of Mr Hart and Col. John Preston, who had received a larger portion of my Fathers Estate than I thought had fallen to my Share. Moreover Govr Floyd was not present, and although he never exercised any ownership of my Mothers Legacy I judged it proper to ask his advice in the matter. Things stood in this state until 1837 when Mrs Madison died, (I was

absent in New Orleans) after some little time I applied to Mr Howard Peyton a Legatee and Executor of his Grandmother. He said he was willing to do whatever Mr Ballard Preston, who was another Executor thought right. I applied to Mr Preston who declined doing any thing. I then desired Mr Piper who was in Richmond to look into the condition of the Bank stock belonging to my mother, he found it all transferred to Genl Frans Preston. Whereupon I requested Judge McComas to sue Mrs Madisons Heirs – he failed to do so. Now sir you will perceive my perfect right to this money – and I pray you to obtain it for me. As to the Dower in the Lot in Montgomery. My brother in law Col. George Floyd gave me as a bridal present a remarkably fine gold repeating and alarm watch for which he paid two hundred and fifty dollars. When Col. Wm C. Preston was about to make the Tour of Europe his Father purchased the watch and paid for it in [meaning with?] the corner Lot on the public Square in Christiansburg. My brother made a conveyance to Govr. Floyd whether my Husband ever had it recorded I know not, sometime afterward the Lot was purchased by the Court of Montgomery for the sum of three hundred Dollars which the Deputy Sheriff Mr Thomas Bowyer collected and never paid it over to either Dr Floyd or myself. These are the Facts – Majr. Henry Edmundson and Majr John Taylor are appraised of them, Should a Title be necessary for Forms sake Genl Frank Prestons Executor will make me one I desire this Claim because the Court of Montgomery hunted up an obsolete Law which was Dealt out to Govr. Floyd, to deprive him of the Sheriffalty, as he thought for States rights opinions, and afterwards gave the Sheriffalty to Col James Barnet and Majr Edmundson both of who had held Federal offices. Moreover Mr Hamilton Wade who had been absent from the County was never objected to as a Magistrate – I hope the Patton prop[erty] and McComas business may be pushed. I am getting very old and the delays of the Law press heavily on widowhood and old age.

Offer my kindest regards to Mrs Pack and for yourself Accept the Esteem of your Friend and Hbl [humble] Sert [servant]
Letitia Floyd

The “My Dear Rush” Letter

The “My Dear Rush” letter is a 31-page document written by Letitia Preston Floyd dated February 22, 1843, (see figures). The authors of this article discovered the *original* copy of this important document in January 2014 (after its being unknown for 171 years) in a storage box at the Smithfield Plantation.¹¹⁶ The letter, written in Letitia’s own hand, records many things that can be found nowhere else in the historical record. It is the

most significant of all the writings about the early history of the Patton and Preston families in Virginia, and is a crucial document for understanding the European settling of southwest Virginia.

Despite the fact that the original document has only very recently come to light, the language and content of the “My Dear Rush” letter have been long known to historians, because near contemporaneous copies of the original document were made independently by George Frederick Holmes,¹¹⁷ son-in-law of Letitia Preston Floyd, in May 1846, and James Cochran,¹¹⁸ grandson of Letitia’s sister Mary Preston Lewis, in October 1846. We discuss these copies below.



Figure 6. The date, place of writing, and opening salutation of the original “My Dear Rush” letter written by Letitia Floyd. This letter is held at Smithfield Plantation and was discovered there by the authors in January 2014. Many Internet sources say that this letter was written at “Cairo.” Seeing the original explains how this error of transcription could have originated. Photograph by Jim Glanville, January 2014.

This “My Dear Rush” letter accounts for almost all of Letitia Preston Floyd’s online presence. Copies of the letter (usually with unexplained origins) are held in various repositories, and copies of those copies made at unknown times by unknown persons show up with regularity in the online genealogical literature. Fortunately, having now found the long-lost original, we are spared the responsibility (which was our original plan) of making a study and analysis of all those unknown-origin copies

The “My Dear Rush” letter was written at the instigation of the well-known Wisconsin historian Lyman Draper. Draper was an active seeker after the history of the development of America, and that he would request Letitia’s account was natural. Benjamin Rush Floyd duly sent a copy of his mother’s letter to Draper, writing to the historian in October 1846 “I ho[pe] [to] heaven my Mothers narration reached you safely. I hope it will be of service.”¹¹⁹ However, Floyd’s transmittal must have miscarried, for there is no record of the letter ever reaching Draper.

However, Draper did get another copy of the “My Dear Rush” letter by a different route. On May 18, 1846, Letitia’s son-in-law George Frederick Holmes wrote to Draper as follows: “Before me is your letter to Mrs. Floyd of last July dated at Baltimore, which she has sent to me. She had requested

me to copy out for you this manuscript account of the Floyd and Preston families, which she had written out at your request for your forthcoming work on the Pioneers of the West.”¹²⁰ This copy of the letter did arrive. Holmes’ copy of the “My Dear Rush” letter has been preserved in Wisconsin since 1846. In her 1844 letter to Draper, reproduced below, she commented that she wrote her account after Benjamin Rush Floyd forwarded to her Draper’s letter seeking historical information.



Figure 7. The closing of the original “My Dear Rush” letter reads “Ever your affectionate Mother. Latitia Floyd.” The coin shows the scale of her signature. Photograph Jim Glanville, January 2014.



Figure 8 The recipient address of the original “My Dear Rush” letter. Lines one and two read “Rush Floyd Wythe CH [Courthouse].” The third line is illegible. Photograph Jim Glanville, January 2014.

George Frederick Holmes apparently retained a second copy of the “My Dear Rush” letter in his possession for over thirty-five years before sharing it with R. A. Brock, the editor of the *Richmond Standard* newspaper. On Saturday, June 5, 1880, Brock published, with a scattering of footnotes, the first of four installments of the letter under the title “Incidents of Border Life,” with the announcement “We are indebted to the kind attention of Professor George Frederick Holmes, LL.D, of the University of Virginia for

the following valuable, graphic, and highly interesting narrative.”¹²¹ These newspaper installments were doubtless the source of many of the copies of the “My Dear Rush” letter now archived.¹²²

The handwritten James C. Cochran copy of the “My Dear Rush” letter is held in Special Collections at Newman Library at Virginia Tech.¹²³ This letter was expertly transcribed and interpreted, and published in two parts in Volumes 1 and 2 of the *Smithfield Review* with the titles “Recollections of 18th Century Virginia Frontier Life by Letitia Preston Floyd” and “John Floyd, Kentucky Hero, and Three Generations of Floyds and Prestons of Virginia.”¹²⁴

The authors plan a future, definitive article about the “My Dear Rush” letter in its various versions and formats, which, along with discussion of the original, will include an analysis of the Holmes and Cochran copies. To that end, they have already prepared a three-column, side-by-side tabulation of the original and the Holmes and Cochran copies. That tabulation will allow the eventual publication of the authoritative transcription of the original “My Dear Rush” letter. As a summary, preliminary assessment, we note that while both the Holmes and Cochran copies have merit, neither is fully faithful to the original.

Virginia governor David Campbell (served 1837–1840) was another person approached by Lyman Draper in search of historical records. Campbell knew that Letitia was preparing her historical account for Draper and commented to Draper about Letitia: “The memoir prepared by Mrs. Floyd the daughter of Col Wm Preston will, I am sure be well done, as she is a well informed and highly intellectual woman. She can also tell you much about Colo John Floyd of Ken[tuck]y and the Lewis family.”¹²⁵ As a southwest Virginian (Abingdon) himself, Campbell must have been well acquainted with the Floyd family and in a good position to pass his judgment of Letitia.

As noted above, Lyman Draper finally received his copy of the “My Dear Rush” letter in 1846, three years after it had been written. Letitia had intended that Draper receive a copy two years earlier, and, as we learn from the following letter, from Letitia to Draper written in September 1844,¹²⁶ Letitia’s daughter Nicketti had made a fair copy for Draper because Nicketti wanted to keep her mother’s original letter for herself. We do not know what happened to the copy that Nicketti made for Draper, but we do know that “My Dear Rush” passed down from Nicketti through the family and eventually reached Smithfield Plantation many years later.

The letter below is noteworthy for Letitia’s telling of the loss of her father William Preston’s papers and her description of practicing her childhood reading skills among her father’s papers and correspondence.

To Mr. Lyman C. Draper Cavan, Burks Garden Sept. 30, 1844

[Page 1]

Your Letter of the 10th Instant was duly received. I [] [answering] it as early as I wished [] [sickness] of my son Colo. George [] Floyd from Virginia [] being [] of my [] I have determined to write to you. I regret much that I had not the satisfaction of meeting with you as you passed through Virginia. I would have detailed many Facts that would have shed light on the early settlement of the West as soon as my son [] Ben Rush Floyd sent your my Letter to him to me desiring whatever I might know as the above subject. I write now an account of my Family that of the many singular Incidents connected with the my family of western Virginia and as well as that of Kentucky. The [] to Mrs. [] Lewis her [] Floyd [] Kanawha to [] it to my son B. R. [] My daughter Mrs. Nicketti Buchanan Johnston of [] [county?] was very anxious to possess the original has transcribed a fair copy for you. I will write to Mrs. Lewis today on the subject. Rest assured [] the Papers as soon as Congress meets. I [] or against [] Colo. George W. Hopkins our Representative. I grieve that no great care was taken of my Fathers papers.

[Page 2]

His Letters were all Labeled and carefully put away in a Room attached to the Surveyors Office. After learning to read writing it was my constant habit to read those Letters. Fifty five years have obliterated much of their content from my memory. But the Letters of Colo. Thomas Lewis of Rockingham County, Genl. Andrew Lewis of Botetourt, Colo. William Christian, Colo. William Fleming of the same County Colo. John Floyd of Kentucky are yet vivid in my recollection. In the year 1806 Gen. John Preston gave Mr. Nathaniel Hart of Woodford County Kentucky the greater part perhaps all Colo. Floyd's Letters to my Father. My son George who passed through Kentucky this Autumn has advised me of an incident in Colo. Floyd's life related to him by Colo. George Thompson of Lexington who had it I believe from a man by the name of [Hempenstal] [near Shelbyville?] who was an actor in the affairs which will display the unequalled personal courage and devoted friendship of Colo. Floyd. The early death of this chivalrous, noble man [] to be an irreparable misfortune to his wife and sons and great loss to the opening West. His active and generous life secured the opulent fortunes of the Brown, Breckinridge, and Howard families as well as those of my Father when I know that all his great services to his Friends and Country were forgotten and that no remembrance was ever made to his Posterity by them one or other. I am almost obliged to conclude that it is the height of [] immediately for either.

[Page 3]

Friends or Country — I have promised Mr. James A. Lewis to give him an account of the Lewis's. If I have I will do so. Mr. Robert Wickliffe of Lexington Ky has probably the papers of Mr. John Howard his Father-in-law. Mr. Howard married my Fathers youngest sister and survived Colo. Preston fifty years. His second daughter Mrs. Mary Parker is yet living in Lexington her residence for half a century in Kentucky would furnish you with much original matter. Mr. Nathaniel Hart's [] property may have Colo. Floyd's Letters. I know Colo. George Thompson will aid you to obtain a view of them. Colo. [Byers?] met with the Messrs. Browns of Frankfort the sons of the [Horeljohns?] who was accurate in preserving Papers [] might [] much from them. Genl. William Clarks [] of [] Lewis The [] Croghan their [] whose Fathers service all the Wars of the West and [] might furnish you with much [] Fact. Many years ago a Gentleman by the name of Kercheval from Berkly County in this State called on me for more information relative to the settlement of Western Virginia. I referred him to my sister [Madison] who was living, paid my subscription to his intended work which has never appeared. I will be able to get an exact account of the Battle of Point Pleasant on the Ohio in 1774 from the memoranda of Capt. James Newell who was in the Battle. This I will furnish you with. Pardon this long Letter. Old age makes me prolix. Should I meet with anything of Interest to you I will [] it. Wishing you much success in your arduous undertaking.

I am Sir Your very Obt. Set.
Laetitia Floyd"

Potential Sources for Letitia Preston Floyd Letters

During the preparation of this article, its authors investigated where they might find sources of letters written by Letitia Preston Floyd, with the idea that they would use far more than the fourteen letters that they have included here. As the work developed, it became clear that a full investigation of the extant letters of Letitia Preston Floyd would carry their work far beyond the planned compass of a single introductory biographical article about her. Therefore, this concluding section summarizes their preliminary investigations and points to some of the archives that will likely reward future visits. In effect, this section is a set of recommendations for future work.

In the 1998 Volume 2 of the *Smithfield Review*, Laura Katz Smith surveyed libraries that hold Preston family manuscript collections, and her work remains the first place to look for family sources, including materials on or by Letitia. The information below in this section supplements but not

supplants Smith's catalog.¹²⁷ However, in the intervening 16 years, there has been a dramatic growth in the availability of archival records via direct online access.

There are two specific potentially useful collections at the Library of Virginia. The first is "The Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, 1830–1834,"¹²⁸ from which biographical information about the governor was cited above. The second collection is the Johnston Family Papers, 1779–1891.¹²⁹ This latter collection includes John Floyd's diary published by Ambler and frequently cited in this article, as well as some letters of Letitia Preston Floyd.

There are six potentially useful collections at the University of Virginia—five at the Alderman Library in Charlottesville and one at the University of Virginia's College at Wise. In Charlottesville are first the papers of Joseph E. Johnston and George Frederick Holmes.¹³⁰ The George Frederick Holmes papers include letters to his mother-in-law, Letitia Preston Floyd. Second, in Charlottesville is the book *Papers of James Lewis Woodville*, which includes letters from Mrs. Letitia Floyd of Newbern, Pulaski County, Virginia.¹³¹ Third, at Charlottesville is the correspondence of Leonidas Baugh of Abingdon, one of whose correspondents was Mrs. Letitia Floyd.¹³² The fourth potentially useful collection in Charlottesville is the papers of the Preston and related Radford families (1726–1895) which include letters of Letitia Preston Floyd.¹³³ The fifth potentially useful collection in Charlottesville is the papers of Charles Carter Lee and the Lee family (1768–1931), which includes various materials related to Jacksonian era politics as well as some correspondence of Letitia Preston Floyd.¹³⁴

At the University of Virginia's College at Wise are the papers of Daniel Trigg and John B. Floyd.¹³⁵ The Floyd papers relate to his public service and contain correspondence between the women of the Floyd and Johnston families. We know from the footnotes in Ralph Mann's paper "Mountains, Land, and Kin Networks: Burkes Garden, Virginia, in the 1840s and 1850s," cited above, that these papers include many letters of Letitia Preston Floyd. However, when Mann was engaged in his studies he made hand written notes, rather than making actual copies of Letitia's letters.¹³⁶

At Duke University are the John Warfield Johnston Papers (1778–1890).¹³⁷ This collection includes the papers of Johnston and his wife Nicketti Virginia [*sic*] (Floyd) Johnston, of her parents, Dr. John Floyd and his wife Letitia Preston Floyd, and of other members of the Preston family. It also contains the papers of Francis Smith Preston (1765–1835) and his sister, Letitia Preston Floyd, concerning pioneer life, plantation management, politics in Virginia and the nation, and family and personal affairs, including Roman Catholicism.

At the College of William and Mary are the George Frederick Holmes papers.¹³⁸ These include papers from the years 1790–1822 relating to the Floyd and Preston families.

An interesting recent development has been the discovery of chancery case records relating to Mrs. Floyd in Christiansburg, Virginia. These records have been found because of the project currently underway in the Circuit Court archives maintained by Montgomery County Clerk Erica Williams.¹³⁹ For example, one of the civil suits from the courthouse archives dating from 1848 pitted Letitia Floyd against the executors of the estate of Elizabeth Madison (Letitia's deceased oldest sister). Letitia claimed that the executors had denied her a proper share of their mother's legacy. The judge agreed, and awarded Letitia \$218.38 plus interest. The 1845 letter from Letitia Floyd to her attorney Samuel Pack, transcribed above, was drawn from this chancery case.¹⁴⁰

Finally, deserving of further investigation are the files at Smithfield Plantation, which have produced two of the letters published in this article.

In Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that Letitia Preston Floyd of Smithfield, Thorn Spring, and Burke's Garden, was a remarkable woman whom history has badly neglected. Her letters reproduced here give the interested reader an opportunity to form his or her own opinion about Letitia from her writings.

She was an interesting and highly intelligent lady who is surprisingly absent from any of the feminist literature, which has seen a revival of interest among historians in the past two decades. She perhaps deserves a full biography, or at least a Master's thesis. In any event, she is worth studying not only in her own right, but also for the insight such studies may provide to the Jacksonian period of American history.

Sources identified here suggest a rich trove of Letitia's correspondence may remain to be discovered.

Acknowledgments

We thank Wirt Wills for his encouragement and for insisting that we examine the files at Smithfield Plantation. We thank Father Harry Winter for his collaboration and especially for providing the letter from his files. We thank Cori Burner for transcriptions. We thank Beth Pike Clemmons of Tazewell for guiding us on a tour of Burke's Garden, and Ray Scott of Blacksburg who was our driver when we visited the sites of Letitia's homes at Thorn Spring and Burke's Garden. We thank Mr. Sam Gregory of Pulaski County. We thank archivist Sarah Nerney. We thank the anonymous

referees whose comments strengthened our work and focused our attention. We thank Hugh Campbell for his gracious editorship. JG, as always, thanks his wife Deena Flinchum.

