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

Volume I, 1997

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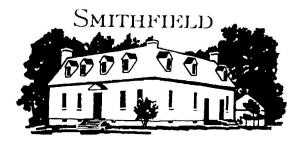
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^{The} Smithfield Review

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A Note from the Editors

Smithfield is an historic property adjacent to the campus of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia. The manor house, constructed around 1774 on the early frontier, is a premier example of early American architecture and is one of few such structures of that period to survive in the region. 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. Smithfield served as a land office involving property as far west as Kentucky. It was a home for the distinguished Preston family and a military base during the tumultuous Revolutionary War period. Today, along with Jamestown and other historic properties, Smithfield is owned by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA) and is operated as a museum that is open to the public. A local group of dedicated volunteers administers and interprets the property.

The Smithfield Review is the culmination of a long-held desire by some APVA members associated with Smithfield to provide a journal in which the important but often neglected history of the region becomes available to the general public in a way that is both interesting and enlightening. *The Smithfield Review* will focus on the history of the area west of the Blue Ridge mountains in Virginia and adjacent states. Articles will include studies of important personages and events, reports of archaeological discoveries, and analyses of the social, political, economic, 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.

This inaugural issue consists of five articles that carry out our editorial mission. "Recollections of 18th Century Virginia Frontier Life" was written a century and a half ago by Letitia Preston Floyd, the daughter of Col. William Preston and a childhood resident of Smithfield, who

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later became the wife of Dr. John Floyd, a governor of Virginia. Her reminiscences include charming descriptions of the life and personalities of Smithfield's occupants and visitors alongside horrific tales of Indian fighting. The text of the document is introduced and transcribed by Wirt Wills, the director of the Montgomery County branch of the APVA, which supervises the Smithfield property, and June Stubbs, chair of the Accessions Committee.

In "Newport, Virginia — A Crossroads Village," longtime resident Douglas Martin, the Benefits Manager at Virginia Tech, and his son Perry, a Virginia Tech student, tell the lively history of Newport, situated across the mountain from Blacksburg alongside a picturesque creek that is spanned by three of Virginia's last covered bridges.

In "Our Native Stone: Architecture and Identity at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 1872–1922," Daniel Pezzoni, architectural historian and preservation consultant based in Roanoke, Virginia, traces the development of his alma mater's campus, with its sweeping oval Drill Field and Gothic buildings patterned after those of the great medieval universities — all part of what the late architect J. Ambler Johnston called the "effort to lift VPI out of the appearance of a trade school cow college."

"The Coal Mining Way of Life in Virginia's New River Valley" by Mary La Lone, Radford University anthropologist, gives a fascinating account of the life of New River Valley coal miners and their families, involved in what was once the region's major non-agricultural industry. Adapted from the recently published *Appalachian Coal Mining Memories: Life in the Coal Fields of Virginia's New River Valley*, the article is based on interviews with surviving miners and their wives and children, by a Radford University research team.

Finally, in "William Ballard Preston and the Politics of Slavery" by Virginia Tech History Professor Peter Wallenstein, we share in the ordeal of one man's changing attitudes toward the evil institution of slavery, as expressed in his own words and speeches over a thirty-year period. Preston, the grandson of Col. William Preston, was active in state and national politics prior to the Civil War.

> Hugh G. Campbell, Editor Editorial Board: Charles E. Modlin Lon Savage Charles L. Taylor

Recollections of 18th Century Virginia Frontier Life

Letitia Preston Floyd, Wife of Governor John Floyd Introduction by Wirt H. Wills Transcription by June Stubbs

The following text, written by Mrs. Letitia Preston Floyd in 1843, is an early account of the Preston family's remarkable story and a vivid description of events on the early Virginia frontier.

Letitia Preston, daughter of Colonel William Preston, lived as a child at Smithfield in what is now Blacksburg, Virginia, during the eventful later years of the American Revolution and the turmoil on the frontier. She married her second cousin John Floyd in 1804 just before he entered the Medical College of The University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. He had been born in the wilds of Kentucky in 1783, twelve days after his father Colonel John Floyd died from wounds sustained in an encounter with Indians. Col. Floyd had been William Preston's chief surveyor and had married Jane Buchanan, a cousin of Col. Preston. Dr. John Floyd was Governor of Virginia from 1830–1834. The first child of Letitia Preston and Dr. Floyd, John Buchanan Floyd, was born at Smithfield and also served as Governor of Virginia in 1849–1852.

Mrs. Floyd was 64 years old when she wrote her history and was recounting things from a fairly distant past. As far as is known, her sources consisted only of family correspondence and records along with memories of conversations with members of her family. She probably wrote the initial draft in response to a letter sent to her by Mr. Lyman C. Draper of Buffalo, New York, who wished to "collect material for a work entitled *Sketches of the Pioneers.*" She refers to this request in a letter to her son Benjamin Rush Floyd and includes a version of the history in that letter.¹

The manuscript published here was transcribed on October 13, 1846, by James Cochran.² It is unclear whether he was copying an original draft written for Lyman Draper (if such ever existed) or was extracting the Preston family history from the letter to Rush. The whereabouts of any earlier version, if extant, are unknown. Cochran's copy was sent to the Montgomery County Branch of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, Blacksburg, Virginia on September 28, 1995, by J. T. Carpenter, Jr. of Charlottesville, Virginia. It was among the papers of Mr. Carpenter's cousin, Thomasina (Tommassa) Goss, a Preston descendant and contributor of items to Smithfield.

The document, as we have it, is reproduced here with strict adherence to the original paragraphing, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. It does not have some of the wording included by Mrs. Floyd in the letter to her son Rush and represents only about half of that letter, suggesting that the letter was a later document, and that the document here may have been copied from the first penning of her expected response to Lyman Draper. The second half of the letter includes a history of Colonel John Floyd, Mrs. Floyd's father-in-law, and more information about her brothers and sisters and their families.³ (This latter half is to be published in the second volume of this journal.)

The account in the present paper lists William Preston's birthday as November 25, 1729. Other versions⁴ and Patricia Givens Johnson's book, *William Preston and the Allegheny Patriots*⁵, have his birthday on December 25 or 26, 1729. Interestingly, John Frederick Dorman⁶ states that December 25, 1700, was the birthday of Elizabeth (Patton) Preston, mother of William Preston, as well as the day of her death in 1776. Could there be a mix-up in reporting William Preston's birthday?

The letter to Rush Floyd was published in four installments in the *Richmond Standard* on June 5, 19, 26 and July 3, 1880. The Virginia historian and newspaperman, R. A. Brock, transcribed the letter with 35 footnotes under the title *Incidents in the Border Life in Virginia* and credited Professor George Frederick Holmes of the University of Virginia for the "valuable, graphic, and highly interesting narrative."⁷ It is important to note that Professor Holmes was married to Eliza Lavalette Floyd⁸ and, therefore, was a brother-in-law of Rush Floyd. He may well have had in his possession the original letter from Mrs. Floyd. In footnote 33, Brock acknowledges that the published account was extracted from a "volume obligingly loaned us by Professor Holmes" and promised to publish further materials from that volume.

Whether James Cochran, in copying the document in 1846, was extracting the Preston family history from Mrs. Floyd's letter to her son or was making use of an earlier version, his transcription gives us an early version of Mrs. Floyd's recollections of her father and his family, friends, and adventures. This narrative is usually referred to in its newspaper version of 1880, but the version that follows may be the earliest to surface yet. It constitutes a major source of information about William Preston and his life and family for all subsequent authors.

History of "The Preston Family"

Copied from Mrs. Letitia Floyd's manuscript,1843 Mrs. Gov. Floyd

James Cochran — October 13th 1846

Col. James Patton was born in Ireland, in the town of Newton, Limeraddy⁹, in the year of our Lord 1692; he was bred to the sea and was in the wars of England with the Low Countries, and served as an officer in the royal navy; after the treaty of Utrecht, he procured a passenger ship and traded to the Colony of Virginia at "Hobbe's Hole" on the Rappahannock river; he penetrated the then wilderness of the state. as far as Orange county, thence across the Blue Ridge, and commenced a settlement near Waynesboro in Augusta county: he crossed the Atlantic twenty three or four times, his traffic was peltries & tobacco, his return cargo was, what was then termed "redemptioners" (i. e.) poor families of Irish etc. (but with him they were all Irish), who served a given time for their passage; in this way a greater part of Augusta county was settled. The descendants of these emigrants have furnished the West with many of its Governors, Senators, Judges etc. distinguished literary men, and many married into the imperial family of Virginia, as the historian Burke terms Pocahonta's descendants of our State.-

Col. Patton had four sisters, two of whom married men of "guality"; (this state of things kept the other two unmarried) his youngest sister, Elizabeth, whilst crossing the river Shannon (in Ireland) was attracted by the beauty & deportment of a young man by the name of John Preston. on enquiring, he was found to be a Ship-Carpenter, nothing daunted by his humble occupation, an understanding took place between them, and Miss Patton consented to a runaway match; this step placed her out of the pale of her family; Her brother Col. Patton had, by this time, obtained governmental distinction in Virginia, as well as a grant of land from Gov. Dinwiddie, of two or three hundred thousand acres. Col. Patton determined to remove his family from his fair residence White Haven to his estate in Augusta County; he proposed to his brother-in-law John Preston to accompany him to America, and for his services as shipwright to secure to him a grant of four thousand acres of land; Preston did not hesitate, he embarked with his three daughters and only son William Preston, who was then eight years old; In the summer 1735 both parties settled in Augusta County; Preston seven miles below Staunton and Col. Patton at Spring Hill Farm, the late seat of Judge Briscoe Baldwin, about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from Staunton — As Preston had left the seaboard, his pursuits

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too was born in Beland in the town resaddy in the year of our Lord hed to the sea, and was in The wars herevas. 1642 ; The Low Countries, wer: he pene here the state as by, Thines word the Blile Sellement Ridge, and commenced Waynestors in Augusta Compity; he sied th attained twenty thece or four times, This pettries & tobacco, his returned was, what was then termed redempted in Hybri t a given barrage; ca it of Augusta course to of these emigrants have the desce the U & many of its distinguished leterary Judged & and man

Fig. 1. A photocopy of part of the first page of the 1846 transcription by James Cochran.

were changed, and he worked at the cabinet trade — A singular augury of a native Irish woman, viz., that William Preston would get his Uncle's fortune, so impressed Mrs. Patton, (who was a proud haughty woman) that no intercourse was allowed between the families — Seven years after their landing John Preston died at Gibson's old place, eight miles below Staunton, Mrs. Preston was then in straightened circumstances. She sent her son to her brother (Col. Patton) with a message, the youngest daughter of Col. Patton knew her cousin, but her mother did not, Peggy Patton afterwards Mrs. Buchannan passed her cousin William Preston off for a neighbour's son, for fear that her mother would turn the lad out of doors, if she had known him to be her nephew William Preston, at this time, William was 15 or 16 years old; Mrs. Patton's dread of his getting the fortune of the family by marriage with one of her daughters, urged their early marriage; one to a kinsman of hers by the name of Thompson (a very rich man), and the other to Col. John Buchannan; shortly, after their marriage, Mrs. Patton died; this event led her husband to look into the situation of his sister's family; Col. Patton placed his nephew with the Rev. Mr. Craig, pastor of the Tinkling Spring Congregation (7 miles below Staunton); a classical education was not attempted, because Wm. Preston was thought to be too much grown; However, an excellent course of history, Mathematics, and penmanship was afforded — Col. Patton had the affairs of the then Mountain region intrusted to his care by Gov. Dinwiddie - Mrs. Preston was induced to remove to Hanger's (Judge Baldwin's seat) for the purpose of affording her son an opportunity of posting Merchants' books & whatever writing Col. Patton needed.

Col. Patton left his seat and removed to Staunton & lived at his sister's house, shortly after that, he was sent to Log Town somewhere near Pittsburg, to make a treaty with the North-Western Indians; William Preston, then 18 years of age, was made his private Secretary.

I remember to have read Col. Patton's journal written by himself with the speeches of Oconastoto the old Mingo Chief — After peace was made Col. Patton came up to the extreme Western Counties (now/1840) of this State — He located all the fine lands of Upper James River. Catawba, and the Amsterdam lands in Botetourt County — He then came to North Roanoke, Strouble's creek, embracing the Blacksburg lands, and Smithfield, the present residence of Gov. James Patton Preston -After that he came to Burks Garden and the "Rich Valley on Holstein, in which the celebrated Salt works of Mrs. Sally Preston and Mr. Wm. King are situated; Col. Patton tried to rally the settlers to defend the Country from the inroads of the Indians on the frontiers of Virginia; this he was unable to effect — All the settlers from South Holstein to South Roanoke left the country and went below the Blue Ridge - Patton maintained his ground as did Col. Wm. Inglis - Philip Barger and Philip Lybrook, on Sinking creek — on the 8th July 1755 it being Sunday a party of Indians came up the Kenawha, thence to Sinking creek, thence to Strouble's creek — Inglis & Draper, brothers in law, were living at Solitude, ¹⁰the present seat of Col. Robert T. Preston¹¹. The Indians came to Barger's

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 $(\frac{1}{2})$ mile nearer the Mountain) & cut his head off & put it in a bag: Barger was a very old man¹² then came to Inglis' & Drapers, and killed old Mrs. Draper, two children of Col. Inglis', by knocking their brains out on the ends of the Cabin logs - took Mrs. Inglis and her son Thomas, a boy of ten years of age, prisoners, as well as her sister-in-law Mrs. Draper Jr., who was trying to make her escape with her infant in her arms, but she was shot at by the Indians, who broke her arms by which means the infant was dropped — the Indians picked the infant up. & knocked its brains out agains the Cabin logs - Col. Patton that morning having dressed himself in his uniform, and getting his nephew William Preston to sew up in the fob of his small clothes thirty English guineas, told him to go to Sinking creek to get Lybrook to help take off the harvest, which was then ready to cut: Preston went very earley - After breakfast. Col. Patton sat down to write, the Indian War whoop was heard and five or six of them surrounded the cabin to set it on fire — The Col. always kept his sword on his writing table — he rushed to the door with it in hand and encountered the Indians — Patton was almost gigantic in size — he cut two of the Indians down — in the mean while another warrior had levelled his gun and fired & killed the brave old pioneer — After Patton fell the Indians ran off in the thicket and made their escape before any pursuers could be brought together — Lybrook & Preston came through the mountains by an unfrequented route, having arrived at Smithfield they found Col. Patton, Mrs. Draper (the mother of Mrs. Inglis) & the (three) children*, (and) buried (them); The whole settlement *(The Floyd mss. has only "three children buried" but I suppose that "and" & "them" were unintentionally omitted.)13 was destroyed; The Indians on their return stopped at Lybrook's, and told Mrs. Lybrook that they had killed two men, one woman and three children, and requested her to look in the bag that they had brought with them, and she would see an old acquaintance, she did so, and immediately recognised the head of Philip Barguer who was a very old man - Mrs. Inglis, her oldest son a lad of ten years of age, & Mrs. Draper her sister-in-law, were taken to the Indian towns on the other side of the Ohio river, they travelled down the Kenawha or as it is sometimes called New river, & through the North eastern part of Kentucky. In three months after her captivity Mrs. Inglis gave birth to a daughter; her sister-in-law had been traded off to another tribe of Indians as was her son. Three months after the birth of her child Mrs. Inglis determined to run away from the Indians, who were dreadfully cruel to her; another impulse was her great desire to see her husband, which made her undertake a journey unparalleled in the incidents of a Pioneer's life: She and a Dutch woman, who was taken from the

upper part of Ohio, determined to escape together from the Indian towns: Mrs. Inglis left her child asleep in a bark cradle, although she was aware that according to Indian character the child would be killed as soon as its mother was missed — A series of remarkable events occured to them on the route - Mrs. Inglis keeping up the water Courses; when she got to the Ohio river, she and the Dutch woman tied logs together with grape vines, thus making a raft on which the two crossed the Ohio river: they were frequently near famishing with hunger, living on blackberries, sassafras leaves, frogs etc., and in one instance eating a snake they found dead and a raccoon they found in a great state of decomposition - All means failing a proposition was made that they should cast lost [lots] to see which should be eaten by the other; the lot fell upon Mrs. Inglis; who understanding her travelling companion's temper, promised her a sum of money to refrain from killing her: Col. Inglis was a a very rich man & this proposition had the desired effect — Mrs. Inglis stepped off, leaving the Dutch woman to find her way as best she could — After many weeks travelling Mrs. Inglis arrived at Inglis' ferry on New River the residence of Col. Inglis — She was afterwards the mother of a highly respectable family, who have been always distinguished for bravery and honesty - her grand children live on the place which she made such efforts to return to. These transactions took place in the year of Braddock's defeat. Mrs. Inglis lived to a very great old age; I remember to have seen her fifty years ago at a large Baptist Convention, thirty miles from her home, she was then (eighty) years old, looked florid and erect.-

My father, Col. William Preston was the only son of John Preston & Elizabeth Patton and was born in Ireland in the town of Newton Limeraddy¹⁴, on the 25 November 1729; when he was seven or eight years old, his father emigrated to the Colony of Virginia. His father was remarkable for his fine personal appearance, great industry and unabated piety: his mother's qualities were masculine understanding, great ambition and impetuosity of temper — humble fortune, which she brought upon herself by marrying a Ship Carpenter was powerfully resisted — She was, however, left a widow with a family of four daughters, and an only son, who was but a stripling at his father's death — The forest was to be conquered, this her young son did by daily labour, cutting down trees, & making fences - After Mrs. Patton's death, Mrs. Preston removed to Hanger's near Staunton, her daughters were skilful needle women, it was the age of cross stitch embroidery and they wrought diligently at this their business, and obtained a sufficient sum of money to buy a negro woman. A little while afterwards, a young Presbyterian clergy man from Ireland, by the name of John Brown, settled in Staunton and