Endnotes

1. Letitia is the most common form. Variants are Laetitia, Lætitia, and even Latitia.
2. Jim Glanville and Ryan Mays, "The Mysterious Origins of James Patton, Part 1," *Smithfield Review* 15 (2011), 35–64. Quoting the prominent Preston family genealogist Preston Davie, the present authors criticized Letitia Preston Floyd's writings harshly. This article presents a reconsidered and different view of this remarkable woman.
3. Internet searches for "Letitia Preston Floyd" (made on October 19, 2014) produced 4,620 initial hits, a number which quickly reduced to a mere 45 independent hits when examined. The most prominent search result is to her "Memoirs" which is a misnomer for her lengthy 1843 letter addressed to "My Dear Rush," and that is discussed in detail in this article. Almost one half of the 45 hits go to genealogical sources. She has a very slight Internet presence.
4. John Frederick Dorman, *The Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield in Virginia* (Louisville, Ky.: The Filson Club, 1982), 68–70.
5. Sally C. P. McDowell and John Miller, *If You Love That Lady Don't Marry Her: The Courtship Letters of Sally McDowell and John Miller, 1854–1856*, ed. Thomas E. Buckley (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 792. The authors thank David McKissack for calling these Sally McDowell quotes to their attention. Sally McDowell was a great-granddaughter of William and Susanna Preston of Smithfield, a granddaughter of Francis and Sarah Campbell Preston Campbell of the Saltworks in Washington County, and a daughter of their daughter Susanna Smith Preston and her husband and cousin, Governor James McDowell. In 1841, Sally McDowell, at the age of 21, married the Maryland Congressman Francis Thomas, who was twice her age. The marriage was bitter, produced no children, and ended five years later in acrimony and divorce (Dorman, *The Prestons*, 228–29). A decade later, the divorcee entered into a three-year courtship by correspondence with the Presbyterian minister John Miller, whom she eventually married and with whom she had two daughters. More than 500 letters of that courtship correspondence survive.
6. Edward A. Pollard, *Lee and His Lieutenants: Comprising the Early Life, Public Services, and Campaigns of General Robert E. Lee and His Companions in Arms, with a Record of Their Campaigns and Heroic Deeds* (New York: E. B. Treat & Co., 1867), 785.
7. Pulaski County was formed in 1839 from parts of Montgomery and Wythe counties.
8. Dorman, *The Prestons*, 68–70. She died at Cavan in Burke's Garden (Tazewell County), Virginia on December 12, 1852, and is buried beside her husband in the cemetery on the hill at Lynnside (the home of her daughter Letitia Floyd Lewis), at Sweet Springs in present-day Monroe County, West Virginia. John Floyd Jr. (1783–1837) married Letitia Preston in 1804 in Franklin County, Kentucky. He earned a medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1806, served in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1812 to 1817, in the United States Congress from 1817 to 1829, and was a two-term Virginia Governor from 1830–1834. See also Roy W. Kanode, *Christiansburg, Virginia: Small Town America at Its Finest* (Charlotte, N.C.: Jostens Printers, 2008, second edition), 136.
9. The quote comes from William W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816–1836* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), vii.
10. Patricia Givens Johnson, *William Preston and the Allegheny Patriots* (Blacksburg, Va.: Walpa Publishing, 1976). The final years of William Preston's life battling Tories and making a not very successful military expedition to North Carolina are told in the final chapters of Johnson's book. Richard Osborn wrote of this period "Preston's efforts to support Virginia's cause during the rest of the Revolution were an embarrassment to him." Richard Charles Osborn, "William Preston of Virginia, 1727–1783: The Making of a Frontier Elite" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 1990), 352.

11. Dorman, *The Prestons*, 48–52.
12. Jim Glanville and Hubert Gilliam, “To Refrain from Drinking Ardent Spirits: The Bet Between Peter Byrns and Francis Preston,” *Smithfield Review* 11 (2007), 17–28.
13. John Preston, “Some Letters of John Preston,” *William and Mary Quarterly, Second Series* 1 (1921), 46, n3.
14. The single record notes the purchase of a quarter of a yard of muslin cloth for nine-year-old Letitia by her mother. Debit account of “Mrs. Susannah Preston To Mr. Henry Bratton [probably a merchant]” dated 1798–1799. Under “3 November” [1798?] is listed “To ¼ yards muslin pr. Daughter L[etitia]. £0-15-0 [15 shillings].” Preston Family Papers of Virginia, folder 2081, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.
15. Dorman, *The Prestons*, 61–62.
16. John Floyd and Neal O. Hammon, *John Floyd: The Life and Letters of a Frontier Surveyor* (Louisville, Ky.: Butler Books, 2013). John Floyd the surveyor (the father of Letitia Preston’s husband-to-be) was a great admirer and friend of William Preston. Hammon reprints in his book almost ninety letters written by Floyd, fifty-one of which were addressed to Preston at Smithfield Plantation. A positive review of this book is found in: Jim Glanville, “Montgomery County and the Land Rush for Virginia’s West,” *Christiansburg News-Messenger*, Saturday, January 4, 2014, pp. 4 and 7, online at <http://goo.gl/ZpyJaZ>.
17. Letitia Preston, “Letter to her Mother Susanna Preston from Mr. Hart’s, [Franklin Co., Kentucky] November 30, 1803.” Typed transcript of a letter from Letitia Preston to her mother Susanna. Preston Family Papers of Virginia, folder 2290, Virginia Historical Society, “Copied from original in possession of Miss E. M. Peyton, Asheville, N.C.” This letter is here published for the first time.
18. The two underscores in this letter are in the typed transcript.
19. The biographical information in this section derives from: Charles Henry Ambler, *The Life and Diary of John Floyd, Governor of Virginia, An Apostle of Secession, and the Father of the Oregon Country* (Richmond: Richmond Press for the Author, 1918); Dorman, *The Prestons*, 1982; Library of Virginia “Biographical information for John Floyd,” in “A Guide to the Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, 1830–1834,” online at www.lib.virginia.edu/vivaaxtf/view?docId=lva/vi01952.xml; The Congressional Bioguide for John Floyd, online at United States Congress, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=F000221>.
20. Nicholas Jackson Floyd, *Biographical Genealogies of the Virginia-Kentucky Floyd Families* (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1912), 76.
21. Ambler, *Life and Diary*, 32.
22. Flying camps as used in the War of 1812 were mobile military units, centrally located, and capable of rapid deployment as needed either north or south to contest the British on the Chesapeake Bay. McDowell lived in Rockbridge County.
23. Conway H. Smith, *The Land That Is Pulaski County* (Pulaski, Va.: Pulaski County Library Board, 1981), says that John Floyd kept bears chained to trees at Thorn Spring, but we have been unable to document that assertion from any primary source.
24. Floyd, *Biographical Genealogies*, 76.
25. Osborn, “William Preston of Virginia,” 473.
26. Montgomery County Deed Book D: 283–284, Montgomery County courthouse, Christiansburg, Virginia, microfilm at Library of Virginia. John and Letitia Floyd sold the 500 acres to Samuel Caddall for \$2,166.67.
27. Dorman, *The Prestons*, 297.
28. Dorman, *The Prestons*, 48–52.
29. Letitia Preston Floyd, “Letter to her Brother John Preston, September 24, 1807 from Roanoke.” Preston Family Papers of Virginia, folder 2437, Virginia Historical Society.
30. George Rogers Clark Floyd had been born September, 13, 1810, in Christiansburg, so his mother may have been breast-feeding him during her New York trip.

31. Doctor John Floyd to General John Preston, May 27, 1811. Endorsed "Doct. John Floyd May 1811 [to] Majr. Genl. John Preston Treasurer of Virginia city of Richmond Mail [postal stamp] New York 27 May." Preston Family Papers of Virginia, folder 2693, Virginia Historical Society.
32. Dorman, *The Prestons*, 51.
33. Letitia Preston Floyd to General John Preston, July 26, 1812. Endorsed "Laetitia Flo[yd] July 1812 [to] Montgomery [illegible] 26th July General John Preston Richmond Virginia Mail." Preston Family Papers of Virginia, folder 2781, Virginia Historical Society.
34. Abundant online information about Benjamin Rush is readily available. See for example his summary biography at his alma mater Dickinson College at <http://www.archives.dickenson.edu/people/benjamin-rush-1745-1813>.
35. Benjamin Rush, "My Dear Name-sake: Letter to Benjamin Rush Floyd, April 21, 1812," *The Weekly Register* [Niles], Baltimore, Saturday July 24, 1813, 329.
36. Letitia Floyd, "Letter to the Editor of *The Weekly Register*, July 7, 1813," written from Christiansburg, *The Weekly Register* [Niles], Baltimore, Saturday 24 July 1813, 329. See also Jim Glanville, "The Founding Father and the Christiansburg Baby," *Christiansburg News-Messenger*, Wednesday February 26, 2014, p. 4, online at <http://goo.gl/v1upbl>. The article points out that because of its reference to the game "cat and fives" the letter from Benjamin Rush has been widely noted by baseball historians, though not by Virginia historians.
37. See www.vt.edu/about/buildings/Solitude.html. Solitude was restored in 2011 to its mid-to-late 19th century appearance.
38. Letitia Preston Floyd to General John Preston, June 20, 1815. Endorsed "Laetitia Floyd June 1815 and, I draw an order on Garnett Peyton for the money. Montgomery [illegible] June 18th Genl. John Preston Richmond Va. Mail" Preston Family Papers of Virginia, folder 2989, Virginia Historical Society.
39. John H. Schroeder, "Rep. John Floyd, 1817–1829: Harbinger of Oregon Territory," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 70 (1969), 333–346. The quotation is on page 339. Brown's Hotel was one of Washington's famous old-time hotels and located on Pennsylvania Avenue. A companion article in this issue argues that the Floyd family involvement with Catholicism began about the time that Dr. Floyd entered Congress; his young sons Benjamin Rush Floyd and George Rogers Clark Floyd accompanied him to Washington City and attended Georgetown Catholic School. See "Governor John Floyd, Letitia Preston Floyd, and the Catholic Church," pp.121-136.
40. Reprinted from a copy of a letter in the files of Harry Winter (author of "Letitia Preston Floyd: Pioneer Catholic Feminist," pp. 137–145 in this issue). Winter obtained his copy of the letter from Mary Tabb Johnston, the author of the unpublished article "Smithfield Plantation House, Showplace of Montgomery County," during a visit to Smithfield Plantation in the late 1980s. The underscores in the letter are in the typed transcript.
41. William Preston (1770–1821) died while on a visit to Smithfield. He fought at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794 and in the defense of Norfolk against the British in 1812, briefly held the office of Surveyor of Montgomery County, and settled in Louisville in 1814. Caroline lived on as a widow for 26 years. Dorman, *The Prestons*, 57–61.
42. Dropsy refers to a swelling in the tissue or a body cavity, today called edema. As a cause of death in the early nineteenth century it probably referred to kidney or heart disease.
43. Letitia Floyd to General John Preston, 15 September 1822. The letter is endorsed "Laetitia Floyd Septbr 15th 1822 to General John Preston, Horseshoe Bottom." Preston Family Papers of Virginia, folder 3427, Virginia Historical Society.
44. This was presumably James McDowell of Rockbridge County, husband of Letitia's sister Sarah (aka Sally). McDowell was a justice of the peace, briefly represented Rockbridge County in the House of Delegates, was a trustee of Washington College, and colonel of the 5th Virginia Militia Regiment in 1814. He and his wife lived near present-day Lexington. Dorman, *The Prestons*, 56–57.
45. The Kentucky trip was perhaps to visit Dr. Floyd's older brother George Rogers Clark Floyd (1781–1823) who lived at Floyd's Station, now part of metropolitan Louisville. See Kathleen

- Jennings, *Louisville's First Families: A Series of Genealogical Sketches* (Louisville, Ky.: The Standard Printing Co., 1920), 162.
46. The baby was Coraly (Coralee) Patton Floyd who was born on January 22, 1822 and died on July 14, 1833. Dorman, *The Prestons*, 70.
 47. It lies beyond the scope of this article to attempt any serious assessment of the congressional and gubernatorial career of John Floyd, or to summarize his complex and evolving views on topics such as the settlement of Oregon, states rights, and slavery. However, we do present some “snapshots” taken from source quotations. Given that Floyd’s only biography was published more than a century ago, a new, modern biography of him is badly needed.
 48. Floyd was elected as a Republican to the 15th through 17th Congresses (March 1817–March 1823), as a Democratic-Republican to the 18th Congress (March 1823–March 1825), and as a Jacksonian to the 19th and 20th Congresses (March 1825–March 1829). He did not seek reelection in 1828. *Congressional Bioguide*.
 49. His home in the contemporary congressional documents was listed as Newbern, a village in Montgomery County that in 1839 became the first seat of the newly-created Pulaski County. The 1830 letter from Letitia to her daughter-in-law Sally was postmarked Newbern.
 50. Ambler, *Life and Diary*, 79.
 51. Ambler, *Life and Diary*, 97.
 52. Charles Pinnegar, *Virginia and State Rights, 1750–1861: The Genesis and Promotion of a Doctrine* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 2009), 215–16.
 53. Schroeder, “Rep. John Floyd, 1817–1829.”
 54. Floyd, *Biographical Genealogies*, 76. Nicholas Floyd was enthusiastic but “every foot” is inaccurate. The Oregon territory (“country”) was a huge swath of land, and Americans claimed it as far north as 54 degrees 40 minutes. After a crisis provoked by the United States in 1846, Great Britain and the U.S. divided the large area by continuing the existing Canadian/United States border straight west to the Pacific Ocean. A lot of the original Oregon territory is today in Canada.
 55. Ambler, *Life and Diary*, 33.
 56. J. M. Batten, “Governor John Floyd,” *The John P. Branch Historical Papers of Randolph-Macon College* 4 (1913), 5–49. See page 13.
 57. Batten, “Governor John Floyd,” 23.
 58. Letitia Preston Floyd, “Mrs. Letitia Floyd to Captain Benjamin Howard Peyton,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 22 (1913), 30–31.
 59. Howard Peyton was the grandson of Letitia’s sister Elizabeth Preston Madison. Dorman, *The Prestons*, 188.
 60. David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, “‘Not a Ragged Mob’: The Inauguration of 1829,” The White House Historical Association, online at www.whitehousehistory.org/history/documents/White-House-History-15-Heidler-Inauguration-1829.pdf.
 61. Ambler, *Life and Diary*.
 62. Dorman, *The Prestons*, 69.
 63. Ambler, *Life and Diary*, 81.
 64. The electorate that ratified the new constitution consisted of only Virginia freeholders, householders, and leaseholders. The vote in April 1830 was 26,055 in favor and 15,563 against.
 65. Hugh Grigsby, *The Virginia Convention of 1829–1830* (Richmond: MacFarlane and Fergusson, 1854).
 66. Louis H. Manarin, “[The Virginia] Constitution of 1830.” *The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, online at www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/1546 and Christopher M. Curtis, “Reconsidering Suffrage Reform in the 1829–1830 Virginia Constitutional Convention,” *Journal of Southern History*, 74 (2008), 89–124.
 67. Ambler, *Life and Diary*, 86.
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68. See: Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, and David F. Ericson, "The Nullification Crisis, American Republicanism, and the Force Bill Debate," *Journal of Southern History* 61 (1995), 249–70. The text of the South Carolina Ordinance of Nullification of November 24, 1832, titled "An ordinance to nullify certain acts of the Congress of the United States, purporting to be laws laying duties and imposts on the importation of foreign commodities," is online at http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/ordnull.asp. For a useful overview of the Nullification Crisis for the general reader see Wikipedia "The Nullification Crisis," online at www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nullification_Crisis; this extensive article includes many lengthy quotes from professional historians of the Crisis.
69. Ambler, *Life and Diary*, 93.
70. Letitia Preston Floyd. Letter from Thorn Spring on June 27, 1830, to Sally Buchanan Campbell Preston at Abingdon. Original, handwritten letter on file at Smithfield Plantation. Transcribed by the authors. This letter was one of a number of important documents discovered in a box labeled "Misc Important Archives" in January 2014. See Jim Glanville and Ryan Mays, "The Misc: Important Archives Box at Smithfield Plantation: Full Finding Aid and Complete List of Box Contents," prepared on March 22, 2014, and on file at Smithfield Plantation.
71. As a result of persistent inquiries by the authors at the Smithfield Plantation. See Jim Glanville and Ryan Mays, "An Important Smithfield Plantation Archive," *Historic Smithfield Newsletter*, Spring 2014, online at <http://goo.gl/TM9YWq>. This newsletter item tells how the authors tracked down this letter and found, in the same box, the very important 1843 letter (discussed later in this article) in which Letitia recounted the early history of Southwest Virginia.
72. Mary Lewis Mourning Floyd (1827–1833), who died of scarlet fever at Thorn Spring, was the youngest of Letitia's children.
73. Nicketti is often given as Nickette, for example by Dorman. "Woushippakniga" was apparently a nickname for George Rogers Clark Floyd. Its origin is obscure, though possibly related to a supposed American Indian forebear in the Floyd family.
74. Harrison J. Hancock, "Life and Thought in a Student Organization of the Old South," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 47 (1939), 315–29.
75. The insurrection was "the most significant event of [Dr. Floyd's] years of public service," according to Henry I. Tragle, *The Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831: A Compilation of Source Material* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1971), 250. Tragle devotes an entire chapter (pp. 250–76) to the writings of John Floyd about Nat Turner.
76. Hancock, "Life and Thought in a Student Organization of the Old South," quote at page 233.
77. Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 41–70, quotes at 43, 48. A transcription of the memorial from "Females of the County of Augusta" to the General Assembly, January 19, 1832, is online at http://www.virginiamemory.com/docs/AugustaPet_trans.pdf. See also: Patrick H. Breen, "Female Antislavery Petition Campaign of 1831–1832" *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 110 (2002), 377–98.
78. Ambler, *Life and Diary*, 170.
79. John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 126.
80. John Floyd, "Governor of Virginia Discusses the Revolt," John Floyd, governor of Virginia, to James Hamilton, governor of South Carolina, November 19, 1831, holograph letter, Manuscript Division, (1–7), Library of Congress, American Memory, African American Odyssey pages, facsimile online at <http://goo.gl/IQHtBj>. The paragraph draws heavily from American Memory. Transcriptions of this letter have been printed in Kenneth S. Greenberg, ed., *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996), 110–111, and in Jeff Forret, *Slavery in the United States* (New York: Facts On File, 2012), 223–25.
81. Ericson, "The Nullification Crisis," 249–70.