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became attached to Margaret Preston, the second daughter. & married her: He then moved to Rockbridge and took charge of a congregation. & preached for fifty years (42 years - corrected by Jos. Mc Dowell) at New Providence meeting house — The eldest daughter Letitia Preston married Col. Robert Breckenridge, a man of wealth, who had been married before and had two sons by that marriage. The third sister Anne Preston married a young gentleman by the name of Francis Smith during this period Col. William Preston was employed by William Estill high sheriff of Augusta County, to ride as his deputy — The year after Preston and Col. John Buchannan were elected Burgesses to the house of Burgesses Preston was requested by the Congregation of Episcopalians of Staunton to procure a carpenter living near Hanover C. H. by the name of Francis Smith to undertake the building of a church for them; he kept a tavern near Hanover C. H. & was applied to by Col. Preston to attend to the building; Mr. Smith was a rich man and had an extremely beautiful daughter by the name of Susanna, who was educated by the Rev. Patrick Henry. Col. Preston was soon attracted by her beauty and manners; he addressed her and they were married on the 17th July 1761. In the summer of 1757 Col. Preston had been appointed a Commissioner to hold a treaty with the Shawnee & Delaware Indians, at the mouth of the (Big Sandy) Ohio. Col. Thomas Lewis of Rockingham was likewise a Commissioner, but did not accompany the party — The treaty was made (I think) with Oconostato, who was now old, and a chief called Cornstalk — Col. Preston endured singular hardships in this expedition: he had tied the strings of his moccasins too tight, they chafed the instep of one of his feet, which produced partial mortification. The skill of a physician by the name of Thomas Floyd saved his life; Floyd (a redemptioner) had been purchased by Preston a year or two previously, finding him a man of great education & fine knowledge of Medicine; the Doctor was made the Companion of Preston, and died, very many year afterwards, the firm friend of the Preston family - On their return from the mouth of the Sandy, they took up through a rugged region - got so entirely out of food as to be compelled to eat the Buffalo tugs, which tied on their packs, and hence the stream was called/named by Preston the Tug fork of (the) Sandy — The County of Fincastle (Botetourt?) was taken off the County of Rockbridge about the year 1764, Col. Preston obtained the Surveyor's place, which determined him to leave Staunton, he settled at Greenfield near Amsterdam a very valuable estate, yet in the possession of his grand daughter — Having some business to transact in the County Court of Augusta in the month of May he left his family at Smithfield¹⁵ early in the morning. Mrs. Preston was startled by the firing of two guns in guick succession at a neighbor's house within half a mile of hers. Shortly afterwards Mr. Joseph Cloyd rode up on his plough horse with the gears on, telling Mrs. Preston that the Indians had killed his brother John, shot at him, and missed him, although his shirt was powder burnt, that they had gone to the house and he expected had killed his mother — Mrs. Preston sent a young man, living at her house, to Capt. Francis Smith to bring his troops to pursue the Indians; she wrote a letter to him, which was without fear or trepidation; she then sent a white man and two negro men to Mr. Cloyd's, where they found Mrs. Cloyd tomahawked in three places; all the household destroyed, the money carried off, (Mr. C. had a large quantity stored away) Mrs. Cloyd was perfectly in her senses, and told all the circumstances of the savage revelry, getting drunk, ripping up the feather beds, and one of them taking a corn cob and wiping away the blood from her temples, exclaiming "poor woman"; she died the next morning - After this irruption of the Indians there was a pause in their depredations — I think in the year 1765 an expedition was ordered by Lord Botetourt the Gov. of Virginia at that time, and the command given to Col. Byrd, who penetrated as far as the Tennessee line, what his success was I am not able to say, but think that the settlements were insecure — In 1733 (1773 perhaps) Col. Preston became possessed of Draper's Meadows, (now Smithfield). The County of Botetourt was divided and Col. P. determined to follow the Surveyor's office --- Whilst Col. Preston lived at Greenfield Col. Patton (Buchannan?) determined to leave his residence near Pattonsburg and remove to Reed creek and settle at "Anchor & Hope", a splendid estate Col. Patton had given his daughter Margaret; on his journey, he stopped at Greenfield, was taken sick and died after several weeks of illness, whilst on his deathbed, he desired Mrs. Preston to take charge of his daughter Jane, then ten years of age, which was done. Col. Buchannan made Col. Preston the executor of his immense estate; a long & unbroken friendship existed between them. Buchannan is favourably mentioned by Genl. Washington (Spark's Life of Washington). During Col. Preston's residence at Greenfield, in the year 1770, a young gentleman by the name of John Floyd was introduced to him by Col. Joseph Cabell of Buckingham County as very well gualified to assist as deputy in the Surveyor's office — It was always a rule of Col. Preston's, to require of every young man, who was employed in his office, to teach school six months at least, thereby finding out his temper, diligence habits, & trustworthiness — Mr. Breckenridge's, Mr. Smith's children and my brothers, & sisters, constituted Mr. Floyd's school. When my father removed to Smithfield in 1773 Col. Floyd accompanied him — In the Autumn of

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that year Col. Preston and Col. Nathaniel Grist were appointed to make a treaty with the Cherokee Indians & I think the Chickamugga, at Long island on the Holstein river in the State of Tennessee — The treaty was made and the Southern indians were quiet — In the March of 1774 Col. Preston removed my Mother & her children to Smithfield, there was a Fort or Stockade around the house, into which several of the neighbour's families came for safety, because the North Western Indians made constant attempts on the Settlements: Major John Taylor's (who married a niece of Col. Buchannan) was one of the families — Mr. Robert Preston. Capt. James Charlton, his brother Frank and Cap' John Lucas were mainly the persons who defended the fort — In the year 1774 my brother Gov. James Patton Preston was born at Smithfield; Mrs. Preston's confinement was so protracted by Typhus fever, that a nurse for her infant was procured by the kindness of Mrs. Van Lear, who affectionately took upon herself that office; she was the mother of the Rev. John Vanlear. During the summer and autumn of 1774 the entire region north west of the mountains of Virginia was put in commotion by the movements of the Indians on her borders — The Gov. of the State Lord Dunmore made a visit as far as Fincastle in Botetourt Co. to organize an expedition against the tribes — Shawnees, Guyandottes, & Delaware Indians. Genl. Andrew Lewis, who had served in Braddock's war as a Col, and in the old French War as a Major, was appointed Commander of the expedition; his youngest brother Col. Charles Lewis of Bath Co., Genl. A. Lewis' son Samuel, and his nephew Thomas Lewis, Thomas Lewis of Rockingham Co. and Andrew John Lewis & his nephew-in-law Capt. Frog were all in his army. I think that Col. William Christian, Col. Wm. Fleming & his brother-in-law were also Col. John Stuart were all in the campaign. The battle of Point Pleasant was fought on the 10th October 1774: Col. Charles Lewis was killed, Col. Samuel Lewis was wounded; Capt. John Lewis of Rockingham was killed; Capt. Frog was killed, as was Monroe the brother-in-law of Col. Charles Lewis; Col. Floyd was sent on a foraging expedition and did not return until the day after the battle; I remember distinctly to have read a letter from Col. Thomas Lewis of Rockingham to my father, giving an account of the battle — Col. Preston was detained by the illness of his wife, who was not expected to survive. The year after the battle the Country of Kentucky attracted much attention; Col. Preston's surveyor's office comprehended all of that beautiful state; he sent Col. Floyd out on an exploring expedition, with a view to take up lands for the benefit of Floyd and himself; for a long time it was supposed that Floyd was killed by the Indians, he however returned to Smythfield by the way of Guyandotte & Coal river,

after having endured hardships, which few could have survived — In the summer of 1776 the Revolution fairly commenced; all plans for the settlement west were suspended; Col. Preston found himself surrounded by a neighborhood of Tories who kept him continually on the alert to prevent them from murdering himself and family, as well as every other Whig in the County; Genl. William Campbell of Washington County; Col. Arthur Campbell of the same county a brother-in-law of Gov. Campbell, Col. Patrick Lockhart of Botetourt; William Madison son-in-law of old Col. Preston, were all good Whigs, and kept the Tories at bay; Col. Preston was intently engaged in educating his family and improving his valuable estates, which he had by this time acquired; to effect the first named purpose he procured a gentleman by the name of Mr. Aaron Palfreman, this person was a poet and a scholar, he was the correspondent and friend of the celebrated Miss Carter the poetess. Mr. Palfreman in a drunken frolic had consented to marry a beautiful woman, who had been represented to him by his friends as a lady; next morning finding that he had been made a dupe of and his wife a woman of the town, he embarked in a few hours for America, on landing at Williamsburg Col. Preston met with him and procured him and ever after kept him in his family as a teacher — Col. Preston; Col. Thomas Lewis of Rockingham, Genl. Andrew Lewis of Botetourt, Mr. John Madison & Col. Fleming of Augusta engaged Mr. Gabriel Jones an Englishman to select libraries for them in London; This Mr. Jones was Mr. ----- first partner in the practice of Law: a good selection of the Classics. Ancient history, the distinguished poets of England, the dictionary of the arts & sciences, a sort of Encyclopedia, with many polemic and religious productions constituted the libraries: here I would remark that the use of these libraries gave each family possessing them a station which outranked very many wealthier families than the above named.— The multiplicity of business growing out of the Surveyor's office, organizing the Counties and their civil politics seemed to occupy all of his time and energies; in addition to this he held extensive correspondence with many of the then active Whig partizans of the Revolution; in this business he was greatly assisted by his nephew John Breckenridge, who was undergoing the ordeal of teaching school at Smithfield; Mr. Breckenridge studied law at William & Mary College, and married Miss Polly Cabell, second daughter of Col. Joseph Cabell, he recieved a large fortune by her, in 1792 he removed to Kentucky and acquired great celebrity as a lawyer; presented the famous "alien & sedition" laws; was elected to the Senate of the United States, where he made a great display of Political knowledge and oratory that never was equalled by Gouvenir Morris who was in the Senate at the

LETITIA PRESTON FLOYD

time: Mr. Breckenridge was made attorney general of the U States by Mr. Jefferson, in which Office he died, leaving four sons of distinguished talents; his eldest daughter Latitia married Genl. P. B. Porter secretary of War in J. Q. Adam's administration — After Mr. Breckinridge left Smithfield, his brother Genl. James Breckenridge took his place as assistant surveyor, & teacher, but previous to this period there was a company formed, called the "Loyal Company" for the purpose of entering lands in the Western Counties of Virginia, Dr. Thomas Walker of Albemarle, Judge Edmund Pendleton, and one or two others composed it; much surveying being required and Col. Preston was employed, which still increased his estate; Col. Preston planned many of the military movements of that period; he was a man of consummate judgment, and unremitting industry, he planned the campaign, which made the demonstrations in North Carolina, that led to the battle of Guilford and that of King's Mountain; his health had greatly declined from frequent apoplectic premonitions, yet he undertook as commandant of his own County to march into North Carolina to join Genl. Green at Guilford; you will see an account of this matter in Lee's memoirs of the Revolution. A skirmish had taken place at Whitsell's Mill a short distance from the main battle, Col. Preston was riding a large fiery young horse that took fright at the report of the guns and dashed through the Mill pond, threw off Col. Preston, who was likely to be cut down by the British lighthorse, at this moment Col. Cloyd dismounted, & put Col. Preston on his horse and thereby saved his friend & officer's life; this signal service was always held in memory by Col. Preston, & ever after sincere friendship existed between them; Cloyd was the young man who escaped, when his mother & brother were killed near Greenfield; he married an excellent young lady without fortune, which so displeased his father that he was banished from the paternal roof; Preston furnished him money which enabled him to purchase the estate which his son David Cloyd now lives on - After Col. Preston's return from North Carolina his health continued to decline; in the month of June 1783 he had spent the evening [with] his intimate friend Genl. Evan Shelby (the father of Gov. Isaac Shelby) and on the next morning (28th June) he prepared to attend a Regimental muster at Michael Price's three miles from Smithfield, his eldest son Genl. John Preston, then a youth, accompanied him, as did Genl. Shelby; the day was exceedingly hot, after being on the field a few hours he beckoned to his son John to come to him; he complained of a pain in the head, desired to lie down on Price's bed; in a short time afterwards requested his son to help him on his horse, he wished to go home, when the horse was brought to the door he made an attempt to put his foot in the stirrup, but sank down,

was caught by his son, who laid him on the bed, by this time he had lost his speech, but took his son's hand, rolled his sleeve up and made a sign to bleed him, this Genl. Preston could not do; Mrs. Preston was sent for who immediately reached the place, Col. Preston's reason had not been staggered in this conflict; he caught his wife's hand, kissed it, shed tears, and again made a motion to be bled, this could not be done from consternation and ignorance, soon after the stentorian breathing of apoplexy came on, about midnight he breathed his last.

Col. Preston was above the ordinary height of man, he was 5 ft. 11 in., large, inclined to corpulency, was ruddy, had fair hair and hazel eyes; his manners were easy & graceful, he had a well cultivated intellect and fine taste for poetry. I remember reading several productions of his to my Mother in praise of her domestic virtues; on the 12th April 1783 Col. Floyd was killed & when this news reached Col. Preston, such was the feeling produced by it that from that time Col. P was never seen to smile. — Mrs. Preston died on the 18th June 1823, this excellent lady expired after having lived a widow forty years, she desired to be buried in the same grave with her husband, this was done, a tombstone was placed over their grave by their second son Genl. Francis Preston - No portrait of either was ever taken — Col. Preston and wife had twelve children; The oldest was Mrs. Elizabeth Madison, who married the second son of Mr. John Madison the father of Bishop James Madison the learned President of Wm. & Mary College, also the father of Thomas Madison who married the youngest Sister of Patrick Henry, also of Gov. George Madison of Kentucky who married Miss Jane Smith the neice of Col. Preston.-

The IInd child was <u>Genl. John Preston</u>, who married Miss Polly Radford, daughter of Col. Wm. Radford, an officer in the Revolutionary War.

IIId was Genl. Francis Preston, who married the only daughter & heiress of Genl. William Campbell of King's Mountain memory, her Mother was the third sister of Patrick Henry.

IVth was Mrs. Sarah McDowell the wife of Col. James McDowell of Rockbridge County. She was the mother of Mrs. Susan Taylor, Mrs. Thomas H. Benton of Missouri and her only son is Gov. James McDowell of this State.

Vth was Anna who died at 13 years of age.

VIth was <u>Major William Preston</u> who was a captain in Genl. Wayne's army, he married Col. George Hancock's second daughter, Hancock was a Revolutionary officer.

VIIth was Mrs. Susanna Hart, who married Nathaniel Hart of Kentucky, whose father was killed at the siege of Boonesborough.

VIII was Gov. James Patton Preston, who married the second daugh-

ter of Mr. Robert Taylor of Norfolk, Gov. P was wounded at the battle of Christel's field in Canada during the last war, he is yet living at Smithfield, is a pensioner, a gentleman of exceedingly graceful manners greatly beloved by his neighbours & relations.

IX was Mrs. Mary Lewis, she was the wife of Capt. John Lewis an officer of the Revolution, he was entitled to half pay during his life, he was the proprietor of the celebrated Sweet Springs of Va (My ancestor E. C. G.)¹⁶

X. was Mrs. Letitia Floyd, who married Gov. John Floyd of Va, the youngest son of Col. John Floyd and Jane Buchannan.

XI. was Thomas Lewis Preston, who married Miss Edmonia Randolph, the second daughter of Col. Edmund Randolph of Williamsburg; Col. Randolph was once <u>aide</u> to Washington, Attorney General of the U. S., the Secretary of State under Washington's administration.

XII was Mrs. Margaret Preston, who married Col. John Preston of Washington County, Va, who was a very distant relation of the Va Preston family.—

Endnotes

- 1. This letter dated February 22, 1843, was sent from Cavan, the Floyd home in Burke's Garden in Tazewell County, Virginia.
- James Cochran was probably James C. Cochran, son of Margaret Lynn Lewis Cochran (1808–1876), granddaughter of William Preston, although he would have been only 16 years old at the time. See John Frederick Dorman, *The Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield in Virginia* (Louisville, Kentucky: Filson Club, Inc., 1982).
- 3. See Richmond Standard, July 3, 1880. Typed copies of the newspaper version are in the Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.
- 4. See note 3.
- 5. Patricia Givens Johnson, William Preston and the Allegheny Patriots (Pulaski, Virginia: B. D. Smith & Bros., Printers, 1976).
- 6. See Dorman, p. 1.
- 7. See note 3.
- 8. See Dorman, pp. 295-299.
- 9. Limavady is probably the actual place meant.
- 10. At this point in the manuscript a left bracket occurs, but it apears to have been inserted later.
- 11. A mark that may be a right bracket occurs here.
- 12. At this point a right bracket occurs, but it appears to have been inserted later.
- 13. The asterisks and parenthetical insertions are in the text, and appear to be notes added by James Cochran.
- 14. See note 9.
- 15. The place meant here is probably Greenfield, since Smithfield was not completed until about 1774.
- 16. This parenthetical note was interlined by an unknown commentator.

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Newport, Virginia — A Crossroads Village

Douglas D. and Perry D. Martin

Newport, Virginia, a crossroads country village, is located at the foot of Gap Mountain in Giles County, Virginia. It serves as the home of three of the remaining covered bridges in Virginia, which, beyond their historical value, symbolize a blending of cultures and generations. Over the years, those families who cleared the local lands by the sweat of their individual and collective brows worked side by side with newcomers who offered their talents to provide a unique village, where theory and practicality often met. Newport with its bridges has literally served as a crossroads and as a junction for ideas. This article revisits the colorful past of this former saloon town that was once described as "Hell's Half Acre" and provides insight into a village that remains a blend of individuals from diverse backgrounds who share an appreciation of and respect for time-honored traditions.

Geographically, the village is located near winding Sinking Creek that begins near the Continental Divide in neighboring Craig County and makes a subterranean exit prior to reaching the north-flowing New River in Giles County. Some of the valleys adjacent to the town of Newport were formed along ancient fault lines, and there are indications that some of the slopes may be a part of the largest prehistoric landslide in North America.¹ Native rock formations contain the fossilized remains of bryozoan and brachiopods — indicators that in ancient times the area was under water and perhaps part of an inland sea.

The abundance of Native-American artifacts gives credence to stories that this was a prized hunting area in prehistoric times, and confirms a pre-European presence in the area. Stone implements found throughout the area provide evidence that mountain springs, streams, and creeks were frequented by hunters and gatherers perhaps as far back as 8,000 to 10,000 BC.

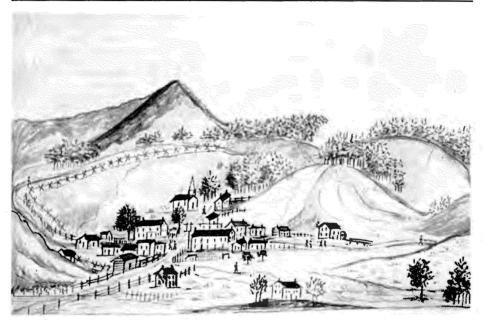
In the mid-1700s European explorers and settlers made excursions into this area. Noted American frontiersman Christopher Gist documented his discovery of nearby Mountain Lake on May 11, 1751², and Adam

Harman has been listed as living at Gunpowder Springs (nearby Eggleston) as early as 1749.³ It is known that some of the early European settlers in the Newport vicinity fought in the Revolutionary War: however, their immediate ties to the area are sketchy. Some historians established 1779 as the starting date for the Newport community, which was known at one time as Crossroads and later on as Chapman's Mills.⁴ The name "Newport" was used as early as January 1836, at which time Tyree G. Newbill was given permission to retail ardent spirits at his store in Newport.⁵ In the early 1800s, the first roads began to tie together small communities later known as Clover Hollow, Spruce Run, Maybrook, Mountain Lake, and Sinking Creek with Newport proper, and the location was a natural hub as early settlers established roots and laid claim to fertile lands. The town served as a crossroads and stagecoach junction for the Salt Sulphur Turnpike that ran from Christiansburg, Virginia, to near what is now Union, West Virginia, and the Fincastle-Cumberland Turnpike, later known as the Blue Grass Trail, that ran east-to-west. Some speculate that indeed this was a "new port," thus the name "Newport."

Census reports in the early 1800s reveal crafts people and farmers occupying the Newport area. Families with surnames such as Adkins (Atkins), Epling, Fry, Harless, Kessinger, Lafon, Link, Lucas, Price, and Vaught carved out their niche, and vestiges of their presence still remain. Later, black families with last names of Moss, Webb, Johnston, Page, and Oads, among others, also located in the area — some free and some as slaves — and they made their contribution to the growth and development of the area as well. Some individuals with Melungeon surnames may have been a part of the early fabric of this town and adjacent communities.

Early outsiders traveling through the area captured the essence of Newport life through their sketches and paintings. In 1853, Lewis Miller, an itinerant artist, provided a graphical illustration of the town of Newport and adjacent areas in some of his drawings. Artist Edward Beyer likewise captured nearby Mountain Lake in his paintings. Such drawings document the presence of various types of mills, hotels, and churches and confirm the pristine beauty of the area.