82. John Floyd, "Message to the House of Delegates," December 13, 1832, reprinted in *Niles Register*, December 22, 1832, p. 275, online at <http://books.google.com/books?id=SZU-AQAAMAAJ>.
83. Ambler, *Life and Diary*, 116. The original is among the Floyd manuscripts in the Library of Congress.
84. Letitia's description of Jackson is a direct reference to Hamlet's famous soliloquy at the end of Act 2 of *Hamlet* in which the unfortunate prince is bemoaning how others have conspired against him and his family in search of political power. Her reference to Shakespeare's play adds to our contention that Letitia was a well-educated, knowledgeable person. Both the spellings "leacherous" and "villian" are *sic*. As for Letitia's spelling, Andrew Jackson supposedly once remarked: "I have a small opinion of a man who knows only one way to spell a word!" We much thank an anonymous referee for calling these points to our attention.
85. The distance from the Thorn Spring Plantation house to the Newbern post office was about a mile and a half, and stagecoaches ran through the town. Newbern was not so remote that it couldn't promptly receive newspapers from Richmond, Washington City, etc.
86. Floyd's diary (Ambler, page 145), for June 3, 1831, records that he had received a letter from Williams. Floyd wrote "Colonel Williams is bitterly opposed to General Jackson, [and] says from many years of acquaintance with him that he is a bad man and will not be content with one term in the Presidency, nor two, nor three nor four, and then will try to appoint his successor." Williams played a key role in Jackson's victory at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814 but lost to Jackson in an 1823 reelection contest for United States senator from Tennessee. See "John Williams" in the online Congressional Bioguide at <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=W000516>.
87. John C. Calhoun, "along with Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and Andrew Jackson, dominated American political life from 1815 to 1850." He was vice-president of the United States from 1825 to 1832 and senator from South Carolina from 1832 to 1843 and 1845 to 1850. "John Caldwell Calhoun," *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 2004, online at <http://www.encyclopedia.com>. See also his online United States Senate biography at www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/VP_John_Calhoun. Calhoun had resigned the vice-presidency two months before Letitia wrote her letter reprinted here.
88. Thomas Ritchie was for 41 years publisher of the *Richmond Enquirer*. At the time Dr. Floyd was governor, Ritchie strongly supported Andrew Jackson and opposed nullification. Charles H. Ambler, *Thomas Ritchie: A Study in Virginia Politics* (Richmond: Bell Book and Stationery Co., 1913).
89. The "Albany Regency" was a cabal that controlled New York state government from roughly 1820 to 1840. It has been described as one of the first American political machines. It supported Jackson and his vice-president, Martin Van Buren, of New York.
90. The magazine to which in 1813 she had sent the letter from Dr. Benjamin Rush reprinted above.
91. Edwin Croswell (1797–1871) was a New York American journalist and politician associated with the *Albany Argus*. He was also the New York state printer. Letitia in her letter is proposing to stop the Floyd family subscriptions to the newspapers of Ritchie, Niles, and Croswell, as retaliation for their opposition to her husband's views.
92. Probably Nathaniel Hart (1805–1854) Letitia's nephew from Kentucky. Dorman, *The Prestons*, 62.
93. After his initial support, Green soon broke entirely with Jackson over the so-called (in the South) Tariff of Abominations. Later, Green became an industrialist in Georgia and supported the Confederacy with his products.
94. This page from Adams' diary can be readily viewed online. See Massachusetts Historical Society: Diary entry of John Quincy Adams for December 24, 1832. Online at http://www.masshist.org/jqadiaries/php/popup?id=jqad39_13. See also W. S. Belko, *The Invincible Duff Green: Whig of the West* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 1.
95. Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789–1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 216.

96. Varon, *Disunion!*, 215.
97. Floyd, *Biographical Genealogies*, 77. By the time of the Nullification Crisis, President Jackson and Governor Floyd no doubt hated one another. Nicholas Floyd's characterization of President Jackson as the governor's "personal friend" is understandable only as a *former* personal friend.
98. Richard B. Latner, "The Nullification Crisis and Republican Subversion," *Journal of Southern History* 44 (1977): 19–38, quote at 33.
99. Ambler, *Life and Diary*, 93.
100. Ambler, *Life and Diary*, 81.
101. Ambler, *Life and Diary*, 118; Dorman, *The Prestons*, 70.
102. Peter C. Luebke, "John B. Floyd (1806–1863)," *Encyclopedia Virginia*, 2014, online at www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Floyd_John_B_1806-1863.
103. There were 12 taxable slaves at Thorn Spring Plantation in 1831. Alison G. Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831–1832* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 84–85.
104. Letitia Preston Floyd, letter, dated January 30, 1837, written from New Orleans to her niece, Sarah Elizabeth Lewis of Charlottesville, Virginia. Library of Virginia, accession 38922, personal papers collection. Transcription by Cori Burner.
105. James C. Cochran, born June 5, 1830, was the son of Margaret Lynn Lewis Cochran and Capt. John Cochran III, and through his mother the grandson of Letitia Preston Floyd's sister Mary Preston Lewis. Dorman, *The Prestons*, 283.
106. A minor sense of the verb recruit means to recover health or strength,
107. Her son John Buchanan Floyd, the future governor, who had been married for four years and had an adopted daughter.
108. Probably Isaac Trimble Preston, attorney general of Louisiana 1824–1829.
109. Pulaski County Deed Book 1 (1839–1846): 15–16, Pulaski County Courthouse, Pulaski, Virginia, microfilm at Library of Virginia.
110. George B. Gose, *Pioneers of the Virginia Bluegrass (and Their Descendants)* (Radford, Va.: Commonwealth Press, 1971), 241; John B. Floyd and George R. C. Floyd to Letitia Floyd, 800 acres in Burke's Garden, June 10, 1841, Tazewell County Deed Book 1838–1843: 285, Tazewell County courthouse, Tazewell, Virginia, microfilm at Library of Virginia.
111. County Cavan is in the Irish Republic. Preston family connections are known to counties Donegal and Derry/Londonderry to the north, but none are known to Cavan.
112. Dorman, *The Prestons*, 292.
113. John Johnston, "The Sons of Governor John Floyd," *The John P. Branch Historical Papers of Randolph-Macon College* 4 (1913), 78–115, see 78–79; Floyd, *Biographical Genealogies*, 81–82; Luebke, "John B. Floyd (1806–1863)."
114. Ralph Mann, "Mountains, Land, and Kin Networks: Burkes Garden, Virginia, in the 1840s and 1850s," *Journal of Southern History* 58 (1992), 411–34. Mann wrote that Letitia Floyd's correspondence of the time shows how she "maintained cooperation among [her] children settled in various parts of mountain Virginia."
115. "Letter of Letitia Preston Floyd to Samuel Pack, January 1845, Montgomery County Chancery Cause 1848–016, Letitia Floyd vs. Executors of Elizabeth Madison," Local Government Records Collection, Library of Virginia, in Regan Shelton, "The Women of Smithfield," illustrated blog posting January 23, 2014 to http://www.virginiamemory.com/blogs/out_of_the_box/2014/01/23/the-women-of-smithfield/. Since 2014 an ongoing Library of Virginia digitization project for chancery cases headed by archivist Sara Nerney has been under way at the Montgomery County Courthouse in Christiansburg. This letter is an excellent example of the kind of new material that the project is uncovering.
116. Glanville and Mays, *Newsletter*. The "My Dear Rush" letter was the most important single item in the box labeled "Misc: Important Archives" brought to Smithfield Plantation in October 2004 by Jane Byrd (nee Sargeant) McCurdy and her sisters Evelyn (nee Sargeant) Hutton and

- Louisa (nee Sargeant) Dent, some time after their father had died. While not perfect, the 171-year chain of possession of the “My Dear Rush” original among Preston/Floyd descendants is strong and convincing. See Glanville and Mays, “The Misc: Important Archives Box at the Smithfield Plantation.”
117. Dorman, *The Prestons*, 297–98. For a full sketch of Holmes see Leonidas Betts, “George Frederick Holmes, Nineteenth-Century Virginia Educator,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 76 (1968), 472–84.
 118. Dorman, *The Prestons*, 283–84.
 119. Letter from Benjamin Rush Floyd to Lyman Draper, from Wythe Courthouse, October 4, 1846, Boone Papers 24C: 65–66, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, reel 9.
 120. George Frederick Holmes, Letter to Lyman Draper, May 18, 1846, from Richmond College, Va. Draper Collection of Manuscripts, George Rogers Clark Papers, 6J109, reel 26, Wisconsin Historical Society.
 121. Letitia Preston Floyd. “Letter to her son Colonel Benjamin Rush Floyd,” February 22, 1843, *Richmond Standard*, June 5, June 19, June 26, and July 3, 1880, transcribed by George F. Holmes, with R. A. Brock editor and footnote writer.
 122. Copies of the newspaper installments are held, for example, at the Filson Club in Louisville, and the libraries of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the State of Indiana in Indianapolis.
 123. Letitia Preston Floyd, “Letter to her Son Colonel Benjamin Rush Floyd,” February 22, 1834. Copy by James C. Cochran dated October 13, 1846. Box-folder: 12:9 in Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, Montgomery County Branch Papers, 1754–1996, Collection Number Ms62–001, Special Collections at Newman Library, Virginia Tech.
 124. Letitia Preston Floyd, “Recollections of 18th Century Virginia Frontier Life by Letitia Preston Floyd,” introduction by Wirt H. Wills, transcription by June Stubbs, *Smithfield Review* 1 (1997), 3–16; Letitia Preston Floyd, “John Floyd, Kentucky Hero, and Three Generations of Floyds and Prestons of Virginia,” introduction by Wirt H. Wills, transcription by June Stubbs, *Smithfield Review* 2 (1998), 39–52.
 125. Governor David Campbell, “Letter to Lyman Draper,” July 3, 1844, King’s Mountain Papers of the Draper Collection of Manuscripts, 10DD47, Wisconsin Historical Society.
 126. Letitia Floyd, “Letter to Lyman Draper,” from Cavan, Tazewell County, September 30, 1844, King’s Mountain Papers, Draper Collection of Manuscripts, 15DD23, Wisconsin Historical Society. Transcribed by the authors from a faded and difficult-to-read microfilm copy.
 127. Laura Katz Smith, “A Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections of the Preston Family,” *Smithfield Review* 2 (1998), 53–64.
 128. See “A Guide to the Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, 1830–1834,” online at the Library of Virginia at www.lib.virginia.edu/vivaaxtf/view?docId=lva/vi01952.xml.
 129. Johnston Family Papers, 1779–1891, Accession 24154, 24321, Personal papers collection, Library of Virginia. According to the finding aid, “The Johnston family was a prominent family in southwestern Virginia and was related to the Preston and Floyd families. John Warfield Johnston (1818–1889) served as a member of the Virginia Senate from 1846 to 1848. He served the Confederacy as receiver for the Southwest District of Virginia during the Civil War. After the war, he was judge of the circuit court from 1866 to 1870. In 1869, he was elected to the United States Senate and served until 1883. Johnston married Nicketti Buchanan Floyd, the daughter of Governor John Floyd (1783–1837) and Letitia Preston Floyd (1779–1852).”
 130. See: “A Guide to the Papers of Joseph E. Johnston and George Frederick Holmes, 1821–1885,” a collection in The Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library, online at <http://ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaxtf/view?docId=uva-sc/viu03092.xml>.
 131. James Lewis Woodville, *Papers of James Lewis Woodville*, 1820. University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville. Bound manuscript of the business and personal correspondence of Woodville, a lawyer and member of the Virginia General Assembly who lived in Fincastle in Botetourt County, Virginia.

132. Leonidas Baugh Papers, Accession 38–104, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library. Baugh was the printer of the *Abingdon Democrat* from 1820 to 1895. The collection includes legal and business papers, family correspondence, material on the *Democrat*, etc. See “A Guide to the Leonidas Baugh Papers.” online at <http://ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaead/published/uva-sc/viu00015.xml>.
133. Papers of the Preston and Related Radford Families (1726–1895), University of Virginia Library. See: “A Guide to the Papers of the Preston and Related Radford Families” online at <http://ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaxtf/view?docId=uva-sc/viu00920.xml>.
134. Papers of Charles Carter Lee and the Lee family (1768–1931), Charles Carter Lee (1798–1871) collector. Online description at <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/647915474>.
135. Papers of Daniel Trigg and John B. Floyd, Special Collection at the John Cook Wyllie Library of the University of Virginia’s College at Wise, Wise, Virginia.
136. Jim Glanville, telephone conversation with Ralph Mann, Boulder, Colorado, May 2, 2014. It is a pity that Mann kept no copies as they would have made a nice addition to the Smithfield Plantation library.
137. The John Warfield Johnston Papers, Duke University Library. See “Guide to the John Warfield Johnston Papers, 1778–1890,” on line at <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/johnstonjohnw/>.
138. Tim Silver, archivist compiler, George Frederick Holmes Papers (1790–1898). See the finding aid on line at <http://scdb.swem.wm.edu/?p=collections/findingaid&id=7435&rootcontentid=142957>.
139. Thanks to a grant that the Library of Virginia obtained from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, three archivists are at the present time reorganizing and digitizing the chancery court records (records of civil suits) stored in the Montgomery County Courthouse. Library of Virginia archivist Sarah Nerney from Richmond is on temporary full-time assignment to the project, and Regan Shelton and Scott Gardner are working as local contract archivists. See Erica W. Williams and Sarah Nerney, “History Goes Digital: Wealth of Information in County’s Chancery Records: Since 2005, the Digitization of Chancery Records Has Been a Priority for the Library of Virginia’s Circuit Court Records Preservation,” *Christiansburg News Messenger*, August 16, 2014, pp. 1 and 7.
140. Shelton, “The Women of Smithfield.”

Governor John Floyd, Letitia Preston Floyd, and the Catholic Church*

Jim Glanville

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Introduction

Letitia Preston (1779–1852) was born at Smithfield Plantation in present-day Blacksburg, Virginia, and lived there until her marriage to John Floyd at the age of 24. For her biographical sketch see the companion article published in this issue of the *Smithfield Review*. Around 1820, as she approached the age of 40, Mrs. Floyd commenced a relationship with the Catholic Church that culminated three decades later, in the final year of her life, with her formal conversion to the faith. Specific documentary evidence about this relationship comes in six letters written to her by two different Catholic bishops and two other Catholic churchmen between the years 1843 and 1846.

This article consists mainly of these six letters, which are here published in full transcriptions for the first time, with added annotations and background information by the author. The six letters concern Mrs. Floyd's efforts to found a Catholic community in Burke's Garden in Tazewell County, Virginia, and her conversion to Catholicism.

With the death of her husband, Governor John Floyd, in 1837, Letitia Preston Floyd became a widow at the age of 58. She had been married to him for 33 years and had given birth to 12 children. At the time of the governor's death they were residing at Thorn Spring¹ in Pulaski County, Virginia, where they had lived for approximately two decades, or since about 1817. In 1839, two years after becoming a widow, Mrs. Floyd moved from Thorn Spring to Burke's Garden, to a home she called "Cavan." She lived at Cavan until her death there 13 years later, in 1852. The historian Ralph Mann has provided an excellent picture of what life was like in Burke's Garden during this final period of her life.² The six letters published here all come from this final period, and all were addressed to her at Burke's Garden. The letters deal principally with Catholic responses to her efforts

*This is one of three articles about Letitia Preston Floyd that appear in this issue of the *Smithfield Review*. The companion articles are a biographical sketch of her including some letters written by her and an article that describes her as a "Pioneer Catholic Feminist."

to establish a Catholic community in Burke's Garden, with several of them also urging her conversion to the Catholic faith.

The Floyd Family and Catholicism

Letitia Preston grew up in a Protestant household at the Smithfield Plantation. Her parents, William and Susanna Preston, had both been educated by Scottish Protestant clerics: William in Augusta County by the Aberdeen-trained Presbyterian minister John Craig and Susanna in Hanover County by the Edinburgh-trained Anglican minister the Reverend Patrick Henry (uncle and namesake of the founding father).³

John Floyd was born near present-day Louisville, Kentucky, in 1783, two weeks after his father had been killed by American Indians. His mother was Jane Buchanan (daughter of John Buchanan the surveyor and a ward of William Preston), and his stepfather was Alexander Breckinridge. Both his mother and stepfather were of Scotch-Irish extraction, so Floyd was no doubt raised in a Protestant, and probably Presbyterian, environment, and was educated at the local log schoolhouse.⁴

The association with, and conversion to, the Catholic church of the Floyd family was well described by an article published in the *New York Freeman's Journal* soon after Mrs. Floyd's death and reprinted in the February 5, 1853 edition of *The Tablet*.⁵ The article, titled "The Late Mrs. Letitia Preston Floyd, of Virginia, Her Conversion and Death," is in effect her obituary combined with a brief history of her family's relationship with Catholicism. The entire short article is reproduced below:

Our century has been renowned for the number of brilliant and eminent persons who have returned to the bosom of the Catholic Church. It is not as swelling the number of these, but as an edifying and consoling example of how souls of a high mould, sooner or later, find their true home in the bosom of the Church, that we devote a few lines to the memory of Mrs. Floyd.

Born, by her misfortune, outside of the Catholic Church, and remote from Catholic influences, she yet, by the instincts of a virtuous and noble nature, clung to the Catholic traditions of family and society that it is the misery of our times to see so fast dying out in the Protestant world. The proof of the excellent moral training of her family exists in the fact that of her surviving children no less than four are already garnered within the Catholic Church. Of the living we will not speak; we are only recording the memory of the dead.

Mrs. Floyd was the widow of the late General John Floyd, formerly Governor of Virginia; mother of ex-Governor Henry B. Floyd, sister of the late James P. Preston, ex-Governor, also, of Virginia, and aunt of the late Governor James McDowell of Virginia, and of the Hon. Wm. Campbell Preston, of South Carolina.

On the 12th of August last the Right Rev. Dr. Whelan, Bishop of Wheeling, had the satisfaction of receiving this lady into the Catholic Church,⁶ when she received the Holy Sacraments with the lively devotion and penitence that marks the true convert. Just four months from that date, on the 12th of December, after practising the duties of religion and enjoying its consolations, in the 74th year of her age she yielded up her soul to God at her residence, Burke's Garden, Tazewell Co., Va., and was buried according to the rites of the Church in a blessed grave⁷ by Rev. Mr. Parke, of Wytheville.

“Even in these days,” a friend writes to us, “when the Faithful are consoled and cheered by the conversion of so many that are good and great, the Church has not made conquest of a more elevated spirit, a warmer heart, or a more splendid intellect than hers for whom I request your prayers.”

May her soul rest in eternal peace.

Mrs. Floyd's daughters Letitia, Lavalette, and Nicketti, were the first members of the Floyd family to formally convert to Catholicism. All were baptized at St. Peter's Church in Richmond. The church records do not give the precise dates, but the baptisms apparently occurred while their father was governor (1831–1834). The present-day Catholic historian Gerald Fogarty considers that Father Timothy O'Brien was the priest responsible for the “successful cultivation” of the Richmond elite for the Catholic church.⁸ The Catholic historian Joseph Magri gave “about 1832” as the conversion year of Mrs. Floyd's daughter Letitia and wrote that it “caused a sensation throughout the state.”⁹

The tenure of John Floyd as governor corresponds to the beginning of a period of rapid growth of Catholicism in Richmond at the time of building there of St. Peter's Church, which was consecrated in 1834. This rapid growth of Richmond Catholicism is evidenced by the records of baptisms and marriages during this church's early years. In 1834 and 1835 combined, 19 baptisms and 12 marriages took place at St. Peter's. In 1836, 28 baptisms and 17 marriages took place, and in 1837 there were 48 baptisms and 14 marriages.¹⁰

The best explanation that has been offered for the origin of the engagement of the Floyd family with Catholicism comes from a writer known to us only by his initials “JWJ.”¹¹ JWJ suggests the origin occurred when Congressman John Floyd sent two of his young sons to Georgetown-related Catholic schools in Washington City.