As the town and area began to take on an identity in the mid-1800s, however, the national issues that were so divisive became local realities as young men answered the call to arms. There were a few who sympathized with the northern cause, while many considered the Civil War as one of Yankee aggression. Captain William Payne, a Newport resident, described as "... a man of exemplary habits, well-educated, of dauntless



An 1853 sketch of Newport by Lewis Miller, artist. Picture courtesy of Abbey Aldrich Museum.

courage — a strikingly handsome, fine-looking soldier"⁶ was killed while leading his Confederate troops down the Coal River in Raleigh County. West Virginia. In the nearby Maybrook community, only one of Mary Atkins's three sons serving the Confederate cause made it home from the war. Oral history is that the Butler family in Newport left a candle burning in their window for their young son, who never returned from a trip to town, the speculation being that he had been conscripted into service. There were depredations as the Yankees traveled through the area, and an actual skirmish occurred over the town of Newport when General George Crook, following the Battle of Cloyd's Mountain, came through Newport on his way to the friendlier confines of the North. As General Crook and his troops scaled nearby Salt Pond Mountain during a cold and rainy spell in May 1864, they had to discard some of their possessions in order to reach the summit. As a result, there are countless tales and legends about buried cannons, gold, and other valuables they supposedly left behind. Continued findings of Civil War relics give credence to the presence of Civil War activities in the area, and reviews of Civil War records confirm the supreme sacrifices made by Newport native sons on many Civil War battlefields.

DOUGLAS D. AND PERRY D. MARTIN

After the war, the town of Newport took on a more formal demeanor. There were ties to a small college, later to be known as Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, then just emerging across the mountain in Montgomery County. This land-grant college was founded on March 19, 1872, and Newport residents were among the early students. The Newport community has continued its close ties with the university, and its citizens have served in many faculty and staff positions.

Coincidentally, Newport became the first incorporated town in Giles County at about the same time that the university, originally known as Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, was founded. George Hines, a returning Civil War veteran, was named the first mayor, and the town council included other returning veterans such as the popular medical doctor Christopher Wingo. Chapter 129, Acts of the Virginia General Assembly, 1872, identified the first town officials, outlined the official boundaries of the town, and addressed other such issues as taxing powers, law enforcement, and related matters. (See Appendix I for the complete "General Assembly Act to Incorporate the Town of Newport".)

Grist mills and sawmills decorated the landscape, and an iron foundry was in production, confirming the resurgence of industrial activity after the war. The Johns Mountain Iron Company in Newport was typical of new industry in the area. This company, founded in 1872 with Mr. E. P. Williams of Berryville serving as president, operated on present Route 42 and, after having been closed for several years, was reactivated by J. Wilcox Brown. Power to operate the iron company was supplied by a large dam constructed on Sinking Creek; the land for the dam was leased from Mr. Giles M. Dowdy at an annual rental of \$250.00 plus a royalty of 10 cents per ton of iron. The pig iron from the iron furnace was transported by wagon to the intersection of the Newport-Blacksburg road near the top of the mountain at the Gap, then on to the railroad at Cambria, Virginia, some 18 miles away. Six horses supplied the power to move the heavy loads over two mountains. Coke to fire the Iron Furnace was hauled in from nearby Clover Hollow.

In addition to post-war building, the Newport community showed an intellectual flair. While their social value was questioned in the press, scholarly debates provided evidence of keen minds and competitive spirits. One such light encounter was reported in the *Pearisburg Virginian* of April 1, 1870:

"Heavy" Debate ! — The Grand Question Finally and Forever Settled! — The World Breathes Free once More! — Newport the Scene of Action, etc., etc. - The much agitated question, "Which deserves more credit, Columbus for discovering America or Washington for defending it?" was debated in Newport on Friday night last. It seems that Messrs. Hines, Banks, and Porterfield, the renowned champion "Stumpers" of Newport, accepted a challenge made by Messrs. Williams, Jones, and Williams, the learned and able orators of Craig County, to meet upon the rostrum of deadly contest, upon any subject that might be selected. Newport maintained, manfully, the affirmative and Craig the negative side of the question. After a long, heated, and bloody combat, the judges awarded the "palm of victory and crown of thorns" to the champions of Newport.

We have, from our earliest recollections, been taught to look upon Newport as a famous place for "rock battles," — especially on election days — but never for oratorical debates upon such momentous and powerful subjects.

Sporting events provided another outlet for energetic and ambitious citizens. Jousting tournaments were important events; the winner had the honor of escorting the gueen to the dance that typically followed. Baseball became a local as well as a national pastime. In 1892 those "college boys across the mountain" played their very first baseball game against Newport. The score was recorded as a 15 to 5 victory for the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College team. Coincidentally, one hundred years later in 1992, Mike Williams, a collegian, Newport native, and future major league pitcher, threw the first pitch at the newly dedicated English Field at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. He went on to establish baseball records in the early 1990s as a mainstay of the university pitching staff. He also became the second person from Newport to reach the major leagues - Bob Porterfield having distinguished himself in the early 1950s as a pitcher for the Washington Senators, Boston Red Sox, New York Yankees, and Pittsburgh Pirates; he was also selected as the major league "Pitcher of the Year" by "The Sporting News" in 1953.

Early Education

The value of a formal education was ingrained into the early Newport community, and many families went to great effort to assure that their children had access to educational opportunities. Hattie Miller in *The Story of Newport and Its People* documents that a Latin School was located in Newport between 1839 and 1855⁷. In 1872, four free schools were located in the Newport area.⁸ There are reports of private schools in the area, and there is mention of Reverend Stickley, a Lutheran minister, having a school in Newport from 1873 to 1875. In 1884, a Newport Academy headed by J. Porterfield offered "higher branches" in



Rocky Sink one-room School, c 1916.

addition to the regular course of study.⁹ Higher branches could be offered only on the authority of the district board, and the higher offerings could not interfere with instruction in elementary studies.¹⁰ The many one-room schools that dotted the area had personalities and stories of their own. When pesky students at the Rocky Sink School locked their teacher, J. Claude Link, out of the building, he climbed onto the roof and stopped up the chimney. Reports of students who cut the saddle cinches on the teacher's horse, put pig tails in the ink well, salted the principal's sandwich, or went skinny dipping in the school spring assure that the educational process was not a dull one. Teacher responsibilities went beyond the "Three 'R's"; one early contract read:

He would teach for \$25.00 a month for five months if the money lasted that long. He was to build fires and clean the building. The contract initially read that cleaning material would be furnished but that clause was changed to read that the teacher would provide the cleaning supplies.¹¹

Greater opportunities for formal education for all children evolved as the emphasis on education gained political and practical popularity. A new high school built in 1911–12 successfully prepared students for advanced education. The first graduating class of twelve students in 1915 included four businessmen — one the general manager of a coal company — an entertainer/farmer, six teachers, and a government worker. The first high school was replaced by a new school, built in 1932 as part of the WPA program; this school initially offered eleven grades and continued the emphasis on academic excellence.

Religion

Religion was an integral part of early Newport life. Methodists, Disciples of Christ, and Lutherans were among the early denominations in the area. Ministers and others tried with varying degrees of success to reform the "sinners" of the area. Some progress was reported by one minister: "I know of no place where there is dancing.... I think that there is not one fourth of the drinking in Newport that there was one year ago."¹² Local preachers also provided some educational opportunities, offering basic educational material along with a Biblical message. Many ministers made lasting contributions to the community by serving as stabilizing forces in times that were often chaotic, and some of the ministers or their children married and remained in the community, where their progeny continue today as respected contributors to the community's quality of life.

While, as an institution, religion was presented as an integral part of community life, personal visits by the preachers could be stressful events.



Old Lucas Memorial Christian Church, Maybrook, Virginia, c 1918.

DOUGLAS D. AND PERRY D. MARTIN

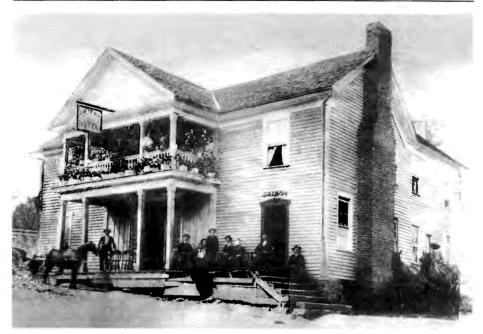
Family members were expected to be on their best behavior, scrumptious meals were the order of the day, and in some homes the Bible quickly replaced the Sears and Roebuck catalog in a prominent location. Family members were attired in their better outfits and possibly given a quick lesson on social etiquette. In one such incident, all of the requirements listed above had been met, but some of the younger boys playing outside decided to entertain themselves by tossing the family duck into the air to watch it fly. For some unexplained reason, the duck descended into the chimney, causing the house to be filled with smoke. A ladder was quickly dispatched to the top of the house and the duck was rescued — singed but alive. It is unknown whether salvation was accorded to any other family members on that day.

After the Civil War, the Newport area was again discovered by outsiders, and local-color writers were writing about the natural beauties that had been depicted by earlier artists. However, some writers did not fully appreciate the attitudes of local folk, and their observations and writings were, in part, responsible for an Appalachia stereotype that still persists in many parts of Southwestern Virginia, Eastern Tennessee, and Eastern Kentucky. Edward A. Pollard, writing for the "Virginia Tourist" observed in 1871 after leaving Blacksburg,

... a pretty village which boasts a 'college' of some sort ... the sun had been set about a quarter of an hour when we reached Newport, a settlement of twenty or thirty board houses on a little pad of soil at the bottom of a funnel-shaped cup formed by the high hills or mountains. ... The night was gathering, the sky had become overcast with clouds, but we determined to press on (to Eggleston Springs) in view of the cheer that awaited us, much to be preferred to that suggested by the tarnished signboard of the Newport Hotel that creaked dismally over our heads.¹³

Indeed, the town was getting a reputation. Local saloons attracted outsiders who admitted to filling their pockets with rocks on their way into town so as to start a fight if one was not already in progress. Barn burnings were methods of retaliation, and fist fights and gun fights were the means to resolve disagreements. Some of the "best rye whisky" was available for local use or for export, and Civil War veteran "Pent" Taylor was known far and wide for his peach brandy. Cadets from the "college across the mountain" came to Newport to study (according to them) the unique hinges found on the gates in Newport. There is even one report of local pigs getting access to the "best rye whiskey" mash, doubtless some of the more festive pigs living in Newport at that time. With four distilleries and three saloons, it was definitely "Saturday Night Live" in Newport.

NEWPORT, VIRGINIA



Smith Hotel and Saloon, c 1890, Newport, Virginia.

During this era, Newport personified the phrase "gay nineties". Residents published several newspapers, Falls Manufacturing Company was in operation on Sinking Creek making farm equipment, buggies, guns, furniture, and kitchen utensils, and a woolen mill was in operation in the town. Local merchants met many of the needs of Newport residents and those of adjacent communities. A chicken wagon visited the farms to buy produce to be sold locally or exported to outlying areas. Other trips were made to connect with the rail lines that made stops in nearby Eggleston and Pembroke. One of the wagon drivers, it is reported, had a tendency to over-imbibe; it is also reported that the horse knew the route and could make the trip and proper stops without the assistance of the inebriated driver. Perhaps this is the 1800s version of the current "smart road" concept, where the vehicle utilizes the sensors in the road and other variables to assure the safety and comfort of passengers.

The festive demeanor, the bawdiness, and the personality of the town itself received a telling blow on the night of March 31, 1902. Although the cause is still debated, a fire fanned by March winds destroyed the main part of town, and on April 1, 1902, the town lay in ruins. Some travelers heading into town on April 1 thought that they were the victims of a bizarre April Fool prank. *The Roanoke Times* confirmed the worst, reporting,

TERRIFIC FIRE

Town of Newport, Va., Entirely Destroyed - Heavy Loss

Eggleston Springs, Va., April 1,- Special - At an early hour this morning Newport, Giles County, Virginia, famous for doing more business than any other inland town in the state, was practically wiped out by fire. Every store in the place was destroyed; two hotels and the best residences were leveled to the ground. The fire originated from an unknown cause in a shed back of Dunklee & Martin's big store. The wind was blowing a gale and the flames spread guickly from the shed to the store which was also a mass of flames in a few minutes. From there the wind scattered the fire in every direction. Before the horrified inhabitants realized what was happening, nearly every house in the immediate neighborhood was in flames. The loss is estimated to be over one hundred thousand dollars with little insurance. The principal losers are: McPherson's four-story hardware establishment and twenty-five thousand dollars stock; Dunklee and Martin's store and twenty thousand dollar stock general merchandise; Miller & Sons' store and fifteen thousand dollar stock general merchandise; Hunter's Hotel, Smith's Hotel and Mrs. Martha Price's handsome residence. Every one in the town is naturally depressed but the merchants all say they will rebuild at once and in a short time will be doing as much business as formerly.

Newport, which is located in Giles county is well known to most people in this section of the state, and is regarded as a business-like progressive inland town. It is situated about six miles from the nearest point on the New River division of the Norfolk and Western which is Eggleston's. Fortunately, there are a great many wealthy people in the place, in so far as wealth is usually credited to country people, and for this reason, the great loss will not be so heavily felt. (*Roanoke Times*, April 1, 1902).

Newport citizens were rugged individualists, and rebuilding began. New stores emerged, civic organizations made their contributions, and rebirth was under way. Prominent families such as the Dunklees, Millers, Masons, Martins, Prices, Williams, and Farriers were joined by newcomers, and this blend revitalized the area. Churches provided a spiritual base for the community, and circuit riders supported by lay leaders created an outreach program that had social as well as spiritual implications. The 1905 diary of a local Lutheran minister, Reverend Levi Spraker, provides insight into the community in addition to glimpses of the personal life of a minister. He had fallen in love with one of the young women on his circuit, and his diary contains poignant passages that blend the duties of a minister who must cover a fifty-mile circuit on horse-



Newport, Virginia, on April 1, 1902, the day after the fire.

back with the romantic inclinations of a young man in love. In one passage, he wrote that "She had him so upset that he went deep into the woods and smoked a cigar." When she accepted his marriage proposal, he recorded that she had made him the happiest man on earth. Other entries document a typical work day in the life of a minister with chores such as planting the garden, setting the chickens, fixing a saddle, and visiting those in need.

Turn-of-the-century enthusiasm, rebirth and revitalization after the fire, and technological advances made an impact on the Newport way of life. The first high school complete with indoor plumbing was built in 1912. At the same time, the Bradley Covered Bridge eliminated the need to ford Sinking Creek on the way to Mountain Lake, and in 1916 a second bridge spanned Sinking Creek to allow access to the Clover Hollow area without the necessity of fording the creek. Newport personalities were actively involved in county and state affairs. Mr. Henry Farrier from Newport became superintendent of schools for Giles County and served in that capacity for many years. Mr. Maurice Puckett, also from Newport, was the overseer of bridges for the county and was a moving force behind the three public covered bridges built in the Newport area over a short span of time. He may have assisted in building the fourth bridge (a private one) that still exists on the Reynolds property off route 42. Three of these bridges remain, making Newport the home of covered bridges for the Commonwealth of Virginia.



Covered bridge built in 1916, Newport, Virginia. Photo courtesy of Donna K. Martin.

The agrarian emphasis continued around Newport; farming was the way of life for many people. Threshing hands made their rounds from farm to farm to help with the harvest. Each season had its unique and specific needs, and many of the farming activities — such as sheep shearing, apple butter making, and molasses making — involved many in the community. At times, livestock was herded by hoof over long distances to market. Hattie Miller recalls one time when sheep being driven from Newport to Christiansburg chose one of the stores in town as a place to rest from the heat. The sheep owner had to pay for damages to the store.¹⁴

Mills

Mills were an integral part of early Newport, as the early name of "Chapman's Mills" indicates. Local mills provided access to many necessities and luxuries. Farmers raised their own livestock, grew their own grain and other crops, and used lumber cut from their property. Local mills were, in essence, the processing plants. Wheat, corn, oats, rye, and barley were transformed into food products for human and animal consumption, and logs were converted into finished lumber. In Newport proper, Fry's Mill ground corn into corn meal and ground the chop, a



Threshing hands, Lucas Farm, Clover Hollow, c 1916.

food for livestock. In earlier years an oil mill that gleaned oil from flax seed was in operation. Zell's Mill and the Price-Leffel-Givens Mill, both built on Sinking Creek, were multi-purpose mills. Zell's Mill was a combination grist mill and sawmill, and the Price-Leffel-Givens Mill provided electricity for the Newport area for a period of time and, among other items, manufactured chicken coops. The Echols Mill also functioned as a grist mill for the area. The community now known as Maybrook frequented Brown's Mill, also known as Wysong's Mill, and the Spruce Run community was served by Cook's Mill. Some local residents still reflect on their trips to the mill. At times small children were responsible for transporting grain by horseback to the local mill for grinding into meal or flour. Such trips could provide some time to visit with playmates before returning home with the finished products. Mills also provided access to other items such as oil for lamps, a primary source of light in pre-electric times. Sometimes the oil would seep into the flour during the trip home. so that biscuits sometimes had interesting flavors.

Throughout the history of the Newport community, many individuals have excelled in their chosen professions. Many citizens displayed a strong crafts orientation; their ingenuity was evident as the first water lines were installed, as the telephone and accompanying switch board came into the community, and as the various mills and factories provided services to Newport and adjacent communities. Newport has also been benefited by a strong matriarchal network. Mrs. "Fan" Miller was the first principal of the high school, built in 1911–12, and served on the Board of Visitors



at Radford College; Mary Kinzie excelled at Roanoke College as one of the top basketball free-throw shooters in the world; and Mrs. Aggie Bradley served as a local midwife for an extended period of time. In later years, Mrs. Mila Sibold was recognized as the "State Mother of the Year"; Eva Reynolds Helms was cited as one of the top educators in the Commonwealth; and Alberta Williams staffed the local switchboard for many years. Among Alberta's duties were sounding the fire alarm when needed and turning on the street light. Local resident and historian Hattie Miller officially guided community improvement efforts in 1952-53, and she has remained a valuable resource and a valued friend to many. Presentday visits to such local residents as Vena McElrath, Emma Phlegar, and Mildred Walker provide refreshing insight into past practices. These individuals and many others combine a knowledge of the past with an infectious and optimistic enthusiasm for the future.

Modesty is a way of life in Newport. Yet even a cursory look into the individual personalities often reveals extraordinary accomplishments. Soldiers from the area were at Valley Forge during the Revolutionary War; some were heroes, POWs and casualties during the Civil War; and others distinguished themselves in the World Wars of the 20th century. Many Purple Hearts, Bronze Stars, Commendation Medals, and other symbols of distinction are tucked away in individual archives. Among the many notable efforts are those of Noble Porterfield at Pearl Harbor; Joe Givens, who lost his life at Okinawa; Hal Farrier, who disappeared on British soil; and Harry Taylor, who was recognized by President Sigmon-Ree for his military efforts. A person from Newport received a Bronze Star for service in the Korean conflict, and there were a number of Viet



Adam P. "Pent" Taylor, Civil War veteran and noted brandy maker, with grandson Albert Kinzie, c 1890. Photo courtesy of Billy Kinzie.

Nam-era veterans, including one specifically chosen for a special rescue mission into North Viet Nam. Newport residents continue in service to their country in many ways, living lives of "quiet dignity".

Changes

The Newport community has had to act and react to changes internally and externally. Area industries such as the Radford Arsenal (Hercules Powder Plant) in Radford and the Celanese Plant in Narrows drew workers from the farms to an industrial setting. Local workers boarded company buses, such as the "Green Hornet" for trips to the Powder Plant or the Celanese bus. Relocation of US route 460 bypassed Newport, so that traffic no longer travels through the heart of town. Newport residents, while receptive to change, have not hesitated to speak their minds on issues concerning the quality of life in the area. The later discovery of an Internal Revenue Service lock gives credence to an early story that town residents were not overly inclined to pay tax on whiskey, with the result that some places that were dispensing liquid refreshment were locked up by the IRS. Currently, village members often act in concert on environmental concerns and other issues that threaten the fabric of life in this crossroads community; this thread of community pride has been evident throughout its history. The village, including adjacent areas, is under consideration as both a state and a national historical district.