JWJ wrote “Perhaps no conversion ever occurred in this country which was so unexpected and surprising, and attended with such great consequences, as that of Miss Letitia P. Floyd ... the eldest daughter of [Governor and Mrs. Floyd].” JWJ added that Letitia’s mother (Mrs. Floyd, the governor’s wife) “was a member of the Preston family, which produced so many brilliant men and women, and was remarkable for her powers of conversation, in which she equaled any of the distinguished men of the day. She took the same interest in public affairs that her husband did, and kept well informed about them during her whole life.”¹²

As for the initial involvement of the Floyd family with Catholicism, JWJ explained that before Floyd became governor he “had been for a number of years a member of Congress, and, in order to have his sons near him, had caused two of them to be educated at Georgetown....”

John Floyd was first elected to Congress for the Fifteenth Congress which assembled in Washington City in March 1817 during the first two years of the presidency of James Monroe. Floyd’s two sons who attended Georgetown were William Preston Floyd (who was age 8 in 1817) and Benjamin Rush Floyd (who was age 6 in 1817). A Catholic school for secondary education that was associated with Georgetown Academy was opened in Washington, D.C., around 1821 and the two sons may have attended there, or possibly at an earlier Georgetown facility.¹³

Both William Preston Floyd and Benjamin Rush Floyd went on to graduate from Georgetown College. William Floyd received the A. B. degree in 1830 and the A. M. degree in 1836. Benjamin Floyd received the A. B. degree in 1832 and the A. M. degree in 1836. William Floyd made a valedictory address in 1830 that was “long remembered for its eloquence,” and in 1832 an address by Benjamin Floyd to the Philodemic Society at Georgetown was received with plaudits.¹⁴

Six Letters to Letitia Preston Floyd

Letter 1¹⁵

The letter below was written by Bishop Richard Whelan from Richmond on February 24, 1843, to Mrs. Floyd at Burke’s Garden. In 1842, Mrs. Floyd had proposed in a now lost letter to Bishop Whelan that Catholic colonists be sent to Burke’s Garden.¹⁶ This is Whelan’s response to her proposal. It is

noteworthy for Bishop Whelan's telling of his "attachments to the West." Six years later, he would propose that the Diocese of Richmond be divided into eastern and western sees. The Catholic Provincial Council in Baltimore in 1849 made this recommendation to Rome, and a Pontifical Brief in 1850 created the new Diocese of Wheeling with Whelan as its first Bishop.¹⁷ The Diocese of Wheeling originally encompassed (with the exception of the eight panhandle counties) all of present-day West Virginia counties and 17 and one-half counties in Southwest Virginia. In 1974, the Diocese of Wheeling was realigned to be coterminous with the state of West Virginia.¹⁸ Much of the letter consists of the bishop thanking Mrs. Floyd for a tub of butter.

Richmond, Feb, 24th 1843

My Dear Madam,

A few days since I received a letter from you which I read with much pleasure as a manifestation of your confidence & an evidence that you appreciated the sincerity of the interest I had expressed for the welfare of your estimable family. At the moment it was not convenient to reply and when this morning I determined to do so, judge of my surprise when I found that instead of replying to a letter of the last few weeks I was to answer a communication penned in November. No doubt you must have felt hurt that I should have remained so long seemingly indifferent to your kindness; unless perhaps your charity supplied an excuse for my delay. The letter was either lost sight of by the person to whom it was entrusted, or was allowed to remain in the [torn, length of about 15 alphabet letters absent] my knowledge that it was there. This will explain my apparent [torn, length of about 20 alphabet letters absent] explains also what had been somewhat of a mystery to myself. [torn, length of about 30 alphabet letters absent] large firkin [wooden tub] of butter for now some time since [ten letters in 3 words unreadable], possibly the sd. Mr. [torn, length of about 35 alphabet letters absent] could give no account of it; nor could I conjecture when [torn, length of about 25 alphabet letters absent] tho' I must admit, I strongly expected Lavalette [Mrs. Floyd's daughter] as the donor before(?) you will please, tho' late, accept my sincere thanks for your kind remembrance which has proven a most useful auxiliary at our table. Now you will permit me to tell you that your letter was as welcome an intruder as the firkin, & that I shall enjoy myself as much in the renderings of any little service to yourself & family as I could in making use of the fruit of your generosity.

I have made every exertion to send colonists to the garden [Burke's Garden], and I hope that my efforts will not be unsuccessful. Indeed

one of your own children would scarcely feel more pained at the idea of your giving up your house there, than would I. I wish to see you enjoying yourself many years yet in the midst of your hospitable and deserving family, & then leaving them in possession of comfort and contentment. Whatsoever I may be able to do in my humble way to effect this, shall be done. You are kind enough to observe that I would be a welcome visitant at the Garden, and I will not say that I shall allow the summer to pass without being there. My arrangements are still unsettled, but I am sure my attachments to the West will plead strongly when I begin to make up my mind. When the church at Lynchburg will be ready for dedication I am unable to say: but if your daughters desire to be present I shall not fail to give them due notice, & I am delighted to hear that they design to come to the ceremony. Present my kindest remembrance to each of the members of your family, Mr. Johnston and his mother, the Pole and his lady, & [torn, length of about 30 alphabet letters absent] Mr. Kelley.¹⁹ To yourself, my dear Madam, permit me to tender [torn, length of about 30 alphabet letters absent] & the assurance of my esteem

That God may bless you all is the ardent prayer of [torn, length of about 10 alphabet letters absent]

Yours most very sincerely
† Richard Vincent Whelan
Bp of Richmond

Letter 2²⁰

Bishop Richard Whelan wrote the letter below from Richmond on May 9, 1843, to Mrs. Floyd at Burke's Garden. A fascinating aspect of the letter is his reference to a letter written by Mrs. Floyd to his "Most Christian Majesty." In England, Queen Victoria reigned from 1837 to 1901. She married her Prince Consort, Albert, in February 1840. Judging from what Whelan wrote, Mrs. Floyd's letter was perhaps addressed to Prince Albert.²¹ Whelan also wrote that he had forwarded a letter from "Mr Kelly" to Ireland at the request of Letitia's daughter Lavalette and that Father Fox was working to get the church in Richmond completed.

Richmond May 9th 1843

Dear Madam,

Your last kind letter was deserving of a much earlier notice; but you are aware that it is not always in our power to render to each one

according to his deserts. I have been exceedingly occupied Since, & I must add that the difficulty of providing during these hard times for my large household has encroached upon Some of my already busy hours. Your letter convinces me too that you appreciate our increase of both during the Season of lent & the time immediately following Easter. I am just upon the point of setting out for our Synod which opens in Baltimore on the 14th Just. but my conscience would perhaps reproach me, if I did not beforehand make an acknowledgement for the very kind Imposition you have manifested & the zeal with which you are forwarding the religious views of your daughters: You are truly displaying the Spirit of "Old Virginia" in reaching across the Atlantic & lifting your petition to the throne itself. I hope his "Most Christian Majesty", as you very properly style him, will not deny your request & that you will be cheered by the sight of your children rejoicing in the consummation of their desires.

I have just received Lavalette's letter of March 1st inclosing one from Mr Kelly to a friend in Ireland. I have inscribed a few lines in the latter & forwarded it to its destination. Your daughter speaks to me both of this Church & the sale of a portion of your land. The latter shall be borne in mind during my approaching visit to the North, and I promise myself that my exertions will not [be] unavailing. Also the Church I hope that Rev Fhr [Father] Fox will now be found a useful agitant in pushing it to completion. I have just heard from him & he tells me he has visited the Garden. He writes in good Spirits & appears quite pleased. He is quite a zealous & active & pious young man & I expect much good from his assiduous labor. There is about him a simplicity & devotion that will abundantly compensate for more brilliant qualifications, & which fit him on a peculiar manner, I think, for his mission. L[e]t Lavalette therefore not be discouraged hearing return I may reply more at length to her letter; but in the mean time you will glean my thanks for the full & interesting Sheet I have just read. I must ask of you also to present my affectionate remembrance to her & her sister and all the other members & con[] of your excellent family with whom I met last Summer. May our Heavenly Father bestow on you all every blessings that appertain to this life & the next.

Most Sincerely & resply [respectfully] Your friend & Servt

Richard Vincent Whelan
Bp [Bishop] of Ri~ [Richmond]

Letter 3²²

The following letter was written by Father Edward Fox from Norfolk on August 13, 1844, to Mrs. Floyd at Burke's Garden. In early 1843, Bishop Whelan appointed Edward Fox as a circuit riding priest in western Virginia. There, Fox divided his time among Lynchburg, Wytheville, Burke's Garden, and some western counties. The letter was written while Fox was temporarily in Tidewater Virginia on "a begging trip in Norfolk."²³ It demonstrates that by August 1844 Father Fox was well acquainted with many residents of Burke's Garden, several of whom he names in the letter. Fox's short letter closes with a religious exhortation to Mrs. Floyd.

Norfolk Augst 13th – [18]44

Dear very dear Mrs. Floyd

Almost tired from begging and yet scarcely half equal to our debts, I, instead of being home to see you & any other dear friends am obliged to trouble you with the page I'm scraping – and to tell you that I dont know when I can enjoy the pleasure of seeing you, which indeed used be unalloyed pleasure to me – If Lavalette helped us with the little she has, it would expedite my return, and restore me to my little flock, & to the gratification above which I so anxiously desire – I too have become fond of the mountains & people about. I did think & do still that Lavalette owns a generous & sympathising heart – Won't she do it? I'm stationed here for a time only.

My best wishes to my sisters Lavalette Nicketti M^{rs} Floyd Darthula²⁴ M^{rs} Lewis²⁵ – yes, & to the poor Irishman & Lady, to Mr. Kelly affectionately, to Colonels Rush George & Doctor William;²⁶ in fact to all my Burke's Garden friends who are very dear to me – Certainly, M^{rs} Floyd, you are very dear to me – would that you would take my advice – in time & eternity it would inconcievably [*sic*] serve you – do once more to M^r Johnston Captain Matthews Captain John & Lady affectionate & best wishes

M^{rs} Floyd I am yrs procure a pupil [?] for the Bishop – in thanks & respect E. Fox

[ps] The Bishop & Rev^d M^r O Brien were well when last I saw them – about 2 weeks since. Dear M^{rs} Floyd, your term of existence is coming fast to a close – and shall it be that you will leave us without receiving the Sacrament of God your Saviour which He mercifully puts in your way?

oh M^{rs} Floyd – Reflect well.

Letter 4²⁷

The next letter was written by Bishop John Joseph Hughes from New York on January 8, 1845, to Mrs. Floyd at Burke's Garden. Its author was the fourth Bishop of New York (1842 to 1850) and the first Archbishop of New York (1850 to his death in 1864). A native of County Tyrone, Ireland, born in 1797, Hughes emigrated to the United States in 1817 at the age of 20, became a priest in 1826, and rose to great national prominence. He was a strong supporter of the Union cause during the Civil War and a correspondent of Abraham Lincoln. He has been characterized as one of America's foremost citizens and is said to have exhibited "towering character, genius for government, and intense patriotism." He was referred to as "Dagger John," both for following the Catholic practice of a bishop preceding his signature with a cross and, when provoked, his aggressive personality.²⁸

New York Jan'y 8 1845

Dear Madam

I have had the honor of receiving your letter of the 26 ulto which I read with great interest. I deeply regret that imigrants who arrive in this country with a view of settling on the soil as farmers should not be as convinced as I am of the advantages which they might enjoy in selecting your beautiful valley as the place of their residence. I shall not lose sight of the object, as set forth in your letter. But the great difficulty with me is the responsibility of giving advice. I should be right – but they, (having no experience of the Country) would think otherwise. I have not, at present, any prospects on the subject; but still you will not be surprised if you should hear from me again in relation to it.

I shall put a notice in the Truman's Journal for such a Dairyman, as, you want and if I can find one, such as I think will suit, I shall send him on.

Wishing you, dear madam, all the happiness and consolation of this holy season I have the honor to be

Your obt [obedient] Sert [Servant] in JCst [Jesus Christ]
† John Bp [Bishop] of N.Y.

Letter 5²⁹

Bishop Richard Whelan wrote the next letter from Richmond on May 8, 1845, to Mrs. Floyd at Burke's Garden. It demonstrates his ongoing effort to persuade Mrs. Floyd to convert to the Catholic faith, which, as noted above, did not come about until seven years later in 1852. We do not know from the record whether or not Whelan visited Burke's Garden in 1843, as he suggested in his letter. We do know he was there in 1852 to officiate at Mrs. Floyd's conversion ceremony. The reference in the letter to Carolina no doubt pertains to Mrs. Floyd's attending the marriage there of her daughter Eliza Lavalette in February of 1845.³⁰

Richmond May 8th 1845

My Dear Madam,

When I opened anew your last very kind letter & ascertained that it had been written just 4 months ago, I could scarce persuade myself of the reality. I will scarce be able to persuade you that there is not wanton neglect in my long silence, & yet I do assure you that it is not so. My time is so exceedingly occupied that days & weeks, nay months, run their course without my being aware almost of their quick succession. Your presumed absence from home & the wish to notify you that your very acceptable present had reached me safely induced me to defer my reply for a while. The gross neglect of the person to whom your kind token of remembrance was confided, in consequence of which it has never come to hand, made me put off from day to day an acknowledgement of your letter, still hoping that the enduring day would enable me to gratify you by the assurance that all was well. At length the arrival of Rev Fhr [Father] Fox apprized me of your return from Carolina & induced me to decide upon an immediate acknowledgement of your letter & intended Kindness. But if the rogue disappointed me in this I hope to avenge myself by partaking of butter & potatoe [*sic*] both with you during the coming summer. I shall write in a few days to our mutual friend, M^r Schreiber,³¹ to express to him your desire that he would accompany me in my expected jaunt to the Garden. Shall I not have the pleasure of meeting there M^{rs} Lewis & Lavalette? With you I regret that the latter did not select a Virginian for her partner. We cannot spare any of our small Catholic population, but particularly such as your daughter, such an ornament to the little Church by her personal qualifications no less than by her position in society. I think you were almost in duty bound to retain her, & now to make reparation to their Church, I see no other plan then to prepare yourself for admission. Do, my fond friend, do prepare for

this desirable event. Subdue the rebellious feelings of proud nature. I feel Sure that your intelligent & well informed mind will scarce allow you to admit any resting place between Catholicity & infidelity; I feel equally sure that Christianity carries with it too many evidences of truth to allow you to stake your everlasting hopes upon its rejection. Adopt then the part of prudence, take the safer course, Subdue proud nature, & make an humble & candid acknowledgement of fault, & I will almost guarantee that all difficulties will vanish. Consider the influence of your example for good or ill; how many may already have attempted before God to excuse or palliate their own neglect by your example; how many may still be led astray by it. It is now, my dear friend, the 11th hour for you, as you still have it in your power to repair much of the past, to do a vast deal of good, by acknowledging before men that Savior whom you wish to acknowledge you before his Father in Heaven. What a consolation will it be to me if in my approaching visit I shall be allowed to extend the grace of our Holy Religion to yourself, M^r Johnston & his mother. Apprize them of my hopes & for me ask them both to pray in the interval most earnestly to God that he may be pleased to enlighten their minds & exercise his gentle influence over their hearts.

With kindest remembrance to your daughter near you, to her husband & mother in law, & M^r Kelly, I remain, Dear Madam, with many thanks for your kindness

Most resply [respectfully] & Sincerely Yours
† Richard Vincent Bp of Ri

Letter 6³²

The final letter was written by Father Timothy O'Brien from Richmond on March 13, 1846, to Mrs. Floyd at Burke's Garden. We do not have a copy of the letter that was enclosed with this letter, but its import is readily apparent from what O'Brien says about it here. As demonstrated by several of the letters above, Mrs. Floyd was continuing her campaign to bring Catholics to Burke's Garden.

We know a good deal about O'Brien. He arrived in Richmond in 1832 and "commenced a new era of the Church in that city." From a small, rented rectory near the then-existing Catholic chapel in Richmond he raised funds to erect the church of St. Peter. The new church was dedicated in May 1834, and O'Brien wrote in a letter to Archbishop Whitfield in Baltimore that Governor Floyd had taken a pew in the new church.³³ The governor was apparently familiar with O'Brien from the time of this priest's first arrival

in Richmond. Writing in his diary for May 27, 1832, the governor recorded "I went to the chapel to hear Mr. O'Brien, who is a man of talents and a respectable orator."³⁴ Eventually, in 1850, O'Brien fell into a nasty dispute about the ownership of property (was it the church's or was it O'Brien's?) with the newly appointed, third bishop of Richmond, John McGill. O'Brien left Richmond in 1854 and moved to Lowell, Massachusetts, to administer a school founded by his brother, who was also a priest, and combat the local Know-Nothings.³⁵ O'Brien died in Lowell in 1857.³⁶

Richmond March 13th 1846

My D^r M^{rs} Floyd

On this same day I received your favor of the 24th Ult. I enclosed it in a letter to the Rev^d Mr Donelan of Washington, with a request that he would at once engage the Services of the young man who purposed to go to Burkes Garden. I have just rece^d the enclosed which will inform you of the result. I have thought it necessary to write you without a moments delay least you might be depending on him & neglect other arrangements. The reasons for not going I take to be obvious. I suspect the man does not Know the business he proposed to undertake & wishes to avail himself of any excuse to get off. I regret this disappointment very much for your Sake. Here he is not one who would be fit to undertake it.

I saw M^r Holmes³⁷ a day or two ago. We spen[t] [torn part of page] the day out at the Bishops & all seemed to be pleasa[nt] [torn part of page] I hope we shall always be as good friends as at presen[t] [torn part of page]. He seems very happy & has but one draw-back. It is that he is so far removed from his "darling wife & beautiful child" I hope he will Soon be able to effect a better arrangement for Mutual comfort. None will be more pleased than I. Make my compliments to M^{rs} Holmes & My other friends in & about the Garden & believe me

Very Sincerely & Respectfully
Yours I C [in Christ]
F Obrien

P.S. I fear I will not be able to See the Garden this Summer. Accept, however, my thanks for yr. invitation

Conclusion

We may conclude that Mrs. Floyd was casting her net very wide indeed in her search for Catholic immigrants for Burke's Garden—as evidenced by her communications both to a European monarch and to Archbishop Hughes, the leading Catholic American of her day. However her motives are not readily apparent, and Mrs. Floyd's exertions to bring Catholic immigrants to Burke's Garden after she moved further into southwest Virginia from Pulaski County after being widowed raise more questions than can be answered. Did she advocate the active importation of foreign workers? Did she favor an influx of poor Irish and possibly German Catholics? Why did she want immigrants? At present, it is not possible to answer these questions. The companion biographical sketch of her published in this issue of the *Smithfield Review* suggests many places where letters written by her presently unknown to students may be found. We may hope that future scholarship will be able to shed light on these questions.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the Richmond Diocese archivist Edith Jeter who supplied electronic copies from the diocesan archives of the six letters transcribed here. Thanks also to Wheeling-Charleston Diocese archivist Jon-Erik Gilot who supplied valuable background documents from his diocesan archives. Thanks to Ryan Mays for help with transcriptions, frequent useful discussions, and for reading an early draft of this manuscript. Thanks to Cori Burner who made the initial transcriptions of five of the letters reprinted here. Thanks to Father Harry Winter for his review of an early draft of this article. Thanks to the anonymous *Smithfield Review* referees who, as always, sharpened the author's attention and forced him to think carefully about what he has written. Thanks to Hugh Campbell, the editor of the *Smithfield Review*, for his ongoing support. Finally, thanks to my wife Deena Flinchum for her ongoing encouragement and support.