Events

A common denominator in evidence for many years has been an appreciation and inclination for festive occasions where there is time to "meet and eat," with the eating sharing at least equal billing with the meeting. Some of the events have been unique occasions such as the 1976 Bicentennial wagon train, the 1939 dedication of the Blue Grass Trail, and the Masonic Hall dedication in 1869; other events — such as the Newport Fair, the July 4th parade, and a recently instituted Harvest Dinner — are annual occurrences.

Saturdays in Newport around the turn of the century were market days. Farmers from surrounding areas brought in produce for sale — an early version of the farmer's market. Residents of nearby Christiansburg and other areas came to purchase not only produce but also locally raised mules that were later sold for use on farms or in the coal mines. On May 13, 1996, Paul Walker, just prior to his death, described townsfolk in 1915 as they assembled in town to await the arrival of colts and mules destined for the trading block. Robert Farrier, another Newport patriarch, recalled selling ice cream for five cents a cone on the days the colts and mules were brought to town.

Since 1935, the premier annual event in Newport is "The Fair." Planning for this event is a year-long activity that combines talents across generations and blends newcomers with old-timers. The organization of a fair in Newport was the idea of James H. Copenhaver, who came to Newport High School in 1935 as an agriculture teacher. The first fair was sponsored by the Newport High School, with the Agriculture and Home Economics Departments sharing the responsibility. C. B. King, principal, was elected President; Mildred Lancaster, Home Economics teacher, was named Vice President; and Jim Copenhaver served as secretary-treasurer and general manager. With the help and cooperation of the entire community and the aid of student teachers from Virginia Polytechnic Institute, the first fair was held in the school in September 1936.

Classes were established for livestock, grains and grasses, fruits, vegetables, canning, sewing, flowers, antiques, and school exhibits. No money prizes were awarded — only ribbons for the first three places. Entertainment consisted of bingo and an amateur contest. Over the years, horse shows, beauty contests, greasy-pole climbing, wood chopping, horseshoes, and tobacco spitting have been among the attractions. The fair provides the setting for meeting friends and neighbors and renewing acquaintances.

Where Are We Now?

In her Story of Newport and Its People, Hattie Miller recalls that many years ago the Newport postmaster received the following letter:

Dear Sir:

Christian Science Monitor today gives account of your town as without taxes, mayor, council or other governing body and yet enjoys paved streets, concrete walks, modern schools, churches, etc.

Will you please place this letter in the hands of someone in your town who will inform how you conduct your town affairs?

I will appreciate a reply.

Ben C. Dunbar Danforth, Maine¹⁵

Mr. Dunbar's inquiry is still applicable today. Perhaps the answer is that throughout the history of this community, individuals, civic organizations, churches, and other groups have worked to provide continuity, motivation, and leadership. The local Masonic lodge, established prior to the turn of the century, and churches nearly 150 years old combine with newer churches and clubs, such as the Newport Ruritan Club and the Newport Women's Club, as functional organizations to provide rallying points for community activities. The board of directors for the Newport Fair, a Village Council, a fire department, a rescue squad, Scouting programs, and a garden club combine with a viable sports program to address many community needs.

Newport in many ways remains a crossroads town. New families in the outlying areas blend with established families who trace their Newport roots back six or seven generations. There is local resident Melvin Smith, former dirt-track star who was still racing cars past his 70th birthday, living across the road from Robert Tuckwiller, a noted artist, and their new neighbor, Ake Renqvist, an accomplished musician from Finland. A new post office welcome visitors to the community. Restoration is underway for the old woolen mill — one of the few extant industries in Southwest Virginia. Newport citizens serve as members of gubernatorial cabinets and corporate boards, and work with equally talented, if less prominent, home folk to improve their community. Former notable Newport residents include Helen Farrier, who served as a missionary in Africa, and the successful Nashville songwriter, Michael P. Huffman.

On October 15, 1996, nearby Eastern Elementary and Middle School became the first school in the world to have wireless access to receive communications via satellite. Perhaps it is fitting that a town and community that were considered "wired" in the 1890s because of the free-flowing liquor are participants in one of the first wireless programs in the 1990s. The devotion, dedication, independence, and sense of history of the individuals who make up the Newport community allow it to continue to be a crossroads town, a blend of new ideas and time-honored traditions.

Endnotes

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- 5. James H. Martin, Thousand Names from the Annals of Giles and Mercer Counties, Radford, Virginia: Commonwealth Press, 1976, p. 61.
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- Quarterly Conference Record, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Report of the General State of the Church, May 24, 1890, p. 105.
- 13. Edward A. Pollard, "Virginia Tourist." 1871.
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Appendix: Chapter 129, Acts of Assembly, 1872

An ACT to Incorporate the Town of Newport, in the County of Giles In force March 4, 1872

1. Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia, That the village known as the town of Newport, in the County of Giles, laid off within the following described boundaries, beginning at a white oak tree, a corner of David B. Price's and John P. Martin's lands, marked with four chops; thence running south thirtythree degrees, west one hundred and fifty-five poles, crossing the turnpike leading from Newport to Blacksburg, to an apple tree near a line fence between Gustavus A. Butler and William H. Martin's lands; thence north forty-nine degrees, west eighty one poles, crossing the turnpike road leading from Newport to Scott's ferry, to a red oak tree on a line fence between Christopher C. Wingo's and Sarah D. Payne's lands; thence north twenty-five degrees, east one hundred and fifty-five poles, crossing the turnpike road leading from Newport to Pearisburg, to a poplar tree in the aforesaid David B. Price's lot; thence south fifty-two degrees, east one hundred poles, crossing the turnpike road leading from Newport to New Castle, to the beginning, shall be, and is hereby made a town corporate by name and style of the town of Newport, of the county of Giles, and by that name and style shall have and exercise the powers hereinafter granted; and that George W. Hines is hereby appointed mayor thereof, and David B. Price, William R. Gitt, William Keister, Flayl P. Payne, J. Addison Logan and Christopher C. Wingo, are hereby appointed councilmen thereof, and the said mayor and councilmen shall have and exercise all the powers hereinafter granted to said officers, and remain in office until their successors shall be elected and qualified according to law, a majority of whom shall form a quorum for the transaction of business.

2. The said mayor and councilmen shall be elected annually on the fourth Thursday in May by the electors of said town of Newport, gualified to vote for members of the general assembly according to the general election laws of the commonwealth. The person so elected mayor of the said town as aforesaid shall be and is hereby invested with the powers and authority of a justice of peace within the corporate limits of said town, to have and exercise the like jurisdiction in all cases whatsoever originating within said limits as a justice of the county now has or may hereafter have by law, but acting upon the general laws of the land. It shall be the duty of the mayor to suppress all disturbances, riots and disorderly conduct within the bounds of said town. He shall have the power to issue process, hear and determine all prosecutions, cases and controversies arising under the by-laws and ordinances, and issue executions, giving to parties the right to appeal to the county court of Giles in all cases where the fine or other matter in controversy shall exceed ten dollars. Said appeal shall be taken in the same time and manner and upon the same terms that appeals are now taken from judgments of a single justice.

3. The mayor, or any two of said councilmen, shall have power to call a meeting of said council as often as occasion may require.

DOUGLAS D. AND PERRY D. MARTIN

4. The said council shall have power and authority to improve the street, walks and alleys of said town; to prevent and punish by reasonable fines, the firing of guns, or running or riding horses at an unusual gait in said town; to license and regulate shows and other public exhibitions, and tax the same as they may deem expedient; to appoint all such officers as may be necessary for conducting the affairs of said town not otherwise provided for in this act, and allow them such compensation as they may deem reasonable; and finally, to make all such by-laws, rules and regulations as they may deem necessary and proper for the good government of said town: provided, they be not contrary to the laws of this state or the United States, and the same to amend, repeal or enforce by reasonable fines and penalties not exceeding for any one offense the sum of twenty dollars, to be recovered with the costs in the name of the mayor of said town.

5. The said council shall have the power to assess and collect annual tax within the said town for the purpose before mentioned on all such property, real and personal, as is now subject to taxation by the revenue laws of this commonwealth: provided, that the tax on said real and personal estate shall not exceed in any one year fifty cents on every hundred dollars value thereof, and a tax not exceeding fifty cents in any one year on all male inhabitants over twenty-one years of age within said town; and moreover, it shall be competent for said council to conduct and distribute water into and through said town, upon a request of a majority of the qualified voters of said town, such request to be made in such manner as the said council may deem best calculated to obtain full expression of opinion upon the subject.

6. The said council shall appoint annually a sergeant or town collection, who shall possess the like right of distress and powers in collecting the said taxes, service and return of process in pursuance of it, and shall be entitled to like fees and commissions as are allowed by law to constables for similar duties and services. Said sergeant shall execute bond with approved security in such penalty as said council shall deem necessary, payable to them and their successors in office, conditioned for the faithful discharge of his duties and payment over of said taxes and moneys collected and received by him in virtue of his office, and he and his securities, his and their executors or administrators, shall be subject to such proceedings, by motion or otherwise, before the county court of the county of Giles for enforcing payment of such taxes and other moneys by him collected or received as aforesaid, at the suit or motion of the said mayor or other person entitled, as collectors of county levies are by law subject to for enforcing payment of the levies by them collected.

7. All fines, penalties and amercements, and other moneys received and raised by virtue of this act and not otherwise directed to be applied shall be at the disposal of the council for the use and benefit of said town.

8. This act shall be in force from its passage.

Acts and Joint Resolutions passed by the General Assembly of the State of Virginia at its Session of 1871-72, pp. 107–108.

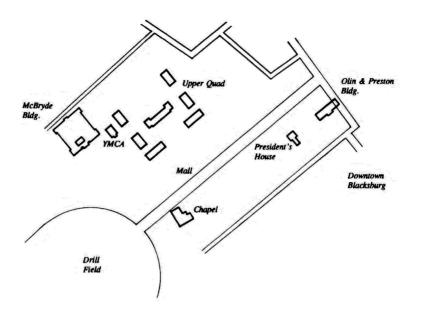
The Smithfield Review Volume I, 1997

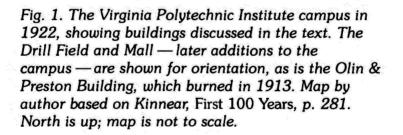
Our Native Stone: Architecture and Identity at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 1872–1922

J. Daniel Pezzoni

Every other fall, thousands of fans converge on Virginia Polytechnic Institute's Lane Stadium to witness one of collegiate football's great rivalries. The match-up between Virginia Tech and the University of Virginia has a long history, dating back to 1895 when the seven-year-old UVA team trounced the Hokie three-year-olds, 38-0. Tech's record over the following decade was — to put it charitably — unimpressive; the school managed to score only five points against the larger state university's 170 point total. Then, in 1905, Tech miraculously won, 11-0. Like David and Goliath, the young land-grant college had brought down a mighty foe.¹

This first triumph over UVA touched off the kind of raucous celebrations at which a modern fan would feel right at home. One student commentator, overcome with post-game euphoria, proclaimed: "We stand in sublime relations with the past and with the future." Victory on the gridiron did represent a turning point of sorts, in that it symbolized Tech's emerging ability to challenge the older school on the more important fronts of academic reputation, legislative support, and fund-raising. For vears following its establishment in 1872, Tech had played second fiddle to UVA and the Commonwealth's other institutions of higher learning, but after 1891 the school's prospects improved under the leadership of its fifth president, noted educator and agricultural reformer John M. McBryde. When McBryde took control, 150 students lived and studied in eleven brick-and-frame buildings scattered over a ten-acre "hay meadow" outside Blacksburg, Virginia. By the time McBryde left in 1907, the student body had swelled to nearly six hundred — adding manpower to the football team in the process - and sixty-seven new buildings had been erected on a campus approaching one-hundred acres in extent (Fig. 1).²





The Virginia Tech campus began to take on a more dignified appearance during the McBryde years. The first building constructed of the school's signature "Hokie stone" went up in 1900, and the Gothic styling that would later come to dominate the campus appeared in 1905. The sweeping oval parade ground known as the Drill Field, once a marshy creek bottom and now the central organizing element of the campus, appeared in concept in McBryde's last official report to the trustees of the college, when he described an "unbroken stretch of beautiful ground" extending from one end of the campus to the other. The seeds of the Drill Field and of a unifying stony Gothicism had been planted several years earlier, when the gifted medievalist architect Ralph Adams Cram briefly visited the school and advised McBryde on its improvement. McBryde and Cram's ideas gathered momentum during the presidency of another visionary, Joseph D. Eggleston (1913-1919), who worked with Richmond architects Carneal & Johnston to establish Collegiate Gothic as the Virginia Tech style. These developments, occurring during the school's first half-century, took place in the context of a broader effort to transform Virginia Tech's image from that of a second-rate training school into a respected institution of higher learning. Architecture would help to forge that new identity.

Today, at nearly 25,000 on-campus students, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University ranks as the largest university in the state, and as a research institution of national reputation. Given its current success, it is hard to imagine Tech's humble and highly contentious beginnings in the late nineteenth century. The idea for the school was conceived during the antebellum period by educators, politicians, and agricultural reformers who recognized a need for college-level agricultural training in Virginia. The state movement had its parallel at the national level, where a call for greater democracy and practical focus in education culminated in the Land Grant College Act, or Morrill Act, of 1862. Once Virginia reentered the Union after the Civil War, the Morrill Act provided seed money for the creation of a technical college, and after a mad scramble for the funds — what the media of the day christened the "War of the Colleges" - the state made the fateful decision not to award the money to an existing school, but instead created a new one. In October 1872, the Virginia Agricultural & Mechanical College (as Virginia Tech was originally known) opened its doors in the little Southwest Virginia market town of Blacksburg.³

"What sort of school should be established at Blacksburg?" asked a committee report submitted to the school's first Board of Visitors the previous summer. As Tech historian D. Lyle Kinnear relates the events of this critical period, the board members split into two camps on the question. Some called for a bona fide university that would combine practical and theoretical instruction, a "University of Virginia for the benefit of the southwest." Others wanted a technical school that would restrict itself to providing practical education in farm management and shop work to the sons of the Commonwealth's "industrial class." After what one participant in the debate termed a "fearful struggle," the board opted for the technical school approach, but the matter was never adequately resolved, and future board members, presidents, and meddlesome legislators would quarrel over Virginia Tech's true mission for decades to come.⁴

The battle for Tech's soul had a crippling effect on its institutional development. Legislative maneuverings resulted in a high turnover rate among staff and trustees, eroding school morale and weakening ties to the political establishment. At times the legislature seemed indifferent or even hostile to Tech's fiscal needs, cutting off state funding entirely for a number of years. The situation was further complicated by the terms of the original appropriation for the school, which stipulated that 200 students receive free tuition per annum. This well-meaning effort to make a college education possible for poor farm boys and mechanic's sons effectively ruled out student fees as a source of revenue. Essential needs such as salaries and firewood soaked up scarce funds, with improvements to the physical plant ranking low on the list of priorities. Between 1879 and 1888, legislators refused to appropriate state monies for building projects, and the school's land-grant status prohibited the use of federal funds for the construction and maintenance of buildings.⁵

Tech's administration struggled to develop a campus amid the uncertainties of the period. The school did not have to start entirely from scratch — it inherited its first building. In 1855, Tech's predecessor, the Methodist-affiliated Olin & Preston Institute, completed a three-story academy building on a hill overlooking Blacksburg's downtown. The handsome brick building featured a projecting central classroom pavilion under a crisp white pediment — a hallmark of the Greek Revival style with dormitory wings extending to each side. It was a grand edifice, apparently grand enough to bankrupt the Institute. The property went underutilized during the Civil War and after, until in 1872 it became an effective bargaining chip in Blacksburg's bid for the location of the state's land-grant college (Fig. 2).

The Olin & Preston Building set the tenor for Virginia Tech's early architectural development. Its brick construction reinforced a traditional Virginia bias for the material, more durable and weather-tight than wooden construction and less expensive and problematic than fine stone construction. The school's first crop of permanent brick buildings included the President's House (1876; now incorporated as the north end of Henderson Hall) and the first and second Academic Buildings (1876 and 1877; demolished), featuring bracketed cornices and round-arched windows indicative of the popular Victorian-era Italianate style. The Olin & Preston Building's axial orientation to Blacksburg's Main Street set the campus at the same 45-degree tilt respective to north as the town. Many of Virginia Tech's early attributes — brick construction, classical styling, elevated siting, and orientation to an adjoining town — can be seen in fully realized form in another nineteenth-century Virginia campus, that of Washington & Lee University in Lexington.

The Olin & Preston Building and surrounding structures, including the President's House, clustered as near Blacksburg's town center as topography would allow. This made sense in the context of the original

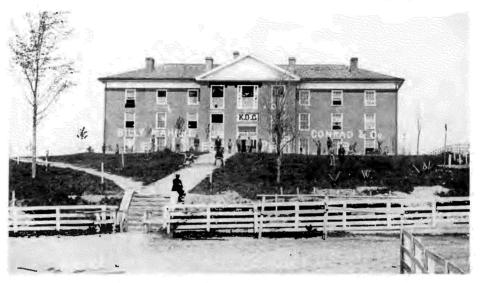


Fig. 2. Virginia Tech's Greek Revival roots: the Olin & Preston Building in a view from the 1870s or 1880s. Photo courtesy of the Special Collections Department, University Libraries, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia.

school, an enterprise nurtured by its host community, but Tech's early administrators must have chafed under the parochial dependence implied by the arrangement, for they quickly shifted the focus of new construction to a hilltop located at some remove from the downtown. The first and second Academic Buildings formed two corners of what would develop into the Upper Quad, the campus center for over half a century. The Upper Quad's architectural message was clear; Virginia Tech was not an academic backwater serving a local constituency — it belonged to the broader community of the Commonwealth and would stand on its own.

The spartan acropolis of the Upper Quad gained a central element with the construction of Lane Hall in the late 1880s. The new dormitory shared the utilitarian corbeled and embayed brick construction of the adjoining buildings, but unlike them its long three-story mass was broken by a five-story mansarded central tower. The old Olin & Preston Building received a similar mansarded tower shortly thereafter, and the college began to take on the appearance of its Second Empire-style land-grant cousins in western states such as Nebraska and Nevada. Another comparison, which a disapproving Virginia Tech president was to make early in the next century, was to industrial buildings of the period — textile mills, shoe factories, and the ilk — which typically featured long, drab machinery floors punctuated with mansarded elevator towers. The factory look might be in keeping with the narrowly defined training-school concept of Tech's mission, but it would prove limiting when Tech sought to convince itself, and the public at large, that it had a greater destiny (Fig. 3).⁶

In its early decades, Virginia Tech managed to assert a symbolic independence from its host community and establish a relatively sizable complex of buildings. Still, the school remained locked in what one observer called the "pioneer period" of architectural development, when it was "necessary to sacrifice sensibility to sense, and to build with an eye to utility." Sense and utility were considered by some to be cardinal virtues. When a building known as the Science Hall was added to the Upper Quad in 1905, a student editor described it approvingly: "The building, though comfortable and admirably suited to the purpose for which it is intended, is perfectly plain, not a cent has been expended for useless ornamentation or display." There were those within the faculty and Board of Visitors who concurred. A 1905 committee report to the board stated:

Many of the buildings, planned here, and built under the direct supervision of members of our staff, are marvels of economy—so declared to be by everyone who sees them. Many of them could not be duplicated for twice their original cost. And the economy of construction is not the chief consideration, for the policy pursued in their erection has furnished employment to numbers of promising students, who through the help afforded them by the employment offered, have been able to work their way, in whole or in part, through College.