Endnotes

1. Thorn Spring is a large spring that debouches into Thorn Spring Creek. The house where the Floyds lived was situated on a low bluff above the spring, several hundred yards north of the intersection of the creek and Bob White Boulevard on what is today private property. The Floyd house was razed over a hundred years ago, and the successor house was torn down about twenty years ago. Other than a few outbuildings, there is little today to be seen at the site.
2. Ralph Mann, "Mountains, Land, and Kin Networks: Burkes Garden, Virginia, in the 1840s and 1850s," *Journal of Southern History* 58 (1992), 411–34. Mann wrote that Letitia Floyd's correspondence of the time shows how she "maintained cooperation among [her] children settled in various parts of mountain Virginia."

3. Patricia Givens Johnson, *William Preston and the Allegheny Patriots* (Blacksburg, Va.: Walpa Publishing, 1976), 69.
4. For Floyd's biography see Charles Henry Ambler, *The Life and Diary of John Floyd, Governor of Virginia, An Apostle of Secession, and the Father of the Oregon Country* (Richmond: Richmond Press for the Author, 1918). See also Nicholas Jackson Floyd, *Biographical Genealogies of the Virginia-Kentucky Floyd Families* (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1912), 75–76, and Wikipedia entry at [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Floyd_\(Virginia_politician\)](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Floyd_(Virginia_politician)).
5. *The Tablet*, or *The International Catholic News Weekly*, has been continuously published in London, England, since 1840. Anonymous article online at <http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/5th-february-1853/3/catholic-intelligence>. The *New York Freeman's Journal*, was published from 1949 to 1918. It was initiated by Archbishop John Hughes, one of Mrs. Floyd's correspondents as recorded by his letter in this article.
6. Her entry into the church occurred at her home "Cavan" in Burke's Garden, and probably near the big spring on Rhudy Branch about fifty yards north of the present-day Lutheran Church.
7. Her grave is in the Lewis family cemetery at Lynnside at Sweet Springs in present-day West Virginia.
8. Gerald P. Fogarty, *Commonwealth Catholicism: A History of the Catholic Church in Virginia* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 86.
9. F. Joseph Magri, "Virginia," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 15. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912. Online at www.newadvent.org/cathen/15451a.htm. Mrs. Floyd's daughter Nicketti married John Warfield Johnston of Abingdon, who represented Virginia for thirteen years in the United States Senate when Virginia was readmitted to the Union after the Civil War. The *Encyclopedia* adds "The conversion of the Floyd and Johnston families led into the Catholic Church other members of the most distinguished families of the South."
10. James H. Bailey, *A History of the Diocese of Richmond: The Formative Years* (Richmond: Chancery Office, Diocese of Richmond, 1956), 67.
11. JWJ (initials only), "History of a Conversion," *The Catholic World: A Monthly Magazine of General Literature and Science*, 14 (1887), 844–45; online at <http://books.google.com/books?id=HroRAAAAYAAJ>.
12. JWJ wrote further "Mrs. Floyd was fond of the society of able men, and, not being at the time a member of any church, was in the habit of going where she could hear the best sermon regardless of denomination. Two priests came alternately to Richmond, one of whom was Father Shriber, who was a very able man, and whose sermons Mrs. Floyd delighted to hear, merely, however, as an intellectual treat. So, whenever it was his Sunday to preach in the little chapel to the mere handful of Catholics then constituting the congregation, she usually attended and often took her daughter with her. Of course the presence of the wife of the governor and her daughter could not be unknown to Father Shriber, and an acquaintance thus sprang up between the priest and his visitors."
13. Robert Emmett Curran, *The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1993), 93–94.
14. John G. Shea, *Memorial of the First Centenary of Georgetown College, D.C.: Comprising a History of Georgetown University* (Washington, D.C.: Published for the College by P. F. Collier, 1891), *seriatim*.
15. Richard Vincent Whelan, letter to Mrs. Letitia Floyd at Burke's Garden from Richmond, February 24, 1843. Transcribed by Ryan Mays and Jim Glanville.
16. Fogarty, *Commonwealth Catholicism*, 67.
17. Bailey, *A History of the Diocese of Richmond*, 100–101. See also John Gilmary Shea, "Diocese of Wheeling," in *A History of the Catholic Church Within the Limits of the United States: From the First Attempted Colonization to the Present Time* (New York: John. G. Shea, 1886), 325–439.
18. Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. Website online at www.dwc.org/boundary.html.

19. Mann in "Mountains, Land, and Kin Networks" says that George Kelly, a Catholic Irishman, was the neighbor in Burke's Garden of Letitia Floyd's son-in-law George Frederick Holmes, husband of Mrs. Floyd's youngest daughter, Lavalette.
20. Richard Vincent Whelan, letter to Mrs. Letitia Floyd at Burke's Garden from Richmond, May 9, 1843. Transcribed by Cori Burner.
21. Prince Albert was not ever "His Majesty" in Britain. Victoria, not her husband, was the descendant of the previous British monarchs and as the hereditary Queen only she was "Majesty." Albert could be addressed as "Highness" or "Prince," but was not King and thus not "Majesty." Also, the title "his 'Most Christian Majesty'" was used by the Kings of France, bestowed officially upon them by the Papacy by 1510. The British rulers were styled "Defender of the Faith" for several hundred years, but not "Most Christian Majesty." Perhaps this letter was intended for the Pope? He too lived across the Atlantic and sat upon a throne and ruled a sizeable kingdom at that time. These American writers were clearly unsophisticated about European titles.
22. Edward Fox, letter to Mrs. Letitia Floyd at Burke's Garden from Norfolk, August 13, 1844. Transcribed by Cori Burner.
23. Fogarty, *Commonwealth Catholicism*, 83, 86, 89–90. Portions of this third letter are quoted by Fogarty.
24. Darthula was perhaps Darthula Thompson, a 12-year-old girl who, according to Internet genealogy sources, is listed in the 1850 census for Tazewell County, Virginia.
25. Mrs. Lewis was Mrs. Floyd's daughter Letitia Floyd Lewis (1814–1887) who was born near Blacksburg, Virginia, and was the third wife of William Lynn Lewis whom she married in 1837. Lewis lived for many years in South Carolina. The couple moved to Lynnside at Sweet Springs in Monroe County (now West Virginia) in 1848.
26. These are three of Mrs. Floyd's sons.
27. John Hughes, Bishop of New York, letter to Mrs. Letitia Floyd at Burke's Garden from New York, January 8, 1845. Transcribed by Cori Burner.
28. Patrick Hayes, "John Hughes," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910); online at www.newadvent.org/cathen/07516a.htm. See also John Hughes (archbishop of New York) at [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Hughes_\(archbishop_of_New_York\)](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Hughes_(archbishop_of_New_York)).
29. Richard Vincent Whelan, letter to Mrs. Letitia Floyd at Burke's Garden from Richmond, May 8, 1845. Transcribed by Cori Burner.
30. Mrs. Floyd's daughter Eliza Lavalette married George Frederick Holmes (a native of British Guiana) in South Carolina in February 1845. John Frederick Dorman, *The Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield in Virginia* (Louisville: The Filson Club, 1982), 297.
31. This reference is probably to the Rev. Peter S. Schreiber, an Archdiocese of Baltimore priest who spent some time in Richmond. See Bailey, *A History of the Diocese of Richmond*, 61–62. See also the "Individuals" archives of St. Mary's Seminary and University online at www.stmarys.edu/archives/collections/associated-sulpicians-of-the-United-States-archives/individuals/#schreiber.
32. Timothy O'Brien, letter to Mrs. Letitia Floyd at Burke's Garden from Richmond, March 13, 1846. Transcribed by Cori Burner.
33. Bailey, *A History of the Diocese of Richmond*, 62–72. The "new era" quote appears on page 62. See also the anonymous article "A Remarkable Priest: Many Converts Through Work of Rev. Timothy O'Brien," *The Sacred Heart Review* 59 (1918), 12; online at newspapers.bc.edu/cgi-bin/bosthonsh?a=d&d=BOSTONSH19180420-01.2.57#.
34. Ambler, *The Life and Diary of John Floyd*, 193.
35. Peter Condon, "Knownothingism" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 8 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910); online at www.newadvent.org/cathen/08677a.htm. In brief, Knownothingism was a fairly short-lived political movement antagonistic to recent American immigrants and favoring "nativism," interpreted as persons born in the United States. The movement had a particularly ugly anti-Irish and anti-Catholic flavor.

36. Fogarty, *Commonwealth Catholicism*, 104–108.
37. For Holmes, see Leonidas Betts, “George Frederick Holmes, Nineteenth-Century Virginia Educator,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 76 (1968), 472–84. Holmes was born in 1820 in British Guiana and sent to England at the age of two to be educated. He moved to Virginia in 1838 to teach school in Caroline County, Virginia, later became a lawyer in South Carolina, and eventually a professor at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. In 1845 he married Lavalette Floyd, the youngest daughter of Governor John and Letitia Floyd. Betts writes: “In 1847, as a result of the influence of former President John Tyler and Laetitia Floyd, his mother-in-law, Holmes was given a position as professor of political economy at the College of William and Mary.” He died in Charlottesville in 1897 and is buried in the cemetery at Lynnside. John Newton Harman in *Annals of Tazewell County, Virginia* (Tazewell, Va.: Self published, 1922) reports that the Tazewell County records show that Holmes renounced allegiance to Queen Victoria in 1847 and became an American citizen.

Letitia Preston Floyd: Pioneer Catholic Feminist*

by Harry E. Winter, OMI¹

Edited by and with Introduction and Notes by Jim Glanville

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Editor's Introduction

This article presents an updated and lightly edited version of a heretofore unpublished manuscript written by Father Harry Winter in 1990. The original manuscript was written without notes. The endnotes here are by the editor.

As the title implies, Father Winter makes a spirited case for the historical significance of Mrs. Letitia Preston Floyd. Readers should keep in mind that this article is not a formal document of history, but rather the enthusiastic writing of a missionary priest, assigned to rural West Virginia, where on arrival he discovered that an important and under-appreciated co-religionist was buried.

Letitia Floyd is buried on the Lynnside property in Sweet Springs, West Virginia, beside her husband, Governor John Floyd. The cemetery where they lie is located on private property. Because Governor Floyd is buried outside present-day Virginia, and because he today enjoys only a modest historical reputation, the Lynnside site is obscure and rarely visited.

It was only as recently as about 1980 that an accident started Lynnside on a path of modest rediscovery. That accident was the posting of Father Winter as a missionary Catholic priest to Monroe County, where Lynnside is located. After he was posted there, Winter naturally took a strong interest in local Catholic-related places and especially in Sweet Springs, the location of both St. John's Chapel² and the nearby Lynnside Manor³ property, with its two cemeteries where many Catholics are buried. This interest led in turn to his studying the broader story of the Floyd family and Catholicism. Inevitably, Winter soon met Lynn Spellman,⁴ a Catholic lay person who at the time owned the Lynnside property. Sharing a natural interest in Catholic history, Winter and Spellman teamed up and worked successfully to get Lynnside Historic District named to the National Register of Historic Places.⁵

*This is one of three articles about Letitia Preston Floyd that appear in this issue of the *Smithfield Review*. The companion articles are a biographical sketch of her including some letters written by her and an article about the relationship she and her husband had with the Catholic church.

Immediately below is the edited version of the manuscript that Harry Winter wrote in 1990 while living in Monroe County, West Virginia. It comes from an unconventional historical perspective and sheds an interesting new light on the remarkable former first lady of Virginia.

**LETITIA PRESTON FLOYD—
PIONEER CATHOLIC FEMINIST⁶**

By Harry E. Winter (1990)

When Alexis de Tocqueville was finishing *Democracy in America*,⁷ about 1835, he asked what was “the chief cause of the extraordinary prosperity and growing power of this nation,” and he wrote succinctly, “the superiority of their women.”

Recently, the Diocese of Wheeling–Charleston, which covers the entire state of West Virginia, decided to honor one of these women, the author and educator Letitia Preston Floyd (1779–1852). She was to the manor born, with her brother, James Patton Preston, serving as the governor of Virginia from 1816 to 1819; her husband, John Floyd Jr., from 1830–1834; and her son, John Buchanan Floyd, from 1848 to 1852. However, the manor was not in slaveholding and aristocratic Tidewater Virginia, but in the antislavery⁸ and populist Appalachian Mountains, near what is now Blacksburg, Virginia. Her childhood home, Smithfield Plantation, is today surrounded by the large land-grant university Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VPI&SU), commonly called Virginia Tech. Smithfield was in the Preston family for five generations, and was deeded in 1959 to the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities. Beautifully restored, and open to the public, it gives a good insight into what it was like to grow up on the frontier, in a powerful, landed family.

Mrs. Floyd herself, with terse and polished prose, described her childhood at Smithfield in a long letter (or perhaps a short history) written on February 22, 1843 to her son Benjamin Rush Floyd.⁹ She wrote lovingly about the books her father had arranged to be purchased in London. “A good selection of the classics, ancient history, the distinguished poets of England, the *Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, a sort of encyclopedia, with much polemics and many religious productions, constituted the libraries.” And then she summed up her view of the importance of education on the frontiers: “the use of these books gave to each family possessing them a station which outranked many wealthier families.”

Letitia's father was the surveyor for much of central and western Virginia. He employed several deputies, and Letitia wrote that every young man whom he employed had to teach school for him "six months at least, thereby finding out his temper, diligence, habits and trustworthiness." One such man was Colonel John Floyd, Sr. In 1804, Letitia married his son, John Floyd Jr. (1783–1837).

Trained in both law and medicine, John Floyd Jr. was soon serving in the U.S. House of Representatives (1817–1829). A cousin, Charles, had been a member of the Lewis and Clark expedition. John tirelessly pushed for the occupation of the Oregon area, both during and after his service in Congress. In 1830, he became the last governor of Virginia to serve under its 1776 pre-Revolutionary War constitution, then the first to serve under the 1830 post-Revolutionary War constitution. In the national election of 1832 he received the eleven electoral votes of South Carolina for president of the United States.

It was during his governorship that their children started becoming Catholic, and therein lies a mystery. What led the family to become Catholic in a time when Catholicism was a very suspect religion?¹⁰

Two people were certainly involved. The first was the very personable pastor of St. Peter's Church, Richmond, Father Timothy O'Brien. Governor Floyd maintained a pew at St. Peter's during his term of office. The three daughters began to convert at this time, during their teens. Three of the four sons eventually became Catholic. Undoubtedly, the sermons they heard from their pew helped. In fact, on May 27, 1832, their father recorded in his journal, "went to the chapel to hear Mr. O'Brien, who is a man of talents and a respectable orator."

The second person involved was Bishop Richard Whelan, second bishop of Richmond and first bishop of Wheeling. His views on slavery, and those of Governor Floyd, were remarkably similar: they wanted to stamp it out. Governor Floyd wrote in his journal on December 26, 1831: "I shall not rest until slavery is abolished in Virginia." (The Nat Turner slave rebellion, which Floyd had to subdue, must have been a tragic time for the whole family). Slavery affected Bishop Whelan no less seriously. One of the main reasons he left Richmond altogether for Wheeling was his hatred of and opposition to slavery.¹¹

Thus two clergymen undoubtedly influenced the Floyd family. But it is quite certain that the teenage girls could never have joined the Catholic Church without the permission of their mother.

Governor Floyd had never enjoyed robust health. Mrs. Floyd's sister Mary had married John Lewis, a part owner of the famous resort Sweet

Springs. The powerful families of the day summered for several weeks at each of six resorts: a modern historian (Fishwick) notes “one HAD to be at the Sweet for the last week in August and the first week in September. It [the gathering of the powerful] was like the salmon, who knew when it was time to go back up the Columbia River.”¹² John Floyd died suddenly at his daughter’s home, Lynnside, just outside the village of Sweet Springs, Virginia (now West Virginia) on August 21, 1837. He was only 54 years old. Local historians assert that John Floyd was received into the Catholic Church on his deathbed, but no records have ever been found. Consequently, the reports have never been accepted by Diocese of Richmond authorities.

The oldest daughter, also named Letitia, had become the third wife of widower William Lynn Lewis, John Lewis’ son, in a Catholic marriage on March 19, 1837. They were first cousins, and some 15 years different in age. Letitia Lewis now became mistress of the estate of Lynnside, some five months before her father’s death.

They buried her father in the Lewis Family Cemetery, at the Lynnside estate where they had spent so many happy summers. Letitia Lewis set about building a chapel for local Catholics, and securing the services of a priest. The chapel, St. John’s, Sweet Springs, stands to this day and is the oldest Catholic Church in West Virginia to be preserved in its original form. Bishops, archbishops, and probably even Cardinal Gibbons¹³ beat a path to Sweet Springs to stay with the powerful Lewis/Floyd family and celebrate Mass at St. John’s.

After her husband’s death, Letitia Floyd directed the affairs of her family from an estate high in the Appalachians, at Burke’s Garden, Virginia. She certainly spent many summers in Sweet Springs, at her sister’s and daughter’s estate. And she wrote thousands of letters.

Her lengthy correspondence with Bishop Whelan is probably preserved among papers of the Floyd and Preston families in the several archives and state libraries. No one has yet edited the letters and written the definitive biography of this Christian feminist, but four of the letters from Bishop Whelan to her are available in the archives of the Diocese of Richmond. The one of May 8, 1845 is especially revealing. Bishop Whelan had lost patience with her, and used every argument to help her make up her mind. “I feel sure that your intelligent and well informed mind will scarce allow you to admit any resting place between Catholicity and infidelity. I feel equally sure that Christianity carries with it too many evidences of truth to allow you to stake your everlasting hopes upon its rejection.” He wanted her to consider the influence of her example: he felt that many had

attempted before God to excuse or lessen their own neglect by her example. He concluded these and other arguments by warning her “it is now, my dear friend, the 11th hour for you, and you still have it in your power to repair much of the past, ... by acknowledging before men that Saviour whom you wish to acknowledge you before his Father in heaven.” He wrote that it would be a great consolation to him on his approaching visit to receive her and two others he named into the Catholic faith.

Mrs. Floyd put off the final decision for seven more years, not being received into the Church by Bishop Whelan until June, 1852. She died on December 12 of the same year. The pastor of Wytheville, Virginia, her sons and sons-in-law accompanied her body the 80 miles from Burke’s Garden to Sweet Springs. A beautiful journey over mountains and streams in good weather, it would have been a torturous one in bad. They buried her next to her husband in the Lewis Family Cemetery on the knoll with the exquisite view behind her daughter’s house.

If one reads the historians of frontier religion, particularly Methodist historians, one can perhaps understand why it took Mrs. Floyd so long to join an organized religion. One of the signs of fervor during revivals was the amount of barking one could do. Religion in the Appalachians, even up to Civil War times, was very messy and chaotic. The slavery issue affected all churches with great bitterness. It is perhaps to her credit that she allowed her children to join as they approached their late teens, but took much more time for her intellect to accept the reasonableness of the Latin language and other externals of Catholicism at that time.

On January 24, 1821, Mrs. Floyd witnessed the death of her brother William. She had to write William’s wife the sad news.

“He died as he lived, satisfied with the justice and goodness of his Creator.” Devout but not saccharine, she then added “A friend to all honest men and the foe of scoundrels.” Signing the letter to her sister-in-law “Your afflicted Sister,” Mrs. Floyd expressed the belief, “Oh my Sister what a shield and stay his precious family have lost. I hope God will enable them to bear this sad bereavement.” She may not have been quick to join any organized religion, but she was deeply religious.

Governor Floyd’s grave had been marked with a handsome dressed concrete slab some three feet long, six feet wide and ten inches thick. After discussion with Mrs. Floyd’s direct descendent, Mrs. Jack (Lynn) Spellman, who maintains the Lewis Family Cemetery, this text was agreed for Mrs. Floyd:

<p>JOHN FLOYD TWICE GOVERNOR OF VIRGINIA AN APOSTLE OF SECESSION AND THE FATHER OF THE OREGON COUNTRY DIED AUG. 21, 1837</p>	<p>LETITIA PRESTON FLOYD WIFE OF GOVERNOR JOHN FLOYD MOTHER OF GOV. JOHN BUCHANAN FLOYD AUTHOR AND EDUCATOR DIED DEC. 12, 1852</p>
--	--

But a major problem would be to find Mrs. Floyd's grave, for it had been unmarked, with only the understanding that she was buried "next to her husband."

An archaeologist trained in restoring cemeteries had been hired to recover the graves of many early Irish settlers buried in the adjacent Old Catholic Cemetery. Professor Ken Robinson, of Lillington, North Carolina, spent the weeks of September 26, 1988, and June 11, 1990, restoring both cemeteries and locating the grave of Mrs. Floyd. No attempt was made to excavate or exhume any human remains. Rarely did the excavations extend any deeper than 10 inches. Excavations were conducted mostly with hand tools such as shovels, mattocks and trowels. Excavation areas were marked prior to the excavation and the precise locations of the excavated areas were mapped and recorded in order to maintain permanent record of where the excavations were conducted.¹⁴

Since the massive concrete marker to Governor Floyd had not been placed on his grave until the 1930s, some one hundred years after his death, it was deemed prudent to see if the marker actually covered his grave. Intensive investigation determined that it was off center by at least two feet. The concrete slab, and a large concrete box supporting it were both moved 4 feet west and 2 feet north of the original location, since both historical evidence and soil analysis and probing indicated that was where the governor's grave was, with an identically matching grave on its south side. This unmarked grave gave every indication of being Letitia Preston Floyd's grave. So the new marker was placed on it, and the Most Rev. Bernard W. Schmitt, seventh bishop of Wheeling, was invited to bless it and celebrate the occasion.

On August 15, 1990, direct descendants of Mrs. Floyd from Virginia and West Virginia joined Bishop Schmitt first in the chapel of St. John and then at the newly marked grave itself, to celebrate the memory of this great Christian feminist. A Roanoke, Virginia, television station gave the church

service extensive coverage. A van brought officials of the Montgomery County Branch of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, and other interested people from Smithfield Plantation, Letitia's childhood home about 75 miles from her grave site across the border in Blacksburg, Virginia.

During the ceremony at the grave, Professor Robinson explained his excavation procedure and Bishop Schmitt blessed the new marker, standing where his predecessor, the first bishop of Wheeling, Richard Whelan, had stood when he visited the grave site on October 19, 1859.

Today, the drive from Wheeling takes more than five hours. Then, the coach ride must have taken at least a week. Bishop Whelan had come to preside at the marriage of one of Mrs. Floyd's granddaughters; and probably would not have missed the opportunity to pray at his famous convert's grave.

Did de Tocqueville, who embodied his praise of American women ever meet this feminist? The Floyds are not listed among the people he interviewed during his 1832 trip up the coast from New Orleans to Washington, D.C. But he almost certainly heard of her. His very poor impression of Andrew Jackson after interviewing him coincides remarkably with the shared opposition that Governor and Mrs. Floyd showed to President Jackson. This shared opposition leads me to conclude that she undoubtedly formed a strong partnership of mind, heart, and action with John Floyd.

In addition to the ceremony at the grave, a memorial service was held in St. John's Chapel. One speaker¹⁵ at that service mused that when he first started reading about Mrs. Floyd, he was tempted to call her "the Abigail Adams of Virginia." Then, as he read more, he began to wonder if someday, when Mrs. Floyd's letters are edited and a definitive biography written, we might not be calling Abigail Adams "the Letitia Preston Floyd of New England!"

Editor's Conclusion

This essay and its two companion articles in this issue of the *Smithfield Review* make it abundantly clear that Letitia Preston Floyd was a remarkable woman who has been largely ignored by writers of Virginia history. In the male-dominated society of her lifetime, she stands out as a tough-minded lady with an agenda of her own. Obviously, she ought to be far better known. We are fortunate that the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate posted Father Harry Winter to Monroe County and that he worked there with Lynn Spellman to establish Lynnside as an Historic District. We are also fortunate that Winter came to understand the role of Letitia Preston Floyd as a Catholic feminist and wrote about her from that perspective.

Editor's Acknowledgments

Thanks to Father Harry Winter for his warm collaboration and for encouraging the editing and annotation of his work. Thanks to the anonymous *Smithfield Review* referees who, as always, sharpened the editor's attention and forced him to think carefully about what Winter had written. Thanks to Lynn Spellman for her many-year custodianship of the recently sold Lynnside property and for her encouragement of the editor. Thanks to Hugh Campbell, the editor of the *Smithfield Review*, for his ongoing support. Finally, thanks to the editor's wife, Deena Flinchum, for her ongoing encouragement and support.

Endnotes

1. O. M. I. stands for "Oblates of Mary Immaculate." The Oblates are a community of Catholic priests and brothers who "serve the poor and needy people in the United States and more that 60 countries world wide." Harry Winter was born in New York in 1937, and joined the priesthood in Rome, Italy, on December 16, 1964. From 1979 to 1994 he was pastor at churches in Virginia, West Virginia, and North Carolina. It was during his service at Union, in Monroe County, West Virginia, that he became interested in Lynnside and the role of Letitia Preston Floyd as an important early Virginia convert to Catholicism. As of 2015 he was Director, Oblate Residence, 104 N. Mississippi River Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55104. His website is www.harrywinter.org.
2. The *Encyclopedia West Virginia* article about St. John's Chapel is at www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/156. Harry Winter's unpublished nine-page article about the history of the chapel is on line at www.lynnside.org/files/StJohnsChapelBriefHistory1999.pdf.
3. The 2012 "Preservation West Virginia" brochure about Lynnside Manor is at www.pawv.org/endangered2012/ELsitesheets3_lynnside.pdf.
4. Lynn Spellman is the daughter of the late Philip Preston Keiley and the late Madeleine Emilie Marie Leclercq and inherited the (now sold) Lynnside property. The Keiley family is a noteworthy Virginia Catholic family, having produced over the years a bishop and an international jurist. Spellman lived for many years adjacent to the Lynnside property. At the time of this writing she is confined to a nursing home in Colorado. During the years 2007–2012, Lynn maintained the now defunct website lynnside.com. Her website recorded the histories and genealogies of the Floyd, Lewis, and related families. lynnside.com has recently been replaced (August 2014) by lynnside.org, which is maintained by Jim Glanville, editor of this article.
5. The National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for Lynnside, a 23-page pdf file with maps and pictures, is at www.wvculture.org/shpo/nr/pdf/monroe/91000452.pdf.
6. Manuscript originally written August 15, 1990. The original manuscript is on line at www.lynnside.org/files/HarryWinter1990.pdf.
7. Alexis de Tocqueville, Henry Reeve, trans., *Democracy in America*, (London: Saunders & Otley, 1835). Multiple subsequent edited and reprinted editions.
8. Author Winter is perhaps overly generous to the western Virginians here, many of whom owned slaves. Specifically, despite Winter's statement, Letitia's father William Preston was a slave owner. In 1759, he purchased for £752 eighteen slaves brought to Maryland on the vessel *True Blue*. At the time of his death he owned 42 slaves. See Jim Glanville, "The Neglected William Preston," *The Roanoke Times*, Friday August 8, 2014, page 7. Letitia and her husband also owned slaves, and it is worth noting that two of them lie buried only a few yards from Letitia and her husband.
9. This important "My Dear Rush" letter is discussed in the companion biographical article about Mrs. Floyd in this issue of the *Smithfield Review*.

10. The answer to this question is perhaps that it was the Georgetown connection, discussed in the companion article about Governor and Mrs. Floyd and the Catholic Church in this issue of the *Smithfield Review*.
11. James H. Bailey, *A History of the Diocese of Richmond: The Formative Years* (Richmond: Chancery Office, Diocese of Richmond, 1956), 100, writes: "Bishop Whelan became convinced that the western parts of Virginia, differing in its natural features from the rest of the Commonwealth, offered greater inducements for Catholics to settle, as slave labor was comparatively rare and the country was rapidly developing." Fogarty, *Commonwealth Catholicism*, 98, writes: "Whelan was convinced of the necessity of splitting his diocese, not because of the size of its Catholic population, but because of the extent of its territory."
12. Marshall W. Fishwick, *Springlore in Virginia* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Popular Press, Bowling Green State University, 1978).
13. James Gibbons (1834-1921) was successively Bishop of Richmond, Archbishop of Baltimore, and a cardinal. He was the second American to attain the rank of cardinal.
14. Kenneth W. Robinson, "Archaeological investigation of the Governor John Floyd and Letitia Preston Floyd Graves, and documentation of the Lewis Family Old Catholic Cemetery, Sweet Springs, Monroe County, West Virginia." Report prepared for the St. Johns Catholic Church, Monroe County Parish, Sweet Springs, West Virginia, February 15, 1991. The report describes the archaeological investigation of a grave site in Monroe County, West Virginia, undertaken in order to determine the approximate location of the grave of Letitia Preston Floyd (1779–1852) relative to that of her husband, former Virginia Governor John Floyd (1783–1837). It includes copies of photographs and diagrams of the grave site. On line at www.lynnside.org/files/KennethRobinson1991.pdf.
15. The editor strongly suspects that the speaker to whom Father Winter here refers to was himself.

Brief Note

**Sugar Maples and Maple Sugar
at Historic Smithfield**

*Donald E. Bixby**

“What is that big tree just over the rail fence?” is a question often asked by visitors to Historic Smithfield, especially in the autumn when the tree is ablaze with fall color. The answer is that it is the last of the ancient Smithfield sugar maples, or *Acer saccharum*. The tree has been dated to the late 1700s, and is likely a contemporary of the first years of the Preston family at Smithfield.¹

As recently as 10 years ago, there was evidence of six of these magnificent trees planted in a row along the rail fence. This row consisted of four trees and two stumps. Three of the trees were in serious decline. Two were hollow, and the staff often watched baby raccoons peering from holes in the trees. Eventually, the three had to be removed for reasons of safety.²

In the spring of 2014, the surviving tree provided about 40 gallons of sap, enough for staff member April Danner to produce a gallon of maple syrup, or about five pounds of sugar, at a youth demonstration.³

Native Americans had long harvested the sweetness of the maple; perhaps first noticing that squirrels and birds wounded the bark of maples and then ate the sugar crystals. A broken branch would often produce a “sapsicle” at the wound that could be broken off and enjoyed. Trees were gashed with an ax, and the sap was collected in birch bark baskets. Meat was often boiled in sap, and sometimes the syrup was poured onto snow to crystallize, or into shells and decorative wooden molds. Maple sugar became an important part of the late winter diet. Other trees, such as birch and hickory, were tapped, but the quantity and sugar content were much lower.⁴

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European settlers substituted an auger and wooden spile, or spout, to collect the sap in wooden or metal buckets. The small hole produced by the auger allowed the trees to be harvested annually without damage to the tree. Today, most sugar bushes use plastic tubing to connect multiple tapped trees to a central collection station.^{5,6}

The area around Historic Smithfield is not a likely region for sugar maples⁷, so why were these trees planted there? An article in the *Colonial Williamsburg Journal* by Mary Miley Theobald may suggest an answer. Benjamin Rush and the abolitionist Quakers of Philadelphia promoted maple sugar over cane sugar with the goal to “lessen or destroy the consumption of West Indian sugar, and thus indirectly to destroy negro slavery.” Thomas Jefferson joined Rush’s group. The maple sugar scheme combined Jefferson’s love of botany and his anti-slavery sentiments, though his slaves provided him with the leisure to pursue this idea and his many other interests.⁸

There was also international interest in maple sugar as a low-cost substitute for cane sugar. Louis Philippe, Duke of Orleans and later the last French king, was traveling through Virginia in 1797. He was intrigued by the possibility of large-scale production, particularly in French-held North American territory. More than a curiosity, European tensions were disrupting trade, including sugar transported from the Caribbean.⁹

Maple sugar is easier to produce than cane sugar and requires less investment in machinery, animals, labor, and slaves. A farm family could



Figure 1. The remaining Preston Sugar Maple being tapped for sap in the spring. Courtesy of Historic Smithfield Plantation



Figure 2. The Sugar Maple towers over the manor house. Courtesy of Historic Smithfield Plantation

produce all the sugar it needed in a season, about 200 pounds with a salable surplus. Rush incorporated Jefferson's ideas and suggestions into a pamphlet extolling the health benefits of pure maple sugar. By harvest time, there were no insects about to contaminate the sugar, and "it was produced by free Americans with cleaner hands than slaves: men who work for exclusive benefit of others are not under the same obligations to keep their persons clean while they are employed at their work."¹⁰

Of the 60 sugar maple saplings Jefferson planted at Monticello, all died within a few years. Two additional plantings met a similar fate. Sugar maples, however, do grow well in the western part of the state at higher elevations.¹¹ Warm days and frosty nights are necessary for a good flow of sap. Jefferson's hopes for domestic sugar independence did not materialize, but they did lead to an increase in maple sugar production in the North.^{12, 13}

Before the Civil War, maple sugar was the dominant sugar product. At half the price of imported cane sugar, it was the common American sweetener. As the price of cane sugar fell and beet sugar came on the scene, maple sugar makers switched to syrup. Today, nearly all maple sap is made into syrup.^{14, 15}

The remaining sugar maple tree at Historic Smithfield Plantation stands as a majestic sentinel and reminds us of a time when sustainability was not just a catch phrase but a necessity for survival, especially on the frontier.

Endnotes

1. Jay Stipes, Professor of Plant Pathology, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, personal conversation, June 14, 2012
2. Personal observation of the author
3. April Danner, Deputy Administrative Director, Historic Smithfield. Personal conversation June 20, 2014
4. Mary Miley Theobald, *Thomas Jefferson and the Maple Sugar Scheme*, Colonial Williamsburg Journal, autumn 2012
5. Ibid.
6. Timothy Perkins, Director, Proctor Maple Research Center - Underhill Center - Vermont
7. George A. Petrides (Author), Roger Tory Peterson (Editor), Janet Wehr (Illustrator) *Field Guide to Eastern Trees: Eastern United States and Canada, Including the Midwest* (Peterson Field Guides)
8. Theobald, *Thomas Jefferson and the Maple Sugar Scheme*
9. Sharon Watkins, *A Future French King Visits the Virginia Backcountry in 1797, The Smithfield Review* 16 (2012)
10. Theobald, *Thomas Jefferson and the Maple Sugar Scheme*
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Janet Eagleson, Rosemary Hasner, *The Maple Syrup Book*, Boston Mills Press
14. Theobald, *Thomas Jefferson and the Maple Sugar Scheme*
15. Eagleson, Hasner, *The Maple Syrup Book*

Index to Volume 19
Rachael Garrity

A

Abbeville District, SC, 53
Aberdeen, Scotland, 122
Abingdon, Va., 93, 102-103, 110
Abolition, 95-96, also see Slavery
Act Donating Public Lands to the Several States and Territories Which May Provide Colleges for the Benefit of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts, see Morrill Land-Grant Act
Adams, Abigail, 143
Adams, Blaine, 8
Adams, John, 7, 9, 15
Adams, John Quincy, 98
African-American, 38
African Methodist Episcopal, 38
Agent's Book (Olin and Preston Institute), 65
Albany Argus, 98
Albany Regency, 97, 117
Albemarle County, Va., 99
Albert, Prince, 126
Alexander, O., 63, 67
Alexandria, Va., 35
Allegheny Hills, 22
Ambler, Charles Henry, 81-82, 89-90, 92-93, 97, 99, 110
American Bible Society, 60
American Colonization Society, 96
American Indians, 8, 10, 11, 13, 17-18, 19-20, 22, 122, 147
American Revolution, 21, 79, 84, 90
Amiss, Edwin J., 64, 69
Amy (slave), 88
Anderson, E. R., 64, 69
Anglican, 122
Appalachian Mountains, 138, 140-141
Arey, Louisa Ann, 36, 39
Arkansas, 89, 91 100, 102
Armistead (slave), 88
Armstrong, J.E., 69
Arnold, Vickie, 22
Ashland, Va., 40

Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, 138, 143
Athens, Ga., 54
Atlantic Ocean, 127
Augusta County, Va., 2, 3, 9, 11, 15-19, 95, 122
Circuit Court, 22