The charge of extravagance could be used against the school (and, in fact, later was) by legislators who for one reason or another were opposed to Tech or to spending on higher education in general. An architectural "low profile" was just another way to avoid political trouble during Tech's early years.⁷

With Virginia Tech relying upon the design skills of its engineering faculty, men more attuned to the layout of manufacturing plants than the niceties of "useless ornament and display," it is a wonder that the school developed at all in an aesthetic direction. But while the utilitarian approach was being espoused by the Board of Visitors committee in 1905, other forces within the board and within the administration were plotting a change of direction. The first move towards a new architecture came in the late 1890s, when a group of alumni headed by William E. Dodd (later Woodrow Wilson's ambassador to Germany) began to raise funds for the construction of a YMCA on campus. Perhaps because the building was



Fig. 3. The "poverty stricken factory" look at Virginia Tech. This view of about 1895, taken from the roof of the remodeled Olin & Preston Building, shows the Upper Quad in the distance and a building known as the Mess Hall in the right middle-ground. Photo courtesy of the Special Collections Department, University Libraries, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia.

essentially a non-university initiative, paid for with private funds, a different approach was taken in its design. In 1899, Richmond architect W. F. West prepared plans for the Romanesque-inspired building (the present Performing Arts center), which was to be built out of rough-faced blocks of grav limestone guarried on the campus (Fig. 4). The stone was an instant success, and before long President McBryde and his faculty referred to it fondly as "our native limestone." Brick construction continued in the Upper Quad, out of a sense of harmony, but new buildings in the undefined area to the south and west of the guadrangle generally employed the local stone. These included the 1905 Chapel, which formerly stood on the site of the present Newman Library, and Price Hall, the school's Agriculture Hall, built in 1906-07. Of the latter building a student editor commented: "The general construction will be of the natural limestone rock obtained from the guarries adjacent to the College. The building will thus be a product of Virginia soils and ingenuity from beginning to end."8



Fig. 4. The YMCA with the tower of the McBryde Building in the background (undated photograph). Photo courtesy of the Special Collections Department, University Libraries, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia.

"Native" stone construction helped to define an architectural identity for the Virginia Polytechnic Institute by distinguishing the school from the predominantly brick character of the state's other institutions, chief among them the University of Virginia, which in the early twentieth century competed with Tech for funding and programs, and earlier still was nearly successful in preventing Tech's establishment altogether. During the "War of the Colleges," UVA had lobbied for Virginia's share of the land-grant funds, adding engineering, chemistry, and agriculture courses to its curriculum in a demonstration of its readiness to provide a technical education to students. In many ways UVA was the obvious choice, and for a time it looked as though the legislature would award it the funds rather than create a separate institution. During Tech's feeble beginnings in the 1870s and 1880s, its failure to secure state funding may have had the positive effect of protecting it from direct competition with UVA. The older school received relatively generous support from the legislature in the form of an annual appropriation, increasing from \$15,000 in the 1860s to \$100,000 in the 1910s.9

The McBryde administration's success at fund-raising and in boosting enrollment to near parity with UVA pushed the two schools into a confrontational relationship, and the legislature provided the battleground for the contest. In 1907, McBryde's successor, Paul B. Barringer, learned of a legislative scheme to transfer the state geological survey from Tech to the University of Virginia. The loss of such a prestigious program would represent a serious set-back, and the feisty Barringer, who as chairman of UVA's faculty from 1895 to 1903 was well aware of his former employer's political clout, fought hard but unsuccessfully to prevent the transfer. Barringer's successor, Joseph D. Eggleston, was tapped for the presidency in part due to his successful dealings with the legislature as a former state superintendent of public schools, but he too faced difficulties. Particularly troubling were rumors that Tech would be absorbed into UVA, a possibility that Eggleston took seriously and that may have contributed to his resignation in 1919. Gradually, however, Tech's growth in academic reputation and alumni support insulated it from the worst attacks. In 1927, when legislation based on a statewide survey of higher education proposed the consolidation of graduate degree programs at UVA and the elimination of Tech's liberal arts programs, president Julian A. Burruss and his backers inside and outside state government were able to defeat the initiative.¹⁰

During this second period in its history, when Virginia Tech began to compete effectively with other institutions, its leaders searched for an architectural language beyond the use of local stone that would further differentiate their school from the others and at the same time enhance Tech's image in the eyes of the Commonwealth. They found what they were looking for in the Gothic style, the style of the great medieval cathedrals and, more to the point, of venerable old-world universities like Cambridge and Oxford and progressive modern counterparts such as Princeton and the University of Chicago. As defined by architect Ralph Adams Cram, the era's foremost proponent of the style for collegiate architecture, Gothic was the "perfect expression of Northern and Western Christianity," the style of "our own kin in the old home overseas," and the repository of "exalted ideals of education and religion." Cram's Gothic ideology, with its overtones of Northern European cultural superiority, appealed to the Anglo-Saxon elite that controlled higher education in America at the turn of the twentieth century. It also struck a chord with Virginians, who prevailed on the master medievalist to plan two college campuses in Virginia: Sweet Briar Institute (now Sweet Briar College), a Classical Revival complex designed in 1901-02 and essentially completed by 1906, and Richmond College (now the University of Richmond), designed and built in 1911-14 in Cram's more customary Gothic style.¹¹

John M. McBryde's national reputation as an educator commended him to the founders of Sweet Briar, and in 1901 they appointed him chairman of an executive committee responsible for supervising the development of the institute's campus. At about the same time, McBrvde was impressed by an article of Cram's on ecclesiastical architecture, and he asked the then relatively unknown Boston architect to come to Virginia to advise on Sweet Briar's development. Cram apparently made a side trip to Virginia Tech; according to McBryde's May 30, 1907 report to the Board of Visitors, the architect had visited "some years ago" and had suggested that the campus be given an entirely new look by facing the brick buildings of the Upper Quad in stone. Cram probably had in mind the guarry-faced local limestone that had been used in the adjoining YMCA Building, and it also seems likely he intended the face-lift to be executed in the Gothic style. Years later, a watercolor perspective rendering was prepared by an architectural firm associated with Cram depicting a Gothicized Upper Quad with lancet-arched and oriel windows, corner towers, and other accoutrements of the style.¹²

Virginia Tech's first true Gothic building appeared in 1905, within several years of Cram's visit. This impressive stone structure, known variously as the Chapel, Auditorium, or "Dutch Barn," stood near the site of the present Newman Library, and in its overall form — dominated by a high gabled roof and a battlemented tower — and details such as lancet-arched windows and a wooden hammer-beam roof, the building evoked the architecture of a medieval English parish church. Cram probably did not design the Chapel, although he may have indirectly influenced its construction by sensitizing President McBryde to Gothic architecture. A more likely candidate is Lynchburg architect J. M. B. Lewis, who is known to have visited Tech in March 1905 during the period of the building's completion, and whose varied talents included a proficiency in the Gothic style.¹³

No additional Gothic buildings were erected during the Barringer administration (1907-1913), a period of discord between the president, faculty, and trustees. As if to highlight the tensions of those years, a suspicious fire destroyed the original Olin & Preston Building, which then served as the school's instructional shops, two weeks before Barringer's departure. The Board of Visitors moved swiftly to dispel the ominous mood created by the fire, hiring the Richmond architectural firm of Carneal & Johnston to design a new shops building for a site near the Upper Quad. J. Ambler Johnston, a 1904 Tech alumnus, and his senior associate W. Leigh Carneal had recently been selected to supervise construction work at Richmond College by Cram, who recommended his young proteges to the board and to the popular in-coming president, Joseph D. Eggleston. In Lyle Kinnear's words, the choice of Carneal & Johnston "marked the beginning of a long and happy association" between the architects and Virginia Tech.¹⁴

President Eggleston understood the importance of architecture in projecting a favorable (or unfavorable) impression of an institution to legislators and the public. During his years as state superintendent of public education he had worked diligently to improve the quality of school construction as one component of his crusade to reform the Commonwealth's educational system. Eggleston saw the association with Carneal & Johnston as an opportunity to implement the promising but unrealized ideas of McBryde and Cram. The Board of Visitors agreed and, in addition to charging the architects with the design of the new shops building, it instructed them to "block out a scheme for the permanent development of buildings on the VPI campus." Eggleston urged the architects to contact Cram, who he was told by former president McBrude had sketched out a "hasty scheme for the renovation of this college" during his visit in the first decade of the century. Carneal & Johnston's plan, and the aforementioned watercolor rendering that accompanied it. built upon the foundation laid by Cram, for they depicted a thorough refacing of the Upper Quad in guarry-faced Gothic stonework and, in addition, the removal of Lane Hall to create an open courtyard more in keeping with the guadrangles of medieval universities.¹⁵

Their concept for the McBryde Building (as the new shops were to be known; not the present McBryde Hall, which replaces it) introduced a number of design elements that were to characterize the firm's future work on campus. Foremost among these was the building's prominent front tower, modeled on the tower of Ralph Adams Cram's Post Head quarters at West Point with its blocky massing, buttressed corner piers and narrow archer windows. This tower was to reappear in Carneal & Johnston and Cram & Ferguson's Memorial Gymnasium, designed ir 1924, and Carneal & Johnston's Burruss Hall, the campus administra tion and auditorium building, built in 1934-35. Another feature, a small courtyard embedded in the spreading rectangular mass of the building and entered through a lancet-arched passageway at the base of the tower. anticipated the dormitory guadrangles that would soon ring Tech's central Drill Field. The McBryde Building referenced the school's technical mission directly by displaying five cast-stone plaques over its tower entry depicting students engaged in forge work, woodworking, and other pur-

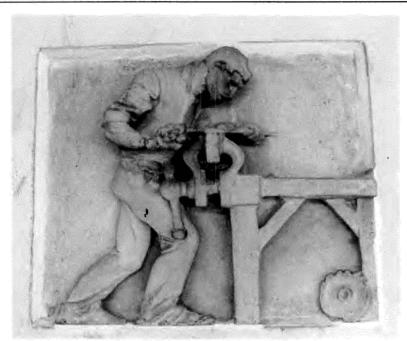


Fig. 5. Plaque from the McBryde Building, located in the lobby of the present McBryde Hall. Photo by author.

suits (Fig 5.). These and a set of heraldic shields bearing the state seal and the Virginia Tech emblem served to reinforce the message implicit in the building's sophisticated Gothic styling: Virginia Tech belonged to a noble lineage extending back to the medieval universities; it was not just another trade school but a progressive institution that provided a unique service to its Commonwealth.

In later years, J. Ambler Johnston reconstructed the thought process that guided the McBryde Building's design. President Eggleston, he reflected, "wanted to depart from the poverty stricken factory type of Lack of Architecture hitherto employed and wanted this new structure to express the character and type of education for which it was created." Gothic architecture would come to seem so right for Virginia Tech, so much a natural outgrowth of the limestone bedrock underlying the campus, that Johnston observed:

Thirty or more years later a party would go to VPI and graduate and never see or understand this early effort to lift VPI out of the appearance of a trade school cow college, yet its spirit has gone on. The McBryde building did what Dr. Eggleston wanted; it set the pace for everything else.¹⁶



Fig. 6. Mature Collegiate Gothic at Virginia Tech: the lobby of the Memorial Gymnasium. Photo by author.

With the McBryde Building underway, Eggleston and his associates launched an ambitious building program intended to capitalize on the momentary beneficence of the legislature, and in a sense to institutionalize that beneficence, to set a standard for quality from which not even the most penny-pinching of legislators could force a retreat. In October 1913, the president wrote to Carneal & Johnston asking them to prepare schematics for a building containing a "gymnasium, baths, swimming pool, indoor track, rooms for visiting teams, etc., etc.," reminding them that the building "will, of course, be built of native lime-stone, quarried on the grounds." Eggleston's idea formed the genesis of Memorial Gymnasium, completed in 1926 (Fig. 6). Other correspondence between Eggleston and the architects references a new Mess Hall to be built on the east side of the Upper Quad as a counterbalance to the new shops building, and a "V.P.I. Chapel" to be constructed at an unspecified location. These latter two projects were never realized, at least not to plans conceived by Eggleston, but more modest undertakings such as faculty houses were designed and built during the busy 1913-14 period.¹⁷

Eggleston was not content just to build — he also meant to publicize his activities. Carneal & Johnston's watercolor rendering of the McBryde Building hung in the president's office, visible to visiting dignitaries. Eggleston suggested the preliminary drawings for the gymnasium would be useful in a fund-raising pamphlet, and he urged the architects to make "cuts" of the McBryde Building perspective available to trade journals and newspapers. "I should like to get all the advertising out of it that is possible," he told them. In the long term, Eggleston's building campaign was successful in raising the level of construction at Tech in quantity and quality, but in the short term Eggleston over-reached. Lyle Kinnear has observed that the president's Gothic offensive was "too much for some members of the legislature already convinced that Eggleston was too inclined to build for ornament," and as a result Eggleston failed to secure any additional funding for construction.¹⁸

Eggleston and his successors used architecture as an effective tool in creating a positive identity for their school, and in furthering its institutional goals. The rock-ribbed Gothic style of Carneal & Johnston, which would dominate new construction until the belated onset of modernism in the 1960s, conveyed a sense of permanence, competence, and solemnity befitting the school's claim to a place of distinction in higher education. No greater proof of Virginia Tech's hard-won prestige could be had than the accolades of University of Virginia president E. A. Alderman, who represented the Commonwealth's state institutions at Virginia Tech's "Golden Jubilee" celebration in 1922. Alderman likened his school and his host to older and younger brothers — quite an admission from an institution that had often tried to push its sibling out of the state-funding nest — and he eloquently summed up the progress of Virginia Tech's first half century:

In a larger sense than the University [of Virginia], the Virginia Polytechnic Institute began its life in an era of disillusion and transition, of selfdenial and suffering. It stirs the spirit to think how you have triumphed over your difficulties. I congratulate you ... as you stand here today, poised on the threshold of a new era, secure in the affection of the Commonwealth and the loyalty of your sons.¹⁹

Architecturally, Virginia Tech's new era had begun decades before, and in a certain respect it continues to the present day, as the school has returned to the use of rough limestone facings for infill buildings bordering the Drill Field and for new complexes located on the fringes of the campus. Modern architects employ the stone in a spirit of contextualism, to integrate new construction with old, whereas administrators and fundraisers see the handsome blue-gray and tan limestone produced by the school's present quarries, just as their predecessors did at the beginning of the twentieth century, as a way to reinforce a sense of tradition and quality. Whatever the motivations, native stone continues to play an important role in defining the identity of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

Endnotes

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by Tech's faculty for UVA and its legislative backers, shops director John R. Parrott urged Eggleston to begin construction on the new shops immediately as the "only way to promptly check the University of Virginia encroaching on our rights" (correspondence of John R. Parrott to Joseph D. Eggleston, July 12, 1913, "Parrott, John Robert" folder, Box 4, Eggleston Papers, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Tech).

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The Coal Mining Way of Life in Virginia's New River Valley: Hard Work, Family, and Community

Mary B. La Lone

Coal mining was once the major non-agricultural industry in the New River Valley of Virginia, shaping a way of life for many families up to the 1970s. Although few physical traces of mining remain today, memories of that life continue among many in the region. The "New River Valley Coal Mining Heritage Project" was designed to document and preserve oral histories of the coal-mining culture.¹ To collect first-hand knowledge of mining household and community activities from the 1930s-1970s in Montgomery and Pulaski Counties, a research team of Radford University students and faculty in 1995–97 conducted fifty-one interviews with miners and their wives and children. The interviews provide a composite picture of the mining way of life in this region.² Three themes especially emerge from the interviews: the hard work, the strength of family, and the strength of community.

You know, the mines round here, from eighteen and ninety, was a way of life. That was it — that's all that was here. That's all the jobs that people had — the mines was it.³

Such was the comment of former miner Donald Minnick of Belspring. Esther Jones of Wake Forest, daughter and wife of miners, confirmed the observation:

That was the way people made their living. And that's what they would depend on, was getting that coal from the mountains \dots that was just the way of life.⁴

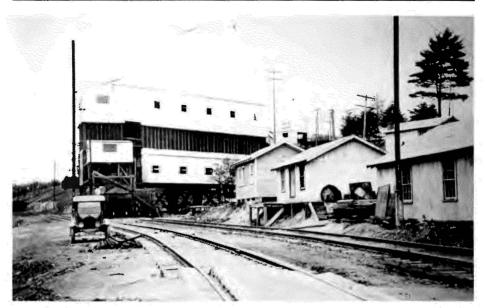
To speak of mining as a "way of life" refers not only to the occupation, but also to the lifestyle and structure of family and community life. It includes the way people acquired food and necessities, family organization and sense of cooperation within households, and the social life and support structures built between kin and neighbors.

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The mining experience that we typically associate with southwest Virginia and Central Appalachia is based on the extraction of rich bituminous coal deposits by large corporations operating mines across a region, with large-scale output. From the end of the 1880s almost continuously through the 1970s or longer, these corporations often housed their work force in large company-run towns.⁵ In comparison, the semi-anthracite coal fields of the New River Valley were characterized by a broader range in size and scale of mining operations — from numerous small "truck mines" (so named because coal generally is carried away in trucks, rather than railroad cars) to the larger mines at McCoy, Merrimac, and Parrott. As we will see, the diversity of mining operations also allowed for some variations in housing and land-holding among mining families in the New River Valley.

The largest operations were the Great Valley and Big Vein mines at McCoy, the Parrott Mine, and the Merrimac Mine. Each employed between 125-200 miners. While these were large-scale operations for the New River Valley, they operated on a smaller scale, as well as a shorter duration, than many mines in the bituminous coal fields of Central Appalachia. The Parrott Mine operated about 54 years, opening in the 1880s and shutting in 1934. The Merrimac Mine operated as a Civil War mine and colliery, but its peak period was from around 1900 until its closing in 1934. The Big Vein Mine opened in 1920 and closed in 1934, later reopening and then finally closing in 1958. The Great Valley Mine opened in the early 1900s and closed in 1946. A few companies operated smaller mines at places such as Coal Bank Hollow and Stroubles Creek, employing between 30-60 miners. The Depression and labor unionization of the 1930s closed some of the New River Valley mines, and the rest cycled down and closed as a result of the coming of the Radford Arsenal. However, until the Radford Arsenal opened in the early 1940s, offering an alternative source of good pay, the mines provided just about the only industrial occupation available in the New River Valley.⁶

While the large mines came and went within a relatively short time period, the real long-term backbone of New River Valley mining has been the small-scale mining that people refer to as "wagon mining" or "truck mining." Much of the mining on Brush and Price Mountains took place as small ventures operated by a few men. These men were true entrepreneurs. With a sharp eye they located likely sources of coal, struck deals with land owners, and organized small crews of men to dig out the coal. When the coal from one location was used up, they moved on to another. Despite their size, these truck mines occupied an important niche in the New River Valley. Much of their coal went to supply the



Coal tipple at Great Valley Mine, McCoy, scene of the accident on April 18, 1946, at which twelve miners were killed. Photo courtesy of Kenneth McCoy.

universities and homes in Blacksburg, Radford, and Christiansburg. Smallscale entrepreneurial endeavors operated across the New River Valley until the 1970s, when the last of them finally closed.

Underground mining in the New River Valley, throughout its history, remained a labor-intensive occupation. Miners worked underground with picks, shovels, augers, and dynamite. According to Oscar and James Sherman, miners who have worked with both the New River Valley coal and softer bituminous coal found elsewhere, mining the semi-anthracite requires much harder work because the coal is harder and contains a large amount of rock.⁷ None of the New River Valley mines used the mechanized coal-cutting machines commonly used in Appalachian bituminous mines.

Unlike those Central Appalachia regions where mining families lived in fairly densely populated company-run towns, the New River Valley offered mining families a range of living alternatives. One was to rent company housing. The Merrimac, Parrott, and Great Valley mines, as well as some smaller operations, housed miners and their families near the mine sites. These were relatively small collieries consisting of a few company houses, a commissary (store) and occasionally a hotel. Merrimac, probably the largest of the New River Valley mines, had a commissary, a hotel, and about 34 company houses.⁸ None of the New River Valley mining companies provided company-run schools or churches, but these were developed independently by members of the community.