B

Baillie, Alex, 24
Baird(Beard), John, 2
Baker, Humphrey, 13
Bales, Jack 45
Ball, Dabney, 38
Ballard, 86
Baltimore, Md., 40, 42, 84, 105, 131
Bane, James, 16
Bankhard, Anna Urula, 15
Barger (Barrier), Casper, 5, 7, 9, 10, 20-21
Barger, Margaret, 10
Barger (Barrier), Phillip, 10, 21
Barger's Indian Fort, 20-21
Barnet, Col. James, 104
Barnett, David, 64
Barton, Dr., 84
Battle of Cloyd's Mountain, Va., 69
Battle of Monongehela, Penn., 17, 19
Battle of Point Pleasant, 109
Baugh, Leonidas, 110
Benton, Col. 100
Berkeley Springs, Va./W.Va., 33-34
Berkly County, Va., 109
Berks County, Penn., 16
Beverley Manor, Va., 16
Bingaman's Ferry, 15
Bixby, Donald E., 147
Black, Alexander, 64
Black, Harvey (Dr.), 38, 58, 64, 69
Black, Mary Irby Kent, 58
Black, Samuel, 15
Black, William, 22
Blacksburg Female Academy, 52, 64
Blacksburg School for Boys, 63

Blacksburg, Va., 7, 9, 22, 33-34, 36-40,
42-44, 53-76, 82, 86, 111, 121, 138,
143
Blair, James, 98
Blair, John, Sr., 18
Blue Ridge Mountains, 96
Blue Spring Creek, Va., 102
Bond, Dr. Beverly W., 43
Book of Discipline (Methodist), 35
Bostick, Mary Ann, *see* *Olin, Mary Ann*
Bostick
Botetourt, Va., 108
Bowyer, Dep. Sheriff Thomas, 104
Boydton, Va., 54
Boys, Dr. 91
Braddock, Maj. Gen. Edward, 17, 19, 22
Breckenridge, George, 2
Breckenridge, Robert, 12
Breckinridge Family, 108
Breckinridge, Alexander, 122
Bridgewater, Va., 35, 36, 39
Bright, Tobias, 2, 15
Brock, R. A., 106
Brown, Benjamin L. 64
Brown Family, 108
Brown, Jacob, 15
Brown, Messrs, 109
Brown's Hotel, 87
Brush Mountain, 6
Buchanan, Col. John, 2-3, 4, 6-8, 10, 18-20,
122
Buchanan, Jane, *see* *Floyd, Jane Buchanan*
Buchann, William, 12
Buckhannon Public Schools, W. Va., 60
Buckley, James M. 56
Bucks County, Penn., 16
Buena Vista, Va., 41
Buffalo, NY, 35
Buhrman (Burman, Buhiman), A., 64-65,
68-69
Burke's Garden, Va., 77, 78, 102-103, 108,
110-111, 121-126, 128-133, 140-141
Burner, Cori, 111, 133
Byers, Col, 109
Byers, William, 5, 7, 10-11
Byrns, Peter, 79

C

Caddell, Samuel, 82
Calhoun, US Vice President John C., 93, 97
Campbell, Gov. David, 107
Campbell, Hugh, 8, 23, 112, 133, 144
Campbell, Sara Buchanan, *see* *Preston,*
Sara Buchanan Campbell
Caribbean, 148
Carlisle, Penn., 33, 34, 81
Carolina, 130
Catawba Creek, 15
Catholics/Catholicism, 102, 110, 121-145
 German, 133
 Irish, 133
 Pontifical Brief, 125
 Provincial Council, Baltimore, 125
 Richmond Diocese, 125, 133, 139-1
 Wheeling (Wheeling-Charleston)
 Diocese, 125, 133, 138-139, 142-143
Cavan, 102-103, 121
Central (Methodist Episcopal) Church,
Baltimore, Md., 40
Charleston, S. C., 54, 98
Charlottesville, Va., 99
Chester County, Penn., 23
Childs, Virginia Louise, 40
Christian Advocate and Journal, 55
Christian, Col. William, 108
Christianity, 96
Christiansburg, Va., 53, 57, 64, 78, 81,
84-85, 104, 111
Civil War, 35, 57, 60, 68-69, 97-98, 129,
141, 149
 Battle of Cloyd's Mountain, 69
Clark Family, 91
Clark, Gen. William, 109
Clay, Henry, 99
Clemmons, Beth Pike, 111
Clinch River, 3
Cloyd, David, 102
Cloyd, Gordon, 92
Cloyd, Joseph, 64, 65
Cochran, James, 105, 107
Cochran, John 99, 101
Cole, Tiffany W., 45
College Life, Its Theory and Practice, 56

College of William and Mary, 3, 111
Colonial Williamsburg Journal, 148
 Columbia River, 140
 Confederate Congress, 57
 Confederates, 57
 Conly, James, 2
 Conly, John, 2
 Conrad, Peter, 15
 Conrad, Stephen, 15
 Continental Army, 84
 Cook, John, 5, 7, 10,
 Coralie (*slave*), 95
 Cotton boom, 99, 102
 County Tyrone, Ireland, 129
 Cox, Clara B., 45, 51
 Cox, William E., 61
 Craig, Rev. John, 122
 Crapps, John, 9
 Crockett, Jane, 11
 Croghan, 109
 Crook, Maj. Gen. George C., 69
 Crosswell, 98
 Cuba, 100
 Cull, James, 20
 Cummings, Anson Watson, 61
 Currie, Mary Virginia, 45, 54, 69-70
 Cynthia (*slave*), 88-89
 "Dagger John," *see Hughes, Bishop John Joseph*

D

Dalrymple, Rev. C. W., 68
 Daniel, Peter V., 93
 Danner, April, 147
 Darlinton, Willm, 24
 Darthula, 128
 Daughters of the American Revolution,
 20-21
 Davis, J. N., 62
 Davis, John, 22
 Dawson, William Henry, 66
 Dayton, Va., 35
Democracy in America, 138
 Denny, Professor Collins, 42, 44-45
 Dice, J. C., 68
 Dickinson College, 33-34, 45, 58, 81

Dictionary of Arts and Sciences, 138
 Die, John, 11
 Dinwiddie, Governor Robert, 4, 18, 20, 22
Diversity and Accommodation: Essays on the Cultural Composition of the Virginia Frontier, 9
 Donald, Christopher, 61
 Donelan, Rev. Mr., 132
 Douthat (Dought), David G., 64, 69
 Draper, Bettie (Robinson), 11, 20
 Draper, Eleanor, 1-2, 11-12, 15, 19
 Draper, George, 1-2, 10-11, 19, 23-24
 Draper, John, 1-2, 5, 7, 10-11, 13-14, 19-20
 Draper (Ingles), Mary, 1-2, 11, 13-14, 19-20
 Draper, Lyman, 105, 107-109, 108
 Draper's Meadows, 1-23
 Draper's Survey, 4
 Draper's Valley, 11
 Duck Pond, 8, 19
 Duke University, 110

E

Eakerd, Conrad, 2, 3, 7
Early Adventures on the Western Waters, 9
Early Schools of Methodism (The), 61
 Edinburgh, Scotland, 122
 Edmundson, Maj. Henry, 104
 Edwards, Thomas, 24
 Edwards, W. S., 68
 Ege, Deborah, 45
 Elswick (Lorton), Lydia, 16
 Emanuel (Manuel) (*slave*), 88-89
 Ericson, David F., 97
 Euro-American, 8

F

Fairmont, (Va.)/ W. Va., 59
 School district, 60
 Fairmont Male and Female Seminary (Academy), 59
 Fairmont State University (Fairmont Branch Normal School), 59-60, 70
 Faust (Foust), Catherine, 16
 Fellowship, 35
 Feminism, 137, 143
 Ferguson, Dr., 81

-
- Filson Historical Society, 22
 Firkin, 125
 Fiske, John, 54
 Fishwick, Marshall, 140
 Fleming, Col. William, 108
 Flinchum, Deena, 112, 133, 144
 Florida, 90
 Floyd Family, 106, 107, 110-111, 124, 137
 Benjamin Rush, 79, 81, 84-86, 99,
 103-108, 124, 128, 138
 Charles, 82, 139
 Coraly (Coralee) Patton, 89, 95, 114
 Elizabeth Lavalette, *see Holmes,*
 Elizabeth Lavalette Floyd
 George Rogers Clark (1st and 2nd), 81,
 99, 102, 104-108, 128
 Henry B., 123, 131
 Jane Buchanan, 122
 John, Capt./Col., 21, 80, 107-108, 139
 John Buchanan, 81, 92-95, 100-102,
 110, 123, 138-139
 John, Dr., 77, 80-82, 84-85, 87-104,
 107-108, 110, 121-124, 137-143
 Letitia Preston, 77-145
 Letitia Preston, 2nd, *see Lewis, Letitia*
 Preston Floyd
 Mary Lewis Mourning, 99
 Nathaniel, 82
 Nicholas, 81-82, 90, 98
 Nicketti (Nichetti), *see Johnston,*
 Nicketti Buchannan Floyd
 Mrs., 128
 Sara "Sally" Buchanan Preston, 92-95,
 100
 Susanna Smith, 81, 91
 William Preston, 81, 100, 124, 128
 Fluvanna County, Va., 95
 Flying Camp, McDowell's. 81
 Fogarty, Gerald, 123
 Forest Oak Cemetery, 41
 Fort Frederick, 20
 Fort Sumter, S. C., 57
 Fox, Rev. Edward, 127-128, 130
 France, 57
 Frankfort, Ky., 109
 Franklin College, 54-55
 Franklin County, Ky., 79-81
 Freedmen's Bureau of West Virginia, 60
 French, 18
 French and Indian War, 1, 7, 9-10, 17-18, 21
- G**
- Gaines, William Harris, Jr., 57
 Gaithersburg, Md., 33, 41, 69
 Gardner, James, 24
 Garrett, John, 6, 8
 Gaver, H. A., 68
 Georgetown, D. C., 58
 Georgetown University (College), 124
 Germany, 10-11, 15-16, 17-18
 Gibbons, Cardinal James, 140
 Gibbons, James, 23
 Gibbons, Jon, 24
 Gibbons, Joseph, 24
 Gilmore, Mr., 66
 Gilot, Jon-Erik, 133
 Glanville, Jim, 23, 77, 105, 121, 137
 Goheen, M., 64, 65
 Grace United Methodist Church
 (Methodist Episcopal Church, South),
 Gaithersburg, Md., 33, 43, 69
 Graham, Rev. Mr., 66
 Grandin, Joshua M., 66
 Grayson, John Breckinridge, 101
 Grayson, Mrs., 100
Greece and the Golden Horn, 56
 Greenbrier River, 22
 Greene, Duff, 98
 Gregory, Sam, 111
 Greshem, Robert, 16
- H**
- Hale, John P., 10 65
 Hall, Richard, 2
 Hamilton, SC Governor James, 96
 Hampden-Sydney College, 56
 Hanover County, Va., 122
 Harless, Phillip, 16
 Harman, Catrina, 11
 Harman, Jacob, Jr., 5, 7, 9-10, 11-13, 15-16
 Harman, Jacob, Sr., 3, 9, 11-12, 15, 17
 Harman, Sarah Lorton, 11-13, 16
-

Harmon, Adam, Jr, 9, 15
 Harrisonburg, Va., 35, 40
 Hart, Nathaniel, 79-80, 98, 103, 108
 Hart, Susanna Preston, 79-80
 Havanna, Cuba, 100
 Helena, Ariz., 101
 Hempenstal, Mr., 108
 Henderson, Giles J., 64-65
 Henderson, John, 24
 Henry, Rev. Patrick, 122
 Herman (Harmon), Adam, 3, 5, 9
 Herst, Mr., 91
 Hilderbrand, J. R., 6, 8
 Hogan, Abraham, 61
 Holland (fabric), 12
 Holmberg, Jim, 22
 Holmes, George Frederick, 105-107,
 110-111, 132
 Holmes, Elizabeth Lavalette Floyd, 82, 95,
 99-100, 123, 125-128, 132
 Holston River, 3
 Hopkins, George W., 108
 "Horace Mann of West Virginia," 59
 Horeljohns, 109
 Horseshoe Bottom Plantation, 11, 87-88
 Howard Family, 108-109
 Howard, John, 109
 Hudson, Judge Robert M., 37
 Hughes, (Arch)Bishop John Joseph, 129,
 133
 Huntsman, Lawrence, 10
 Immigrants, 133

I

"Incidents of Border Life," 106
*Increase in Prices: Some Descendants
 of David and Agnes(Hoffman) Price
 of 17th Century Germany*, 16
Independent, The, 41
 Ingles Bottom, 13-14
 Ingles, Mary Draper 1-2, 11, 13-14, 19-20
 Ingles, Mathew, 2
 Ingles (English), Thomas, 2, 13
 Ingles, William, 5, 7, 9, 13-14, 19-20
 English Mill Creek, 13
 Ireland, 13, 58
 Irish settlers, 142

J

Jackson, US President Andrew, 78, 88-93,
 96-98, 110-111, 143
 Jackson, John, 24
 Jackson, John M., 23
 James River, 3-4, 10
 Jefferson County, Ky., 82
 Jefferson, US President Thomas, 148
 Jerusalem, Va., 96
 Jessup, Mrs., 91
 Jeter, Edith
 Johnston, Andrew, 12-13
 Johnston, David E., 21
 Johnston Family 110
 Executive Papers of, 110
 John Warfield, 110
 Joseph E., 110
 Mr., 126, 128
 Nicketti Buchannan Floyd,
 95, 99-101, 107-108, 110, 123, 128
 JWJ, 124

K

Kear, William, 10
 Kegley, F. B. Library, 4
 Kegley, Frederick B., 6, 9
 Kegley, Mary, 6, 9, 23
 Keister, George, 69
 Keister, Jacob, 52-53, 69
 Keister, Mary, 52-53, 69
 Kelly (Kelley), Mr., 126-128, 131
 Kent, Cecelia Leavitt, *see White, Cecelia
 Leavitt*
 Kent, James R., 64, 69
 Kent, Mary Irby, *see Mary Irby Kent Black*
 Kentucky, 13, 36, 39, 81, 88-89, 107-109
 Keough, Sara B., 8
 Kercheval, Mr., 109
 Kinder, Conrad, 5, 7, 14-15
 Kinder, Michael, 7, 14-15
 Know-Nothings, 132

L

Lambert, Thomas J., 43
 Land-Grant College Act of 1862, *see
 Morrill Land-Grant Act*
 Latin, 141

Lee, Charles Carter, 110
 Lee Family, 110
 Le Havre, France, 57
 Leicester, Vt., 53
 Leonard, Henry, 20
 Leppard (Lippard), William, 5, 7, 9-10, 15
 Lexington, Ky., 108-109
 Lexington, Va., 36, 39, 81, 109
 Lewis Family, 107, 109-110, 141
 James A., 109-110
 John, 139-140
 Letitia Preston Floyd, 82, 91, 100-101,
 123, 128, 130, 140
 Major Andrew, 19, 20
 Mary Preston, 83, 105, 139
 Sarah E., 99-101
 Thomas, 3-4, 11, 13, 108
 William 100, 140
 Lewis and Clark Expedition, 139
 Lewisburg, W. Va., 35
 Library of Virginia, 64, 110
 Lick Run, 8
 Lick Run Preparatory School, 33
Life and Letters of Stephen Olin (The), 56
 Lillington, N. C., 142
 Lincoln, US President Abraham, 57, 129
 Lingell, Anna, 15
 Lingell, Jacob, 5, 7, 15
 Literary Fund, 51
 London, England, 41, 138
 Looney, Thomas, 22
 Lorton, Israel, 12, 16-17
 Lorton, Jacob, 5, 7, 16
 Lorton, Sarah, *see Harman, Sarah*
 Louis Philippe, Duke of Orleans,
 King of France, 148
 Louisville, Ky., 41, 81, 87, 91, 100, 122
 Love Feasts, 33
 Lowell, MA, 132
 Loy Family, 16
 Anna Marie, 17
 George, 16
 Henry, 16
 John, 16
 Martin, 5, 7, 16
 Mary, 16

Loyal Land Company, 13, 103
 Lucas, Frankie Davis, 58
 Lucius (*slave*), 88-89
 Lusk, Deputy Sheriff William, 2, 22
 Lyle, John N., 37, 63, 67-69
 Lynch, Julia Matilda *see Olin, Julia
 Matilda Lynch*
 Lynchburg, Va., 126
 Lynnside Manor/Historic District, 101,
 137, 140-144

M

MacCue, Samuel, 24
 Madison, Elizabeth Preston, 83, 88, 101,
 103, 109, 111
 Madison, Mr., 12, 101
 Madison, US President James, 92
 Magri, Joseph, 123
 Mann, Horace, 59
 Mann, Ralph, 102, 110, 121
 Marshall, US Chief Justice John, 92
 Martin, Rev. John S., 68-69
 Massacre, Draper's Meadows, 18
 Massanutten Mountain, Va., 11
 Matthews, Capt., 128
 Matthews, Deputy Sheriff Samson, 22
 Max Meadows, 3, 18
 Maury River, 10
 Mays, Ryan, 1, 77, 133
 McCleskey, Turk, 9
 McClure, John, 22
 McComas, Judge, 103-104
 McCurry, John, Sr., 12
 McDonald, Ellen Tyler (Taylor), 52, 66
 McDonald, Joseph, 11, 13
 McDowell, Gov. James, 96, 123
 McDowell (McDowile), Lt. Col. James,
 81, 89,
 McDowell, Sally Campbell Preston, 77, 101
 McNeele, Mr. 66
 McNeice, Mr., 66
 Meadow Creek, 16
 Methodist Episcopal Church, 54
 Abbeville District, SC, 53
 Alexandria Conference, 36
 Allegheny Conference, 60