New River Valley people perceive their mining settlements as being different from coal "camps," a term used by many miners in West Virginia and far southwest Virginia to describe their company-owned towns built at the mine sites. Mining families rarely use the term coal "camp" in the New River Valley. Instead, they prefer the terms coal "community" and "village." Merrimac, according to Fred Lawson, "was never called a coal camp. Never."9 And at Coal Bank Hollow, Hazel Hodge said, "We didn't call ours coal camps even though the houses were owned by the coal company. Nobody ever told us it was coal camp, you know, we thought those were in West Virginia."¹⁰ When the term coal camp is used at all, most often it is applied quite specifically to the area containing the Great Valley Mine's company houses, distinguishing that area from the rest of the community of McCoy, which pre-dated the mines. The choice of terms other than coal "camp" seems to suggest that New River Valley people consider their mining settlements, even with company housing, as having a more community-like character than the large company-run mining "camps" found elsewhere in Central Appalachia.

But company housing, limited to the larger mines and in short supply, was not the dominant living situation. Many families lived in the vicinity of the mines in houses they owned and built themselves. Other families lived in independent communities scattered across Brush and Price Mountains like Sunnyside and the African-American community of Wake Forest, two bedroom communities for the McCoy mines. Miners walked back and forth from these communities each day to work in the large mines or else worked truck mines near their homes. In addition, a substantial number of mining families lived apart from established communities, on fairly large tracts of land on Brush and Price Mountains. Often this was property that had passed down through families for generations.

Unlike other regions in Central Appalachia, where miners mined coal year round, New River Valley coal was mined only during the winter months.¹¹ Miners were out of work in summer when there was little demand for coal. This was a predictable seasonal layoff which created the need to take on additional jobs and subsistence activities in the summer to supplement the mining income. Most mining families owned, or had access to, some amount of land which they used for gardening and raising animals. The amount of land available varied with their living situations. People living in company houses often had a small space

available to them for a garden. At Merrimac and Coal Bank Hollow these were next to the houses: at McCov garden space was available to some camp residents down by the New River. Frequently there was also room for families to have chickens and pigs, and some families at Merrimac even kept cows which they left free to roam and graze the hillsides. Families who had access to more land were somewhat better off than the families in company housing because they had the ability do a substantial amount of farming and animal husbandry in addition to mining. In many cases, families with their own land were nearly self-sufficient for food, raising everything they needed with the exception of things such as sugar, salt, and coffee. Often they even bartered items of their own produce, such as eggs, for any remaining items they needed from the store. Corn, beans, tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, cabbages, turnips, beets, potatoes, sweet potatoes, apples and grapes, were commonly grown foods. As in other Appalachian mining areas, families canned much of their garden produce and preserved meat for use during the winter months. New River Valley mining families also buried cabbages, root crops, and apples directly in the fields, then later unburied and used them as needed.¹² Enterprising families frequently added food to the table by fishing; hunting animals such as rabbits, squirrels, groundhogs, possums, and racoons; and gathering foods such as berries, nuts, and wild greens from the mountains.13

In addition, miners and family members supplemented the mining income by taking on additional jobs. Seasonal wage-labor was often available at one of the large commercial farms and orchards, such as the Kentland Farm near the New River, the Heth Farm near Blacksburg, or the Spradlin orchard located between Merrimac and Cambria. Fred Lawson, for example, talked about picking apples for 12 cents an hour at the Spradlin orchard,¹⁴ and other miners said they regularly tended corn for farmers during the summer months.¹⁵ Miners speak of other creative ways to earn money. Warren Lilly and Leo Scott told of trapping animals to sell their pelts, Lucy Kessinger's husband worked at a sawmill, Lee A. Shepherd did stone masonry, and William Fisher became an entrepreneur in the junk business, tearing up old cars and selling the parts.¹⁶

The New River Valley mines drew most of their labor from the local region. Overall, this created a relatively stable mining population composed of families who were either here before the mines or who moved into the region and stayed over multiple generations. The mining population includes a number of families who can trace a long family history of residence in the region. Family names such as Price, Linkous, McCoy, Albert, and Shepherd are widely represented in the region's mining popu-

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lation. Marriages frequently occurred between the children of families living in the same community or vicinity, creating strong family links which served as primary channels for mutual support and economic sharing. Young couples tended to live close to their kin, and often built their homes on land given to them by their families. In many places, people's sense of community is associated with family histories and attachment to particular lands in the New River Valley. For example, when people speak of "our community" in McCoy, they frequently are referring with pride to a core group of families, such as the McCoys, the Alberts, and the Lillys, who have a long history of residence, intermarriage, and land ownership at that location.¹⁷ Or, as another example, when people speak of the Sunnyside community they are referring to a group of families such as the Prices, Montgomerys, and Shepherds, to name a few, who have lived on land at Sunnyside for generations. Family and attachment to land are two strong sources of identity for many coal-mining families.

The bond between neighbors is another key element of the coalmining way of life. Many people speak about the strong sense of support and responsibility to help one another that developed between neighbors in their community. For example, speaking of Coal Bank Hollow, Hazel Hodge said:

If somebody needed help, you know, everybody helped everybody. They helped each other, and that's the only way you could survive in those days 'cause you had to depend on your neighbors.¹⁸

And Lee Linkous of Merrimac reflected:

I think the people looked after one another. I think that was one of the most important things. People depended on one another for different things. You needed something and didn't have it, you'd go to your neighbors, borrow it or something like that. If you needed help why you would go there. And help them, do whatever you had.¹⁹

As Hazel Hodge and Lee Linkous indicated, neighbors needed to depend on neighbors for support. A code of mutual support developed among neighbors that applied especially in cases of sickness, injury, death, and shortages of food and clothing. Sometimes this was done informally, and at other times through more organized methods such as when a community church congregation held a "pounding" to assist a family in need, other families bringing the needy family a "pound of this and a pound of that," according to the tradition.²⁰ When mining accidents and tragedies occurred, all did what they could to comfort and help the affected families. Neighbors helped neighbors.



On the way to school, with books and lunch bucket. Mining company houses are on the slope in the background, at McCoy, Virginia, in the 1930s. Photo courtesy of Kenneth McCoy.

Neighbors also socialized with their neighbors, strengthening the sense of community. With limited access to transportation and low frequency of travel, much of a person's school, social, and church life took place within his/her community. People visited with neighbors as a regular form of entertainment, especially in the days before television. Women quilted together; men played horseshoes and croquet. Events such as revivals, apple butter stirrings, and baseball games brought large portions of the community together. And, of course, the focus on mining formed a common bond among all the families within the community.

While mining in the New River Valley may have had some differences from other Appalachian regions, its mining families also shared some of the common experiences of miners elsewhere by virtue of the type of work they did. Mining was hard and dangerous work. Miners suffered serious work-related injuries, such as broken bones and head injuries due to rock falls. They frequently suffered from chronic arthritis and back problems due to the physical stress placed on the body by mining, and they contracted black lung due to the coal dust, so thick in the mines that they could barely see at times.²¹ In addition to the health risks, mining could be a deadly occupation. Mine explosions, caused by an accumulation of methane gas, claimed the lives of 43 men and one boy in Montgomery County.²² The region's largest mining disaster on April 18, 1946, killed twelve miners at the Great Valley Mine in McCoy. The possibility of mining accidents affected family life. Jimmie Price told of his and his mother's fear that his father might not return home from the mines at the end of a day's work.²³ Many New River Valley boys went to work to earn money at an early age to help support their family, especially when their fathers had been disabled or killed by mining accidents. But in spite of the hard work and danger, many miners enjoyed their work. William Fisher put it this way: "Was nothing easy about it, but let me tell you this, I loved to work in mines over any other place I worked. I just loved to work in them."²⁴

A household's daily routine revolved around the miner's work. The day usually began with getting the miner fed and off to work early, and ended late in the day when the miner returned home. With the miner away all day, there was great reliance on women and children for complementary household roles. Women handled a heavy work load of household and child-raising chores while their husbands worked in the mines, and interviews emphasize the importance of women's work in household economics. Family members worked together, pooling their efforts to support the household. As Della Snider said:

The children and the mothers worked just as hard as the fathers did. They were in them old coal mines, black and cold. We were at home taking care of things, and the mothers were taking care of the children. They didn't have to do it when they came home. But it was all hard work, it was hard work for all of us. And I wouldn't want to go back to some of the things, but that was some of my happiest days.²⁵

Yet with all the hard work, many people like Della Snider frequently remember that their lives included good times as well as the hard times. Others, like Esther Jones, simply considered the hard work to be a basic part of their lives. "I didn't look at it as being hard," she said. "I looked at is as that was the way people made their living. That was their way of life and that's what they expected to do."²⁶

Endnotes

- 1. In the citations of interviews in the following Notes, the word *Project* is used as an abbreviation of the NRV Coal Mining Heritage Project, Sociology and Anthropology Department, Radford University, Radford, Va. All interviews were conducted as part of that Project.
 - The "New River Valley Coal Mining Heritage Project" was organized and directed by Mary La Lone, a Radford University Anthropology professor. The research assistants were Carol Adkins, Otis Jamie Bauguess, Jerusha Brooks, Elizabeth Bryant, Jane P. Delicate, Bryan Dilday, Lauren M. England, Alicia Gallant,

Parker Gillock, Stacie Haynes, Kristen Hedrick, Mayumi Kurimoto, Sam L. Linkous, Jennifer Owings, Becky Prior, Alex Sweeney, and Ren Talbott. The Coal Mining Heritage Association of Montgomery County helped the research team make contacts with mining families and establish rapport. Special thanks go to Robert Freis, Jimmie Lee Price and Fred Lawson of the Coal Mining Heritage Association. The study covers Brush and Price Mountains in Montgomery County and the Parrott section of Pulaski County, principal mining areas in the Valley Coal Field of Virginia.

- 2. This article is adapted from Chapter 6, "The New River Valley Mining Way of Life: Overall Patterns and Comparisons," by Mary B. La Lone, in Appalachian Coal Mining Memories: Life in the Coal Fields of Virginia's New River Valley, which La Lone edited and which is to be published in 1997 by Pocahontas Press, Blacksburg, Virginia.
- Donald Minnick, interview with Elizabeth Franklin Bryant, Belspring, Va., 25 Sept., 1995. 9255DM1, Project.
- 4. Esther "Queen" Eaves Jones, interview with Lauren M. England, Wake Forest, Va., 30 Sept., 1995, 9305EJ1-4, Project.
- Crandall A. Shifflett, Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880–1960 (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1991); Mary B. La Lone, "Recollections about Life in Appalachia's Coal Camps: Positive or Negative?," Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association, 1995, 7:91–100; Mary B. La Lone, "Economic Survival Strategies in Appalachia's Coal Camps," Journal of Appalachian Studies (1996) 2(1):53–68.
- See Chapter 2 in La Lone (ed.), Appalachian Coal Mining Memories, for a more thorough discussion of the region's mines. See also Garland Proco, Merrimac Mines: A Personal History (Blacksburg, Va.: Southern Printing, 1994); Jimmie Lee Price et al., A Brief History of Several Coal Mines of Montgomery County, Virginia (Blacksburg, Va.: author, 1994); Kelly D. Webb, McCoy, Virginia Remembered (McCoy, Va.: Golden Years Club, Eubank Printing Co., 1989); Walter R. Hibbard, Jr. and Theodore J. Clutter, Virginia Coal: An Abridged History (Blacksburg, Va.: Virginia Center for Coal & Energy Research, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1990); and Marius R. Campbell et al., The Valley Coal Fields of Virginia, Virginia Geological Survey, Bulletin 25: 97-216 (1925).
- 7. James and Oscar Sherman, interview with Becky Prior, Blacksburg, Va., 17 Oct., 1995, 101750S1, Project.
- Fred "Cody" Lawson, interview with Stacie Spradlin Haynes, Blacksburg, Va., 17 Feb., 1996, 2176FL1-3; interview with Mary La Lone, Christiansburg, Va., 18 Jan., 1996, 1186FL; Project.
- Fred "Cody" Lawson, interview with Mary La Lone, Blacksburg, Va., 22 June, 1995, 6225FL1-3, Project.
- 10. Hazel Kanode Hodge, interview with Carol Adkins, Christiansburg, Va., 14 Sept., 1995, 9145HH1, Project.
- Jack Carden, interview with Sam L. Linkous, Parrott, Va., 25 Jan., 1996, 1256JC1; William O. Fisher, interview with Alex Sweeney, Blacksburg, Va., 21 Sept., 1995, 9215WF1-2; Fred "Cody" Lawson, interview with Stacie Spradlin Haynes, Blacksburg, Va., 17 Feb., 1996, 2176FL1-3; Oakley A. Lilly, interview with Lauren M. England, Christiansburg, Va., 13 Feb., 1996, 2136OL1-2, Project.

- 12. Fred "Cody" Lawson and Marie Linkous Lawson, interview with Mary La Lone, Blacksburg, Va., 22 June, 1995, 6225FL1-3; Oscar Sherman, interview with Becky Prior, Blacksburg, Va., 17 Oct., 1995, 10175OS1; Charles Snider, interview with Alex Sweeney. McCoy, Va., 17 Oct., 1995, 10175CS1-2; Jimmie Lee Price, interview with Mary La Lone, Kim Knight and Robert Freis, McCoy, Va., 8 July, 1995, 785JP4-5; Project.
- 13. See Chapters 3 and 4 in La Lone (ed.), *Appalachian Coal Mining Memories* (1997), for a more detailed description of household economics.
- 14. Fred "Cody" Lawson, interview with Mary La Lone, Blacksburg, Va., 22 June, 1995, 6225FL1-3, Project.
- William O. Fisher, interview with Alex Sweeney, Blacksburg, Va., 21 Sept. 1995, 9215WF1-2; Albert Hamlin, interview with Kristen Hedrick, Blacksburg, Va., 12 Oct., 1995, 10125AH1-4l, Project.
- William O. Fisher, interview with Alex Sweeney, Blacksburg, Va., 21 Sept. 1995, 9215WF1-2; Lucy Smith Kessinger, interview with Becky Prior, McCoy, Va., 26 Sept., 1995, 9265LK1; Warren A. Lilly, interview with Parker Gillock, Pearisburg, Va., 21 Sept., 1995, 9215WL1-5; Leo Scott, interview with Otis Jamie Bauguess, McCoy, Va., 16 Oct., 1995, 10165LS1-3; Patsy Price Shepherd, interview with Stacie Spradlin Haynes, Sunnyside, Va., 13 May, 1996, 5136PS1-3; Project.
- 17. Kelly D. Webb, *McCoy, Virginia Remembered*. (McCoy, Va.: Golden Years Club, Eubank Printing Co., 1989).
- Hazel Kanode Hodge, interview with Carol Adkins, Christiansburg, Va., 14 Sept., 1995, 9145HH1, Project.
- 19. H. Lee Linkous, interview with Jane P. Delicate, Blacksburg, Va., 25 Sept., 1995, 9255LL1-3, Project.
- Jimmie Lee Price, interview with Alicia Gallant, Blacksburg, Va., 23 Jan., 1996, 1236JP1-4, Project.
- James and Oscar Sherman, interview with Becky Prior, Blacksburg, Va., 17 Oct., 1995, 10175OS1; Henry Price, interview with Lauren M. England, Blacksburg, Va., 14 Oct., 1995, 10145HP1-3; Albert Hamlin, interview with Kristen Hedrick, Blacksburg, Va., 12 Oct., 1995, 10125AH1-4; William O. Fisher, interview with Alex Sweeney, Blacksburg, Va., 21 Sept., 1995, 9215WF1-2; Palmer Caldwell, interview with Bryan Dilday, Christiansburg, Va., 25 Sept. 1995, 9255PC1; Alex "Jun" Linkous, interview with Parker Gillock, Blacksburg, Va., 18 Oct., 1995. 10185AL1-2; Jack Carden, interview with Sam L. Linkous, Parrott, Va., 25 Jan., 1996. 1256JC1; Project.
- 22. In 1994, the Coal Mining Heritage Association of Montgomery County erected a monument at McCoy in memory of the 44 victims of mining disasters in Montgomery County in the 20th century.
- Jimmie Lee Price, interview with Alicia Gallant, Blacksburg, Va., 23 Jan., 1996, 1236JP1-4, Project.
- 24. William O. Fisher, interview with Alex Sweeney, Blacksburg, Va., 21 Sept., 1995, 9215WF1-2, Project.
- 25. Della "Gertie" Price Snider, interview with Alex Sweeney, McCoy, Va., 29 Jan., 1996, 1296CS1-3, Project.
- Esther "Queen" Eaves Jones, interview with Lauren M. England, Wake Forest, Va., 30 Sept., 1995, 9305EJ1-4, Project.

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William Ballard Preston and the Politics of Slavery, 1832–1862

Peter Wallenstein

William Ballard Preston (1805–1862) resided his entire life at "Smithfield" in Montgomery County, Virginia, west of the Blue Ridge and not far from the New River.¹ Going east of the Blue Ridge for his higher education, he graduated from Hampden-Sydney College in Prince Edward County in 1824 and then attended law school at the University of Virginia in Albemarle County in 1825. In 1839 he married Lucinda Staples Redd, and they raised a family. But Preston himself spent many weeks, even months, far away from home, in Richmond in 1830–32 and 1840– 45, in the nation's capital in 1847–50, and even in France in 1857–58.

Preston spent the most visible portions of his public life wrestling with questions related to slavery, the great public issue of his time and place. Whatever his private feelings or personal interests, the state he lived in was also home to more slaves than any other. However, since his part of the state, the half that lay west of the Blue Ridge, held relatively few slaves, especially in his younger years, he could not be counted on to be an apologist for the institution. Whatever the specifics of his biography and geography, to watch him dance with the devil of slavery is to watch the recurrent dilemma that many public men encountered in the Old South.

This essay recounts William Ballard Preston's role in events at three critical junctures between 1832 and 1862. In 1832 he gave a speech on the floor of the Virginia House of Delegates in support of a measure designed to bring an eventual end to slavery in Virginia. In 1849 he gave a speech on the floor of the United States House of Representatives designed to bring to closure the dangerous debate over the expansion of slavery into American territories west of the Mississippi River. Finally, in 1861 he again represented the voters of his part of Virginia when he attended a convention to deliberate the question of secession, to which he brought his customary energy, experience, leadership, and counsel.

Much of what follows is not narrative but, rather, large portions of his speeches on various facets of what he referred to in 1849 as "the great guestion of the age." His speech in 1832, important as it was, has previously appeared only in an 1832 newspaper, aside from a brief excerpt in The Road from Monticello by Joseph Clarke Robert (1941). His speech in 1849 is nestled in the pages of the Congressional Globe, predecessor to the Congressional Record. He gave a lesser speech in 1852 to a Fourth of July crowd in Montgomery County, in which he commented on the politics of slavery: I have included it here. Among his speeches at the 1861 convention, one appears here as it was reported. in the third person, in an 1861 newspaper; one major speech, never reported, cannot appear here; others were reported in his own words. I have edited Preston's speeches because I have limited space and because some portions seem to me less important than others in portraying this representative public man as he articulated his considered thoughts on various facets of the great issue of his time. A learned man, a connected politician, and an accomplished orator, he had much to say in his troubled time, and he said it. We get to listen.

Part One. The Great Debate over Slavery in Virginia: 1832

The Virginia House of Delegates, Richmond

In April 1830, Virginia voters went to the polls and publicly voiced their support for one or another candidate for the state legislature. William Ballard Preston, twenty-four years old at the time, gained the approval of his fellow citizens in Montgomery County for a seat in the House of Delegates. Only later that year, days before the legislature convened, would he reach the age (twenty-five) that the Virginia Constitution of 1830 required. In December 1831 he went to Richmond to begin his second one-year term in the legislature.