- Ecumenical Conference, 40, 41
 General Conference, 34-35, 38, 41, 55
 Leaders in Blacksburg, 52
 New York, 55
 South, (Baltimore Conference), 33-49,
 58, 61-63, 65-70
 Baltimore District, 40
 Board of Church Extension, 41-42
 Committee on Seminaries, 36,
 62-63, 67-68
 Methodist Episcopal Church,
 South, 43-44
 Lewisburg District, 66
 Moorefield District, 40
 Roanoke District, 37, 40, 67
 Rockingham Circuit/District, 35,
 36, 41, 67
 Bridgewater, 35-36
 Dayton, 35
 Fellowship, 35
 Mt. Crawford, 35
 Mt. Solon, 35
 Naked Creek, 35
 Wesley Chapel, 35
 Rockville, Md., Circuit, 38-39,
 40-41
 Winchester District, 40
 South Carolina Conference, 37
 West Virginia, 60
 Middlebury College, Vt., 53-54
 Middletown, Conn., 55-56
 Miller, John, 77
 Miller, Thomas C., 58, 60-61
 Minichan, Dr. David, Jr., 61
 Mississippi River, 2
 Monroe County, Va. (now W. Va.) 101,
 137-138
 Monroe, US President James, 92, 124
 Montgomery, Ala., 100
 Montgomery County, Md., 40
 Montgomery County, Va., 1, 13, 16,-17,
 21, 52-53, 56, 66, 69, 81-82, 92, 99,
 103-104
 Courthouse, 52, 64, 69, 77, 104, 111
 Montgomery Female Academy, 57
 Montgomery, Jacob, 66
 Montgomery Presbytery, 57
 Monticello, 149
 Moore, Daniel, 24
 Morgan County, Va. /W. Va., 33, 143
 Morgantown, W. Va., 60
 Morrill Land-Grant Act (Morrill Act), 38, 51
 Morrison, Alfred James, 52
 Mt. Crawford, 35
 Mt. Solon, 35
 Myers, Thomas, 68

N

 Naked Creek, 35
 Nancy (*slave*), 88-89
 Naples, Italy, 55
Nashville Christian Advocate, 41-42
 National Register of Historic Places, 137
 Nealy, James, 2
 Negroes, 59-60, 97
 Nerney, Sarah A., 64, 69, 111
 New England, 143
 New Orleans, LA, 99, 100, 104, 143
 New River, 3, 4, 6, 9-11, 13, 15, 17, 19-22
 New River Valley, 1, 12, 13, 15, 22
 New York, 129
New York Freeman's Journal, p. 122
 New York, N. Y., 83
 Newbern Road, 87
 Newbern, Va., 93, 102, 110
 Newell, Col. James, 109
 Newman Library, Virginia Tech, 65, 67-68,
 107
 Newport, Va., 7
 Newton, Township of, 1, 23
 Nichols, Paul L., 33, 69-70
 Niles, Hezekiah, 84
Niles Register, 97
 Norbeck, Md., 40
 Norfolk, Va., 57
 Normal schools, 59
 North Carolina, 79
 North River, 10
 Northwest Boundary, 90
 Nullification Crisis, 78, 93, 97-99

O

O'Brien, Rev. Timothy, 123, 128, 131, 139
 Offenburg (Landau), Rheinland Pfalz,
 Germany, 16-17
 Ohio River, 109
 Old Fort Road, 21
 Old Oregon Trail, 87
 Olin and Preston Institute, 36-39, 51-53,
 57-76
 Act of Incorporation, 63-64
 Olin, Julia Matilda Lynch, 56
 Olin, Henry, 53
 Olin, Lois Richardson, 53
 Olin, Lynch, 56
 Olin, Mary Ann Bostick, 54
 Olin, Stephen, 53-56
 Olin, Stephen Henry, 56
 Ohio River Valley, 18, 20
 Orange County, N. C., 16-17
 Oregon (Territory), 90, 139

P

Pack, Mrs., 104
 Pack, Samuel, 103, 111
 Paley, William, 34, 46
 Palfreyman, Aaron, 79
Papers of James Lewis, Woodville,, 110
 Park, Thomas, 24
 Parke, Abel, 24
 Parke, Rev. Mr., 123
 Parker, Mrs. Mary, 109
 Patton Family, 105
 Patton, Colonel James, 3-4, 6-7, 9-11,
 13-20, 22, 104
 Patton, James & Company, 2-3
 Paxton, Township of, 1, 23
 Peaked Mountain, Va., 11
 Pearsell, John, 24
 Pearsoll, Richard, 24
 Peck, William H., 64, 69
 Pellegrin, Amy Baker, 59, 70
 Pennsylvania, 1, 10, 16-17, 19, 23, 33-34,
 58, 84
 Pepper's Ferry Turnpike, 69
 Peterson, George, 10
 Peyton, Capt. Benjamin Howard, 90-91, 104

Peyton, Mrs., 101
 Peyton, Wm., 91
 Philadelphia, Penn., 1, 10, 15-18, 23, 81, 148
 Philips, John R., 64
 Pitzer, A. L., 65
 Philodemic Society, 124
 Pinnegar, Charles, 89
 Piper, Mr., 104
 Poage, John, 3, 4
 Pollard, Edward, 77
 Porter, James, 24
 Poteet, G. F., 52
 Preisch (*see Price*)
 Presbyterian, 79, 122
 Preston and Olin Institute, 37-39, 51-52, 69
 Preston Family, 105-106, 110-111, 138,
 147-148
 Ann Taylor, 56
 Caroline H., 87-88
 Elizabeth ref to as Madison, *see*
Madison, Elizabeth Preston
 Francis (Frank), Gen., 84, 94,
 103-104, 110
 James F., 57, 64, 69
 James Patton, 56-57, 86, 103, 123, 138
 John, 79, 82-84, 87-89, 103, 108
 Hancock, 88
 Letitia, *see Floyd, Letitia Preston*
 Lucinda Staples Redd, 57
 Mary *see Lewis, Mary Preston*
 Mary Radford (Polly), 83
 Peggy, 94
 Robert T., 57, 64-65, 69
 Sally Buchanan, *see Floyd, Sally*
Buchanan Preston
 Sara Buchanan Campbell, 94
 Susanna Smith, 77, 79-81, 84, 103, 122
 William, Col, 3-17, 19, 20, 22, 77, 79,
 82, 102,-103, 107-109, 122, 138-139
 William Ballard, 53, 56-57, 64-66, 69,
 96, 104
 William, 88, 141
 William C., 104, 123
 Preston and Olin Institute, 37-39
 Preston Resolution, 57
 Preston Salt Works, 94

Price, Agnes (Hoffman), 16
 Price, Anna Catharina, 17
 Price, Augustine, 5, 7, 16, 17
 Price, Daniel, 5, 7, 16-17
 Price, Henry, 5, 7, 11, 16-17
 Price, Johan Michael, 17, 21
 Price, Madlina, 11
 Price, Mary Magdalene, 17
 Price, Michael, 16
 Price Mountain, 6
 Price, W. Conway, 16
 Price's Fork, 17, 21-22
 Prince Edward County, Va., 56
 Protestant (Scottish), 122
 Prudhomme, J. F. E., 54
 Pulaski County, Va., 11, 69, 78, 82, 87,
 102, 110-111, 121, 133
 Pusey, Alden, 63, 67

Q

Quakers, 148

R

Radford Va., 7, 13
 Radford Army Ammunition Plant
 (Arsenal), 11, 88
 Radford, Cartson, 84
 Radford Family, 110
 Randolph-Macon College, 40-41, 45,
 53- 55, 69
Randolph-Macon Monthly, 54
 Ratliff, Silos, 12
 Read, Col. Clement, 20
 Redd, Lucinda Staples, *see* Preston,
Lucinda Staples Redd
 Reed Creek, 3, 18
 Reeder, Nicholas, 86
 Register, Samuel, 35, 68
 Revolutionary War, 139
 Reynolds, Cathy, 23
 Rhudy Branch, Va., 102
 Rice, William North, 55
 Richmond, Diocese of, *see* Catholics/
Catholicism, Richmand Diocese
Richmond Standard, 106

Richmond, Va., 57, 83-84, 92-93, 95, 104,
 123-126, 130-132, 139
Richmond Whig, 99
 Ritchie, Thomas, 97-98, 117
 Roanoke, Va., 15, 83, 142
 Roanoke River, 3-4, 13, 15, 19
 Robertson, Jenkins M., 61
 Robinson, Elizabeth (Bettie), *see* Draper,
Bettie
 Robinson, Prof. Ken, 142-143
 Robinson, Mary, 91
 Rockingham County, Va., 11-12, 17, 108
 Rockville, MD, 38, 39-40
 Roland, Candice, 23
 Ronald, N. M., 64, 69
 Rome, Italy, 125
 Rush, Dr. Benjamin, 84-86, 148

S

Salem and Pepper's Ferry Turnpike, 69
 Sally (*slave*), 88
 Sayers, Samuel, 102
 Scherp (Sharp), Anna Elizabeth, 16, 18
 Schmitt, Most Rev. Bernard W., 142-143
 Schreiber, Mr., 130
 Schroeder, John, 87, 90
 Scott, Ray, 111
 Secession, 57
 Second Continental Congress, 84
 Secretary of the Navy (US), 56
 Seminaries, 36
 Shadow Lake Road, 20-21
 Sharp, George, 5, 7, 17
 Sharp, Harness, 5, 7, 16-18
 Sharpe, Governor Horatio, 22
 Shawnee Indians, 19-20
 Shelbyville, Ky., 108
 Shell, John, 37-38
 Shenandoah River, 11
 Shenandoah Valley, 10
 Sherman, H. H., 40
 Sherifalty, 104
 Shindle, Robert, 62, 65
 Shirley, General William, 22
 Slavery, 34-35, 55-57, 88, 92-93, 95-97,
 138-139, 141, 148

Slaves (mentioned by first name only)
 Amy, 88
 Armistead, 88
 Coralie, 95
 Cynthia, 88-89
 Emanuel (Manuel), 88-89
 Lucius, 88-89
 Nancy 88-89
 Sally, 88
 Woushippagniga, 95
 Smith, Charles A., 66-67
 Smith, Gilmore, 66
 Smith, Laura Katx, 109-110
 Smith, Rev. Mr., 66
 Smithfield Plantation, 22, 56, 57, 77, 79,
 81-84, 86, 88, 95, 104-105 107, 111,
 121,
 138, 142, 147-149
Smithfield Review, 52-53, 57, 107, 105,
 109, 121, 133, 137, 143-144
 Snidow, William H., 64
 Snyder, Edmund B., 65
 Solitude, 19. 86
 South Carolina, 93, 96-98, 100, 139
 Southhampton County, Va., 95
 Speake (Speak), Rev. William F., 68-69
 Spellman, Lynn, (Mrs. Jack), 137, 141,
 143-144
 St. John's Chapel, 137, 140, 142-143
St. Louis Christian Advocate, 39
St. Mark (a ship), 16
 St. Michael's Reformed Church, 39
 St. Peter's Church (Richmond Cathedral),
 123, 131, 139
 Stafford County, Va., 93
 Staley, Cynthia, 59
 Stalniker, Captain Samuel, 20, 21
 Stansbury, John T., 63, 65
 Staples, Waller R., 64
 States' rights, 57, 92-93, 95, 104
 Staunton Hospital, 91
 Staunton, Va., 16, 35, 36
 Stern, Frederick, 22
 Stokes, Samuel H., 63, 67
 Strouble's Creek, 2, 6, 8-9, 11, 21-22
 Sugar maple (*Acer Saccharum*), 147-149

Surgeon General, Continental Army, 84
 Swan Lake, AR, 99
 Sweet Springs, Va., (now W. Va.), 101,
 137,139-143

T

Tablet, The, 122
 Tariff, 1828 federal, 93,
 Taylor, Maj. John, 104
 Taylor, Tom, 100
 Taylor, US President Zachary, 56
 Tazewell County, Va., 78, 102, 121, 123
 Theobald, Mary Miley, 148
 Thompson, Col. George, 108-109
 Thompson, William, 14, 16
 Thorn Spring, 87
 Thorn Spring Plantation, Va., 77-78, 82,
 87-88, 92-93, 95, 97, 99, 102, 111,
 121, 133
 Tidewater, Va., 138
 Tocqueville, Alexis de, 138. 143
 Tom's Creek, 2, 4, 6, 9, 13, 16, 20-22
 Tories, 79
*Travels in Egypt, Arabia, Petra and the
 Holy Land*, 56
 Trego, Willam, 24
 Trigg, Daniel, 110
 Trimble, John, 4
 Trout, George, 10
Truman's Journal, 129
 Turner, Nat, 95-96, 139

U

United Methodist Church
 Historical Society of the Baltimore-
 Washington Conference, 33, 62
 History of Methodism, 56
 Methodist historians, 141
 Methodist Hymnal, 41
 Tennessee Conference, 45
 United States Congress, 56, 89-90, 98
 United States Constitution, 139
United States Telegraph, p 98
 University of Alabama, 55
 University of Georgia, 54, 55
 University of Mary Washington Library, 45

University of Maryland Hospital, 42
 University of Pennsylvania, 81
 University of Virginia, 56, 66, 106, 110
 Library, 44-45, 110
 College at Wise, 110
 Unruh, Von, 45

V

Varon, Elizabeth, 95-96
 Vermont, 53-54
 Victoria, Queen, 126
 Vineyard, Christopher, 10
 Virginia, 148
 Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical
 College (VAMC), 38, 51, 58, 69
 Virginia Assembly, 22
 Virginia Colonization Society, 96
 Virginia Constitution, 92-94
 Virginia Constitutional Convention, 92-93
 Virginia Convention (considering
 secession), 57
 Virginia General Assembly, 51, 56, 63, 82,
 95-96
 Virginia Council, 18
Virginia Gazette, 19
 Virginia Historical Society, 4, 22-23
 Virginia House of Delegates, 82, 83, 95, 97
 Virginia Militia, 81-82
 Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State
 University (*Virginia Tech*), 8-10, 14,
 19-20, 22-23, 33, 36-39, 42, 44, 51,
 53, 57-76, 86, 107, 138
 Virginia Senate, 83
 Virginia, Southwest, 125, 133
 Virginia Tech, *see Virginia Polytechnic
 Institute and State University*

W

W Loan Fund, 41
 Wade, Hamilton, 104
 Wade, W. A., 64
 Walker, Dr. Thomas, 13
 Wall, John, 64-65
 Wallenstein, Peter, 45
 War of 1812, 81

Washington, D. C., 40, 87, 90, 92-93, 124,
 132, 143
Washington Evening Star, 42
 Washington, George, 18
 Wayne, Antho, 24
 Weaver, Nancy, 22
 Wedin, Laura Jones, 57
Weekly Register, 84-85
 Wesley Chapel, 35
 Wesley, John, 43
 Wesley United Methodist Church,
 Morgantown, W. Va., 60
 Wesleyan Female Institute, 36
 Wesleyan University, 54-55
 West Virginia, 58-60, 69
 Superintendent of Free Schools, 59-60
 Western Virginia, 108-109, 125, 137
 Western Waters, 2-4, 9, 18
 Wheeler, J. R., 64-65, 69
 Wheeling, W. Va., 60, 123, 143
 Whelan, Rt. Rev. Dr. (Bishop), 123-127,
 130-131, 139-141, 143
 Whig, 56
 Whisner Building, 43
 Whisner, Louisa Ann (Arey) 36, 39
 Whisner Memorial Methodist Church
 (Methodist Episcopal Church, South),
 43-44
 Whisner, Peter Harrison, D.D., 33-49
 Whisner, Samuel, 33
 Whisner, Virginia Louise (Childs), 40-41, 43
 White, Cecelia Leavitt Kent, 58
 White, Mr., 64
 White, William Ryland, 58-60, 63-66, 70
 White House, 90-91
 Whitfield, Archbishop, 131
 Wickliffe, Robert, 109
 Wightman, Rev. Dr., 54
 Williams, Erica, 111
 Williams, John Alexander, 96, 97
 Wills, Wirt, 111
 Willson, George, 10
 Wilson, James Grant, 54
 Wingard, Mrs. S. A., 66
Winter Galley (a ship), 10

Winter, Rev. Harry E., OMI, 111, 133, 137
Wisconsin, 105-106
Wood's River Land Entry Book, 3
Woodford County, Ky., 108
Woodville, James Lewis, 110
Woushippkniga (*slave*), 88, 95
Wythe County, Va., 3, 18, 106
Wytheville, Va., 123, 141
Wytheville Community College, 4, 23

Y

Yankee peddlers/traders, 96
Yates, Ann, 16
Youthful Piety, 56

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In this issue —

Located in the New River Valley in what is now Montgomery County, Virginia, the Draper's Meadows settlement was one of the earliest Euro-American settlements in the colonial Virginia backcountry. Its first known settlers were George and Eleanor Draper and their children, John and Mary, who arrived apparently in the year 1746. — **page 1**

The 1868 [Methodist] Annual Conference did take action. The minutes reported . . . the following resolutions . . . “That the Baltimore Conference . . . negotiate a loan for the purchase and repair of the building known as Olin and Preston Institute, with authority to mortgage said property for that purpose, and to secure a suitable Principal to put the School in successful operation as soon as possible.” . . . The Conference reappointed Rev. Whisner as preacher of the Blacksburg church and president of the school in 1869 and again in 1870. The 1869–1870 Preston and Olin Institute catalog listed him as the school president, a member of the board of trustees, and as professor of English and moral philosophy. — **page 37**

Although Virginia Tech counts 1872 as the official year it started, an argument can be made that the university is actually a continuation of both the Preston and Olin Institute and the Olin and Preston Institute. This article looks at the first two decades of Virginia Tech history which the University acknowledges as leading up to its founding. . . . Part I of the article covers the university's earliest years as the Olin and Preston Institute and includes short biographies of the men for whom that institute was named and its first principal. — **page 51**

Because [Letitia Preston's] husband enjoyed a successful career as a Virginia congressman and governor, she had a ringside seat to some of the most important political events of the 1820s and 1830s. This was the time of the Nullification Crisis, the controversial presidency of Andrew Jackson, and . . . the great American question of the balance between the powers of the federal government and the separate states. Necessarily, much of her life was occupied by the mundane daily business of child-rearing and plantation-running. In contrast, . . . in the early 1830s she lived amidst the high drama of the great national political discussion of states rights. — **page 78**

Mrs. Floyd's daughters Letitia, Lavalette, and Nicketti, were the first members of the Floyd family to formally convert to Catholicism. All were baptized at St. Peter's Church in Richmond. The church records do not give the precise dates, but the baptism apparently occurred while their father was governor (1831–1834). . . . The Catholic historian Joseph Magri gave “about 1832” as the conversion year of Mrs. Floyd's daughter Letitia and wrote that it “caused a sensation throughout the state.” . . . The tenure of John Floyd as governor corresponds to the beginning of a period of rapid growth of Catholicism in Richmond at the time of building there of St. Peter's Church, which was consecrated in 1834. — **page 123**

When Alexis de Tocqueville was finishing *Democracy in America*, about 1835, he asked what was “the chief cause of the extraordinary prosperity and growing power of this nation,” and he wrote succinctly, “the superiority of their women.” . . . [O]ne of these women, . . . Letitia Preston Floyd (1779–1852) . . . was to the manor born, with her brother, James Patton Preston, serving as the governor of Virginia from 1816 to 1819; her husband, John Floyd Jr., from 1830 to 1834; and her son, John Buchanan Floyd, from 1848 to 1852. — **page 138**