Meantime, in August 1831, another young man, thirty-year-old Nat Turner, led a slave rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia, far to the east of Montgomery. Such was the shock of that rebellion that members of the next legislature debated whether it was advisable, even imperative, that they inaugurate a gradual process of emancipation in Virginia. The 1831-32 legislative session met barely three months after the uprising and only days after Turner's capture, trial, conviction, and hanging. After a break for Christmas, debate in the lower house began in earnest.

At no time did the legislature consider any measure that might have brought an immediate end to slavery in Virginia. Nor did the legislature consider the option of bringing slavery to an end and yet permitting former slaves to remain in their native state. Nor indeed did the legisla-



William Ballard Preston, born November 20, 1805; died
November 16, 1862. Son of Governor James Patton Preston and his wife Ann Taylor Preston of "Smithfield,"
Montgomery County, Virginia. Member United States
Congress 1847–49, Secretary of the Navy of U.S. 1849–50,
Senator, Confederate States of America from Virginia 1861– 62. From the original oil portrait by Harvey Mitchell.

ture have in mind any expansion of the limited definition of black freedom in Virginia. Finally, most of the rhetoric regarding the evils of slavery focused on the dangers, costs, and inconveniences it posed for white Virginians. Nonetheless, as Preston displayed when he spoke on the question, delegates sometimes also appealed to the costs that slavery imposed on black Virginians.

Reflecting western restiveness at the East's refusal to concede greater legislative representation to the West during the state's constitutional convention two years earlier, as well as eastern representatives' assertion that westerners had no interest in the matter, Preston exclaimed, "We will be heard." He attacked the proslavery position that sanctified property ownership even in slaves, and he attacked as well the notion that slaves were content with their lot. He rejected a proposal that called only for the removal from Virginia of all free black residents while, though ostensibly supporting the enactment of a gradual emancipation law at some indefinite time in the future, would have taken no further action in the present.

Preston spoke instead in support of a measure that, had it passed, would have inaugurated a process of gradual emancipation in Virginia. While mostly ignoring the question of free blacks in a post-emancipation Virginia, Preston took a radical stance on the question of whether the legislature could redefine property so as to deny the right of property in slaves — at least those not yet born.

The measure being considered for action at the 1832 session called only for all slaves born at least eight years later — beginning July 4, 1840 — to get their freedom at adulthood. That is, any female slaves still in Virginia (not having been sold South) at the age of eighteen (or beginning in 1858) would be declared free at that age. They then would be hired out to earn money sufficient to pay their transportation out of the state. Young men would remain slaves until they reached the age of twenty-one (or until at least the year 1861) before they began the process of emancipation and deportation. Delegate Preston spoke for the West in support of that gradual emancipation measure.²

Mr. Speaker, I am admonished by very many considerations, that on this occasion I ought not to obtrude myself upon this House, or join in the discussion of this momentous and all-absorbing question. ... But, Mr. Speaker, in disobedience to all these considerations, I feel that, as the individual on whose motion the proposition which is now before you was submitted, I would not be in discharge of that duty which I owe to myself, to this House, and to those whom it is my honor to represent on this floor, were I not to submit to them the views and opinions which have impelled me to action on this occasion.

It has been said by the gentleman from Brunswick, that the fact that the Virginia Legislature were now gravely discussing the question of an abolition of slavery, with open doors, and to a crowded gallery, was one of the most remarkable events in the records of her history. — That in the better days of the republic, this question could not and would not be tolerated; that a solemn silence would have pervaded this hall; that our doors would have been closed, and the voice of every man suppressed, in a debate so startling in its results and so unusual in its character, in this hall.

[¶] Sir, I admit, with the gentleman from Brunswick, the result is most astonishing and miraculous. I admit, that for near 200 years, the thoughts, words and actions of Virginians have been suppressed, and that a solemn silence has closed the mouth and stifled all investigation on this subject. But, Sir, I will not concur in the opinion, that those were better days of the republic. But, thank God, Mr. Speaker, the spell is broken, and the scales have fallen from our eyes. These open doors, that attentive audience, prove to me that I am at liberty to speak any and every opinion, which I entertain on this subject.

[¶] This question of slavery, Mr. Speaker, is one which seems in all countries and ages in which it has ever been tolerated, either directly or indirectly, to have called to its aid a mystic sort of right, and a superstitious sort of veneration, that has deterred even the most intrepid mind from an investigation into the rights, and an exposure of the wrongs on which it has been sustained. ...

 $[\P]$ I esteem, Mr. Speaker, the exhibition now before our eyes, and the aspect which this hall at this moment presents, as the grandest revolution of the age, a great moral revolution, in which our minds and opinions have triumphed over error and interest, and left our judgment free to decide, and our tongues free to speak the principles of justice, and the voice of humanity. ...

[¶] I know full well, Mr. Speaker, that many of the opinions which I entertain and intend to announce, are new, and startling to the ears of many gentlemen. They are however, my deliberate opinions. They are opinions which I conceive are founded in truth and in justice, and lead to results imperatively demanded by the public exigency.

[¶] We have been told, Sir, by many gentlemen, in the course of this discussion, that it was a subject in which the West were not interested. That we ought to surrender this whole question into the hands of our Eastern Brethren. Nay, Sir, that we had by the declaration of one of our Western Representatives, already declared that it was a matter in which we did not intend to concern ourselves. — Mr. Speaker, it was not necessary that we should be reminded on this floor of the fact, that we were not and ought not to be heard on this question. The most casual observer of passing events had long since been convinced that the West, if possible, should not be heard. In the organization of the Select Committee, raised on this subject, we clearly foresaw that <u>we</u> were not considered as being parties to this transaction, and that our course was one of

perfect submission to the voice and will of those who claimed to be more deeply interested, than they asserted we were.

[¶] But, Mr. Speaker, with all due deference to those opinions and indications, we claim to be heard. We will be heard.

[¶] A voice has already been heard from the West — a voice which I shall never forget while memory holds her seat: the voice of the gentleman from Berkeley. Nor, Mr. Speaker, do we come unbidden into the discussion: the gentleman from Hanover has called on us for aid. He invites all portions of this Commonwealth to join in this sacred cause, to relieve them from the impending danger. In the language of his venerable ancestor, he might have said, deliver us from that danger which while we hold the delusive phantom of hope to our bosoms, permits our enemies to bind us hand and foot.

We believe that as members of this Legislature; as the representatives of Virginia; of the whole Commonwealth at large, we ought to be heard. As the representatives of the Western portion of the State, we think that there are reasons and causes operating upon us, which give us a most vital and absorbing interest in this question.

[9] It has been said, Mr. Speaker, and repeatedly said, during this discussion, that the West was producing the excitement which is here showing itself; that this is a sectional question; that it is a struggle between the East and West, for party purposes. Let us, Mr. Speaker, examine this matter. What Sir, has been the history of this discussion? When the petitions from various counties of this Commonwealth were presented, a motion for their reference, was opposed by the gentleman from Mecklenburg, (Mr. Goode,) on the ground that the object which they had in view, was one which it was improper to legislate on; that its reference was calculated to alarm and disturb the public mind, when no earthly good could result from such a course: that the very reference of the matter to a Committee, endangered the tranguillity and safety of Eastern Virginia. On that occasion, Sir, all that the West said or did was, that as the question was one of the greatest delicacy, they were disposed to give the East a carte blanche on the subject. But, Sir, on that occasion, the gentleman which is at the head of that Committee-the gentleman from Dinwiddie, (Gen. Brodnax,) assured this House that in the section of the State he represented, "the sense of security was gone, and that the interest of the State emphatically demanded that something should be done:" that some effort should, and ought to be made, to guiet the alarms, and remove the evil from amongst the people: other Eastern gentlemen maintained the same opinion, and sustained the same course. The result was, Sir, as you will remember, that but twenty-seven gentlemen voted against the reference of the petitions. The West, Sir, has done nothing to produce this result, and can do nothing of herself; but assuredly she will be permitted to decide this question in accordance with her interest and principles; a question made by Eastern gentlemen; a danger felt by Eastern gentlemen; and a relief asked for by Eastern gentlemen.

Mr. Speaker, two questions present themselves at the threshold, and upon their decision depends the success of any scheme which may be devised, either now or hereafter.

The first is, whether or not there are any constitutional restrictions or protections thrown around this kind of property, which will protect it from any system of emancipation, which does not amply remunerate the owner for his property; and, therefore prevents the Legislature from passing any enactment on this subject.

The second, whether the necessity of the case is sufficiently great and imperative, to demand that resort should be had to the supreme law of necessity; and if, on investigation, the first question shall be found to oppose no barrier, and the second to demand a decisive action, I myself will not hesitate in the course which my duty prescribes to me.

The gentlemen on the other side all admit that slavery cannot be justified on principle. They say that no man will defend the principle of slavery. But what do they mean, when they say that the Constitutions, both State and Federal, protect them in their right to this property?

[¶] Neither the State or Federal Constitution, Sir, protects them in such right to this property as they assume. They have neither of them thrown any such defense around those rights which are claimed here, as gentlemen would fondly imagine. The <u>poetical</u> gentleman from Brunswick (Mr. Gholson,) whose brilliant imagination and glowing fancy saw wealth and happiness in our worn out fields, ... told us that the Federal Constitution guaranteed the right of property in slaves. He refers us to the 5th article of the amendments of the United States Constitution, by which it is provided, that "private property shall not be taken for public uses, without just compensation."

[¶] I admit, Mr. Speaker, that it is true, that private property cannot be taken without adequate compensation, if taken from an individual <u>here</u> for this use of <u>that</u> Government. But it is a provision solely applicable to those cases in which the Federal Government, in the exercise of her powers, and within the sphere of her constitutional rights, is compelled to take the property of the citizens of the States for her uses. It is a rule prescribed to her, by which the States and the people of the States are to be protected against the Government–certainly not one by which the rights of property of individuals are guaranteed to them, against the laws or municipal regulations of that particular State of which they may be members. It is a <u>rule of action</u> for that Government, not a <u>charter of rights</u> to citizens of the States, in the mode, and manner, and tenure by which they hold their property in the <u>State</u>.

[¶] The gentleman farther supposes, that the admission of representation upon the Federal ratio goes to sustain the guarantee of property under that Constitution. The precise contrary is the result, to which my mind is led by this fact. It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, so far from recognizing them as property, and guaranteeing the right in them as such, it clearly and conclusively proves that they are recognized as persons-persons entitled to a representation for three fifths of their numbers.-It does not, Mr. Speaker, require that we should recognize them as persons. It only limits the extent to which they will recognize them as persons: beyond which we shall not go, but up to which we are not required to advance. That compact, Mr. Speaker, was not one in which this principle was neither directly nor indirectly settled and established; it was, in the language of a gentleman once on this floor, nothing more nor less that a "well driven bargain" — a bargain in which we of the South demanded and obtained from our Northern friends, a privilege for our slaves, which we in our own representation (until the era of our new Constitution [of 1830]) never had conferred either on them or their owners.

[¶] It does, Mr. Speaker, seem to me that the aid which the gentleman from Brunswick invokes from the Federal Constitution to sustain and protect his right to this species of property, entirely fails him. He must, therefore, look to some other point for that constitutional sanctity which he hopes and believes sustains him in this right of property. The gentleman betakes himself to his State Constitution. He asserts, that under its phraseology which is in the very words of the Federal Constitution, there is an insurmountable barrier to our objects and designs on this occasion. He says, that under the 11th clause of the 3rd article of the Constitution, the Legislature is prohibited from passing "any law whereby private property shall be taken for public uses without just compensation."

[¶] I deny, Mr. Speaker that under this paragraph, slaves are protected as property-they are not made property by this Constitution. I admit that they are <u>property</u>, but they are property under the Statutes of Virginia. The gentleman from Brunswick, Mr. Speaker, says that the framers of the Constitution were slave holders and slave owners, and that they considered them property under the Constitution, and entitled to its protection: that a different construction proved that they were either knaves or fools. I, Mr. Speaker, beg leave to differ with the gentleman, if he should arrive at either of these conclusions.

[¶] The gentleman from Rockbridge referred this House to that clause in the Bill of Rights in which it is asserted that "all men, by nature, are equally free and independent." What, Mr. Speaker, is meant by this declaration? Unquestionably as <u>human beings</u>, Mr. Speaker–they are embraced with the bounds of this broad, extensive, and eternal truth– one that is laid down as the cornerstone of all free Governments. But, says the gentleman, they were slave holders, and therefore could not have meant to declare them men. ...

Sir, Mr. Jefferson, whose hand drew the preamble to our Bill of Rights. has eloquently remarked that we had invoked for ourselves the benefit of a principle which we denied to others. He saw and felt that slaves, as men, were embraced within this principle. And as one of the heaviest grievances of which we complained in our separation from Great Britain, in the Declaration of Independence he declared, that they had violated our rights by "prompting our negroes to rise in arms against us-those very negroes, whom, by an inhuman use of his negative he has refused us permission to exclude by law." In the original draft of that instrument, in his own hand writing, he alleges that Great Britain had ["]waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people, who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another Hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither-this piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian King of Great Britain, determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought and sold."

[¶] They were then, Mr. Speaker, considered as men under the principle invoked, but they were property under Statutes made by ordinary Legislatures. "The objects of dominion of property are things as contradistinguished from persons;" and I conceive that that provision in the Constitution which guarantees property to the citizen, refers exclusively to this common law definition of property. Sir, there is no Statute by which your horse or your ox is declared to be property. They are so under this definition. They are property per see, and the declaration which guarantees property to the citizen embraces them, as the natural legitimate objects of property.

It was, therefore, that slaves which were not property by the common law, were made so by statutory enactments—a statutory enactment which, by the operation of mere law, has erected, as they suppose, an insurmountable barrier to those natural and unalienable rights, which we cannot divest ourselves of, or of which none others can divest us. The slave has a <u>natural</u> right to regain his liberty — and who has as high a right to reduce them to slavery again?

[¶] In two of the States of this Union, Massachusetts and New Hampshire, the declaration in the Bill of Rights, has, of itself abolished slavery. Not that I would abolish it here, under the authority of that declaration.— They were made property here by the statute—they are property under the statute, and they must remain property until that statute is repealed; that statute was the result of a necessity, imposed upon us by the British Throne; but it is such a statute as can be repealed by this Assembly.

[¶] The power which this Legislature possessed of declaring what <u>shall be</u> property, also enables it to declare what <u>shall not</u> be property. All that I claim on this question, is that when the public necessity de-

manding their emancipation is greater than the necessity for their retention as slaves, that then it is in the power of this or any subsequent Legislature to repeal this statute. My friend from Berkeley (Mr. Faulkner) might have gone farther in the principle which he advanced, than that the post nati were not such a property as the owner of their parents could not be divested of. It seems to me to result from the power inherent in this body, of declaring what should be considered property, and repealing any laws which have heretofore declared what property is. The gentleman from Dinwiddie (Gen. Brodnax) told us, the other day, that it was not the value of the property involved in this question that made him tenacious of it — that it was the principle for which he contended. He adopts the language, "millions for defence, not a cent for tribute." What is the principle for which he contends? Is it the right to this property, which, he says, is higher than all constitutional power, above all law, anterior to all civil society — a right which he derives from God? He told us, in another part of his two hours' speech, that something must be done to relieve us from this greatest of all evils. He admits that the salus populi [the safety of the people] is the supreme law of all governments — and when we attempt to show that this supreme law demands that something should now be done on this question, he answers us with the declaration, "millions for defence, not a cent for tribute." - Sir, I concur with the gentleman in the belief that something should be done. I think that it should be done now. The voice of thunder predicted the other day by the gentleman from Brunswick, has already been heard. We have already heard the sound and seen the smoke.

[¶] The people demand that something shall be done. Does that gentleman suppose that the time will ever come when a general emancipation will take place within this Commonwealth on the plan which he proposes? Does he believe that the efforts of the Colonization Society will be able to effect this great work? or can it be done by gratuitous contributions? No, Sir, all such views are futile. — The moment the Society has decreased the numbers to that point, at which safety is felt to the persons and lives of the people, and at which the value of the slave has been increased by the removal of many, then, Mr. Speaker, the scheme will fall to the ground — there will be no more voluntary contributions. But, Mr. Speaker, the idea of the gentleman is, that <u>all</u> are to be restored to their much-injured continent. How will he proceed in his enterprize? Will he then resort to law and to this body, for the means of proceeding in the work? ...

[¶] I repeat again, Mr. Speaker, that no emancipation can take place either now or at any future time without an infringement upon the rights of property, if they are such as assumed on the other side — a right both to those now in existence and to those hereafter to be born, which is <u>superior to all law and above all necessity</u>. I see, Mr. Speaker, by indications that I cannot be mistaken in, that I have uttered a sentiment that gratifies those who are opposed to me. They are ready to accuse me with attacking their Constitutional rights. I do attack them openly, boldly; and if they ask me by what right I attack them, I answer by the right which is given me by that great law of necessity — <u>self-preservation</u>; which even by the gent. from Dinwiddie, (Gen. B.,) is said to be the supreme law of the land. The gentleman from Mecklenburg, (Mr. Goode,) shakes his head. I attack his property boldly, openly-let him defend it if he can.

[¶] My old friend from Halifax, (Mr. Bruce) told us that the Virginia slave was happy and contented — that his situation was preferable to that of the laboring classes in Europe, and that no danger was to be apprehended. Mr. Speaker, this is impossible: happiness, is incompatible with slavery. The love of liberty is the ruling passion of man; it has been implanted in his bosom by the voice of God, and he cannot be happy if deprived of it.

[¶] That gentleman referred us to Europe, as affording an example of more revolt, disguietude, and danger both to persons and property, than had been experienced or need to be apprehended here. — The examples, Mr. Speaker, are widely different. - Their[s] are revolutions which are brought about by the operation of that liberal principle which is diffusing itself over the whole face of the habitable globe — a revolution in the moral condition of man, which tells them everywhere that they ought to be free. I rejoice, Mr. Speaker, in such revolutions - we all rejoice in them. -- We hail the knowledge of them with joy, with speeches and songs, and dancings, and merry meetings - we all feel that they are revolutions, in which those who have rights have dared to assert them, and that those who have committed wrongs are made to feel them. The peasant of vesterday is the lord of to-day. The lower class of one day is the higher class of the next. Look, Sir, to France. Though we may deplore the scenes through which she has passed, are there any here who does not rejoice at her revolution? I rejoiced, Mr. Speaker, when her oppressed people tore down every monument of their former Kingly greatness....

[¶] And, Mr. Speaker, if those who are slaves here, were not what they are; if, Mr. Speaker, they were white men in oppression and bondage, I would rejoice in revolution here. It is in the line which God and nature has drawn between us in their color, that the appalling consequences of such a result are so deeply to be feared, so solemnly to be deplored, and so decisively to be provided against.

[¶] Who, Mr. Speaker, can bear the thought of seeing a black Speaker occupy that chair in which you are now seated? — That result has been predicted in this Hall; and the gentleman from Dinwiddie has declared that "unless something was done, either the whites would cut the throats of the blacks, or they would ours" — Sir, that will be the result — and

Mr. Speaker, to avert such a crisis, what is there that ought not to be done?

[¶] If we follow the example, (and it is the only one by which we are guided from the lights of history on this subject) of the deluded planters of Saint Domingo, we can see a mournful lesson, to whose truth we cannot be blind. If we shut our eyes against those truths, if we permit our <u>interests</u> to control our judgments, it is obvious to all, that the day will never come when we will accomplish that work of desolation; while it is equally sure, from their rapidly increasing number, it will come when they are able, from their physical strength to accomplish it on us.

[¶] And where then will you look for your security? Will it be in that love, which the gentleman from Halifax says, the slave bears his master? Trust it not, Sir. The day must and will come when the results in this hall will prove the correctness of the forebodings of the gentleman from Campbell, unless something is done. Mr. Speaker, gentlemen say, that the country is tranquil, that no danger is apprehended, even in the East, and that the West have felt no alarm on these subjects.

[¶] I, Sir, represent a county which, by the last census, contained about 12,000 persons, of that number, there are but about 1100 slaves.³ We were in safety, amid our mountains, and too secure that but few felt or acknowledged the sensation of fear at the present time. But, Sir, we tremble for the future. We foresee, that the day will come when we will be beset by those dangers, which surround you, and many of our most valuable citizens will flee to lands where they and their posterity will escape the danger forever.

[¶] What, I ask you, Sir, will be the result to Western Virginia, when every State which has heretofore afforded this immense drain to your black population amounting to 85 thousand decennially, shall have closed her market, when every State South of us, shall stand sword in hand to guard their country against the importation of our slaves into their borders? When the great South Western world refuse to permit the sale of our slaves there? When this whole redundant population shall be thrown back on the Eastern portion of our state?

[¶] I ask you, what will be the fate of the West? Those mountains, amid which our security has been felt, will no longer be secure; our tall forests will fall before the stroke of the Eastern slave; our rich soil will be filled by the hands of slaves; and our free and happy country will become the home of the slave. Our country, though less inviting to slave labor than the country of the Mississippi, is still, when that is forbidden, more alluring than the exhausted soils of the lowlands, and he must and will be introduced amongst us. The gentleman from Brunswick, (Mr. Gholson) after depicting in glowing colors the prosperous character of our country, the beauty of our daughters, the high and manly chivalry of our sons, concludes by telling us that the only wealth of Eastern Virginia was in the increase of their slaves. In the name of God, Mr. Speaker, has it come to this? Does the wealth and beauty and the chivalry of Virginia derive its support and owe its existence to the increase of our slaves? — If it be so, Mr. Speaker, I would gladly relieve them of so heavy a reproach....

The gentleman from Campbell, (Mr. Rives,) said that the non-slaveholders were the most deeply interested in this question — I concur in the opinion — if indeed it be true, as announced by my friend from Halifax, that with the evil incurable — "that no human ingenuity can devise a scheme for their removal" — that therefore they must content themselves and enquire the evil. Then indeed, Mr. Speaker, we are the most deeply interested — we are at that point at which a remedy can be devised, their[s] is one at which it is hopeless. We are within the sphere of hope — they are in a situation of despair; and we are the more strongly admonished by this fact, to prevent their introduction amongst us.

The gentleman from Brunswick, (Mr. Gholson,) said this slave question was not "the bone of contention" between the East and West — That it was internal improvements. I have always, Mr. Speaker, been a friend to internal improvements — I have always felt that it would bind us together by an indissoluble chain of interests. But, Mr. Speaker, deeply as I feel its importance, and sensible as I am of its advantage, I would not vote for any system of canals or rail roads — which, while it afforded an outlet to our produce, is to be made an inlet for the curse of slavery.

Mr. Speaker, I offered a motion this morning to change the aspect of this question, but because I feared "to see the rays of truth, playing upon the features of the amendment offered by the gentleman from Albermarle" — not because I looked on that proposition, as the gentleman from Westmoreland (Mr. Newton,) does — not because I feared that "its adoption would overturn the democracy of the country" — not because I feared that the gentleman would write the "name of the mover of that proposition on that wall" for the slow finger of scorn to be pointed at. It was for no such reason. The gentleman need apprehend no such dangers as he suggests from that source. It sprang from the same source from which that gentleman derives his right to be heard in this House, as a representative of the people. It sprang from that source which secured to that gentleman the right to worship that God whom he adores.

[¶] It was the twin thought of our Declaration of Independence. The gentleman from Dinwiddie says, that although that scheme originated with Mr. Jefferson, he might not now advocate it, if alive — time might have changed his opinions of its practicability. In 1814, Mr. Jefferson says, that it was a task, which he himself, was deterred from, only by the infirmity of his age, — "that it would have been buckling Hector's armour on the limbs of old Priam." He has bequeathed it as a legacy to the young and patriotic who are to come after him.

One word more, Mr. Speaker. They say the West want works of Internal Improvement and that the slave property is alone able to supply the means — they say now that we desire to destroy that very property. The arguments surely, Mr. Speaker, destroy each other. We attack that property, because it is dangerous — we attack it, because it is subversive of the well being of society — we attack it on principles of necessity and policy-we wish to remove the danger from the East, and to prevent its existence in the West ...

In the end, Preston's oratory did not sway enough delegates to the emancipationist side. So numerous were legislators from the slaveholding East, and so vehemently did many of them oppose any action against the institution, that even a gradual program, a very gradual one, could not muster a majority.

Preston would serve in the legislature in later years, too — in the Virginia Senate in 1840-44 (a four-year term) and again in the House of Delegates in 1844-45 (one last one-year term) — but never again would he have occasion to debate the future of slavery. Virginia remained committed to the institution. Preston would have ample occasion to recognize that he had failed either "to remove the danger from the East" or "to prevent its existence in the West."

Part Two. Slavery in the Western Territories: 1849 The U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.

William Ballard Preston won election as a Whig member of the United States Congress for the 1847–49 term. Thus he was in Congress when the question arose as to how to organize the vast territories just acquired from Mexico after the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo was agreed to in 1848. Even during the war, the House had passed, though the Senate had rejected, the Wilmot Proviso, according to which slavery would never be permitted in the lands acquired from Mexico. Proslavery spokesmen, by contrast, insisted that slavery be expressly permitted in all such territories. The two sides — the North and the South — and the two houses of Congress — the House and the Senate — were at an impasse. The future of the Union hung in the balance more than did the future of the West.

On February 7, 1849, Preston offered a solution, a measure mostly supported by southern Whigs like himself. The bill he supported would bypass the territorial stage, admit the entire region as one large new state, and thus remove from political debate the divisive question — he called it "this most pernicious question" — of slavery in the Mexican Cession. He sought to navigate his way between — counter the cries of —

what he termed "extremes to be found both north and south." He insisted that his proposal offered a divided nation "the only door through which these Territories can be safely incorporated into our system." His lengthy speech follows.⁴

Mr. Chairman: Those who have listened to the reading of the bill will unquestionably concur with me in the fact, that the proposition which I propose to discuss is one of great gravity and of vast interest to this whole nation. ... I began to be apprehensive that I might not have the opportunity I desired to offer the bill just read as a substitute for the Territorial bills; and I felt that it was proper that I should avail myself of this, the first opportunity I have had to present the views I entertain on this great and momentous question.

I suppose I need not offer any apology for appearing before this House to-day. I have rarely troubled them in the short period during which I have been honored with a seat here. I have listened attentively and patiently to the discussion of this slave question — a question which deeply involves the interest and feelings of the country which I represent, and of the whole country which I love. I have listened day after day, calmly and carefully. I have not in anywise attempted to foment or increase those feelings which parties, and sections, and personal aspiration and ambition, have thrown around it. I have not heretofore, and shall not, upon this occasion, go into the consideration of the question which gentlemen have discussed here so long, so ably, so patiently, as to the merits or demerits of our peculiar system in the South, or the merits of those principles which gentlemen of the North propose to lead in by Congressional legislation here upon us. I shall not go into the guestion as to who have produced the evils, and who are responsible for the difficulties which surround us: I shall address myself to the remedies which suggest themselves to my mind, for difficulties and dangers acknowledged by all. It has been called the great guestion of the age: I will attempt to try it by the great principle of the age. Having taken my stand deliberately and determinedly on this question, on this day and this hour, I stake myself upon the principles of this bill.

[¶] I stake myself upon the principle which I propose now to explain and illustrate; and I hope and believe that the good men and the calm men and the wise men of all parties, will forget the section and party questions which divide them, and come forward upon a remedy that commends itself by every principle which lies at the foundation of that Government which we have made, or which, I should rather say, our fathers have made for us, and that we should apply that very rule to the Government of that country which fortune, arms, and conquest, have brought within our control.

I might make another remark. In the great calamity, and in the great embarrassment which have overclouded the land, I feel what all

men feel in adversity and distress — that the very emergency, the very exigency which is upon the country takes from us the general responsibility which attaches to all, and fixes upon each and all of us an individual responsibility that makes me, humble as I am, feel that I have the burdens of all.

The proposition which I offer, I offer as a substitute for the territorial bills now on your table. Let us for one moment examine the principles upon which the territorial bill rests. What, sir, is this territorial government, and what the true character of that issue upon which we are dividing this empire, and producing this great distraction in the land? Is it one of the original objects and ends of this Government to hold and to retain territorial dominion? Is it anything but a trust power, which is declared in the Constitution, in a single clause which I will not stop to read? — not as the basis upon which we should in the hereafter and in the thereafter legislate for the creation, for the maintenance, for the advancement of the proconsular Territorial governments abroad. That is not the Constitution under which we live.

[¶] The territorial power construed either as gentlemen from the North or as gentlemen from the South construe it, is but a secondary power or trust in this Government. What is the primary trust? What is this power which was given to admit new States? What is this power in the Constitution, in which it is declared that we shall make such rules and regulations as are necessary for the government of the Territories, made for? Was it that this House should be converted into a municipal legislature? Was it that we should spend days, weeks, months, and years in legislating upon distant and small territorial questions? strictly municipal questions? No, sir. The great trust — the great power — the great reason why that clause in the Constitution was introduced was upon this principle, and this alone.

[¶] Sir, territorial dominion was given to us, not that we might place slavery there or freedom there; not that we might go into municipal legislation in detail for these provinces; but it was that we should rear up there sovereign and independent States. That is the primary trust in the Constitution. The territorial trust is limited in its duration. In the first resolution, in relation to the cession of territory by the States, under the old Confederation, before we had entered upon the form of Government under which we have so happily lived, in that resolution ... it was declared that we shall create sovereign States. And we were invited — Virginia was invited — to cede her lands to create sovereign States when? As soon — at the very first moment — at the very first period of time that the imperative law of necessity ceased to exist, by which they were kept in territorial subjection.

 $[\P]$ Whenever the period had arrived that there was a population there large enough in numbers, the great primary object of the trust

arose instantly, and on the spot; and he who keeps these people in territorial bondage keeps them in oppression, for the first great primary trust is that they shall become sovereign States.

How was it again in the ordinance of 1787? In that very ordinance it is declared in terms, that as soon as sixty thousand people are found in the Territory, and sooner if possible, they shall be admitted as a State. What does all this look to? Sir, it looks to the great proposition that our forefathers intended, at the first moment of time, to bring every citizen in this nation upon the broad, elevated American platform of popular sovereignty, resting with the people and with no Government whatsoever.

Sir, in the treaty of Louisiana, out of which we have made territories, the phrase there is, that they shall be brought in "as soon as possible" — at the earliest moment of time. In this Mexican treaty it is declared, that they shall be brought in at the discretion of Congress. Ay but it is a discretion to be exercised upon the principal of the trust. It is a judicial discretion — it is a legal discretion. It is a discretion in accordance with the principles of our Government.

[¶] It is no arbitrary power — it is no arbitrary discretion which authorizes you to withhold from them that right while you plant slavery there — while you plant a tariff there, or while you plant your "no slavery" doctrines there; or indeed, while you plant any particular system of policy there. That is not the principle. The principle is, that the trust must be resigned at the first moment of time at which you can possibly discharge yourself of it.

Sir, look for one moment at this question in another respect; and what is it? In any form, it is but a transient and temporary question. Gentlemen are arraying themselves against each other, declaring that they will have, or will not have, Wilmot provisoism. Gentlemen say, "resistance or submission." No, sir; no, sir: that is not the true issue in this question. The mere lapse of time — the mere operation of nature — the progress of our population, — removes that issue, and shows how futile and how erroneous it is. That is not the question. ... Then what is it?

[¶] We talk here about dissolving this Union — we talk about abandoning all the past, and all the glorious prospects of the future, because, forsooth, we will squabble over the situation of a trust subject and a trust fund. We the mere trustee, holding it but for an hour or a day, quarrel and destroy all our institutions, while there are the people of California ...— they to whom it belongs — they who are primarily entitled to it, ask and demand of you that you should not quarrel over the distribution of the trust fund, but that you should come up and surrender that trust subject itself into the hands of those who are its legitimate owners, that a sovereign State may be created out of it. Sir, the bill which I advocate takes other grounds. I have shown the detriments of these Territorial bills. I have shown that you are staking yourselves upon a temporary issue. I have shown that you are staking yourselves upon an issue and upon the division of a fund, and upon the division of a spoil, that does not belong to us but for the fulfillment of the primary object of that trust; and the day and hour when it belonged to us is past, and it belongs to them, for they are in condition to assume it for themselves and exercise it according to the principles of our Government.

Again, sir, I offer this bill because in the first clause, it declares that the people of California shall be at liberty to make a government for themselves. Look at the principle there. You have, as I am informed, one hundred and fifty thousand of your citizens there now. You will have, before this bill can go into operation, two hundred thousand there, which is twice or thrice as large a population as most of the States ever had when they were admitted into the Union. I ask you, who is there here who can stand back and refuse the surrender of the trust upon any grounds personal, individual, sectional, or partisan? I ask you who, sir? None. None of you can; none of you ought.

The bill which I propose, in the first section, simply gives the consent of Congress to the people of California and New Mexico to create a government for themselves. The bills of the committee make governments in these Halls, and send them in imperial power and strength to a reluctant people. The bill which I advocate invites the people of California, and affords them the facilities for the creation of a government founded upon their own will. It renounces the exercise of your territorial authority and jurisdiction. It recognizes the great principle of popular supremacy and popular government. Sir, in that it but acknowledges the truth which is seen and felt at this moment all over the earth — the great truth that popular constitutional government is the great self-sustaining machine of this age — possessing within itself all the virtue, all the strength, all the wisdom necessary for its creation, its preservation, its perpetuation. It requires no masters to direct its actions. It submits to no kings and rulers to control its councils. It requires no armies to maintain its existence. It is omnipotent here to-day. It will be omnipresent in Europe to-morrow. The next day it will be omnipresent and omnipotent everywhere. Who can resist it?

[¶] I am a Virginian, and come here representing a community intimately connected and deeply interested in the "peculiar institutions" of the South; but upon what do they rest? Shall I keep this territorial question here, that, under the exercise of this arbitrary and tyrannical power this power of making governments here for a people abroad — I may carry my institutions there? Why, if there is anything great and venerable in the past, and in the recollections of us Virginians, it is that a foreign government, not further from us on that shore than our friends in California are on the other, could not and ought not, upon every principle upon which our Constitution and Government are formed, control and direct our legislation. Our slave institution is based upon it. It is the right of the people in Virginia and Georgia to judge for themselves. Their protection and safety is in giving to the people of the States, and to the States themselves in their sovereign capacity, control over this subject; that there is no power here or anywhere but with the people of the States deciding for themselves as to their institutions and form of government. That is the principle upon which I place this whole question.

But again: the difficulty with gentlemen [from the South] peculiarly sensitive upon points of honor is, that ... while the President tells us, while the Cabinet tells us-while orators tell us that slavery can never go there — while we hear that and believe it — while Virginia is told that the climate, soil, and position of this territory do not and will not permit us to carry our slaves there, we are told that there is some great abiding, solemn question of honor that every southern man, who does not stand up to, is recreant to himself and forgetful of his ancestors. Now, I yield to no man on these points. I have yet yielded to no man on these points. Let us see how it is.

[¶] The great merit of the bill which I present is. that it is a bill under which neither party is victorious, and neither party overcomes. It is no compromise at all, and therefore it recommends itself to me above any other proposition that has as yet been suggested. In all other suggestions or propositions which have been offered for disposing of it, there is a question of compromise, and the goodness or badness of the bargain, the extent of the demand you make on the one side, the spirit with which you stand up to it, and the courage or sagacity with which you maintain it, are all questions to be weighed, considered, and decided. How is it in this bill? Here are a people numbering two hundred thousand asking you to surrender the trust, to give them the rights guarantied to them, and for which this acquisition of territory was made; and I ask you, does the point of honor forbid your giving it to them?

[¶] I do not ask my friends of the North to surrender anything to us. I do not, as a southern man, surrender anything to them. The spirit of republicanism, the spirit of popular supremacy comes at this "fourth watch of the night" over this tumultuous and tempestuous ocean, walking upon the waters, and saying in the language of old, "Be of good cheer: it is I, be not afraid." It is but the spirit of the Revolution–it is but the spirit of our institutions that calls upon us. I shall not resist it. If there is dishonor in not resisting it, I submit to the impeachment. If there is principle in submission to it, I claim for it, when the bill comes up, the votes of all gentlemen who feel that it is a privilege and an honor to bow down to that before which our fathers of old made tyrants and Governments bow down. That is my second reason.

[¶] IT IS NO COMPROMISE. I prefer it above the Missouri compromise. I am going to hold nothing back. Here is my proposition, gentlemen of the North and gentlemen of the South. I prefer it above the Missouri compromise for this reason. Carry the line to the Pacific. Let it be decided that we have the right to the south and you to the north of that line, still — the territorial question being, as in the beginning I attempted to show, but a limited and temporary one — the great solemn question as to the prohibition of slavery comes back upon us again in the creation of a State. If our citizens have gone there under the guarantee of the Missouri compromise — if there are more citizens for our institution than against it there, three or four or five years hence there is to be a new struggle, a new convulsion, new mischief, and new calamities. Presidential aspirations take hold of it. Ambitious gentlemen take hold of it. Partisan presses and leaders take hold of it.

 \P <u>I want repose</u>, and the bill now offered gives finality to the question. I want the question ended. I want it ended under this great principle that I have so feebly attempted to enforce.

I prefer it again to the compromise bill of last year. It is a better measure for the South, and a better measure for the North. Look for one moment at that compromise. It proposed to submit to the judiciary of the United States this question, to be by them decided — whether we could, while that government is in a territorial condition, carry our slaves there? Suppose they decided for the South - suppose they decided for the North — what is the effect of the decision? Three or four years no, not one year — would elapse even before the case could be made before the decision could be pronounced by the Supreme Court, the people of California would come here and say, We want no such decision; we are going to form a State government. Your law with regard to slavery in the Territory is a matter of no importance to us. We are about to become sovereign. We have now reached that period when, like men, we can walk; and we will not ask your hand to sustain or uphold us. We come as Americans; we say we have rights; we do not beg them as favors, we demand them as rights appertaining to us as American citizens.

[¶] Before the question could be settled by the country, the State is admitted as a sovereign and independent State. During this period we are exposed to all the evils which result from the agitation and disturbance of this most pernicious question, both in these halls and throughout the whole land.

What, then, is the great desideratum? I am not one of those who look most gloomily at the results of this slave question. I cannot believe there is the danger which many suppose; but I know there is, nevertheless, great danger. The bill which I propose has a merit which no other measure possesses. It is not wholly my measure; it would be in bad taste for me to speak of it in so strong terms of commendation if it were. The great principle of introducing these Territories as States belongs to others. I have only adopted and applied that principle to the exigencies of the present period.

But, to go on with the argument: I want finality to this question. How can it be attained? How can this question be relieved from perpetual agitation, but by the enactment of a law assenting to the surrender of this territorial power to those to whom it belongs, and taking it from us, to whom it does not belong, except in one event — in that necessity alone which would compel us to retain them as territories; and that has wholly passed and gone by in these now under consideration.

I offer you another reason. I deal in no declamation. I am attempting to put this question on its true, important, fundamental principle. I do not depart from it. The bill which I propose differs from that of the very distinguished — and, I take this occasion to say, the very patriotic and determined — Senator in the other end of this Capitol, in this: it proposes to embrace all the territory ceded by Mexico to the United States. And why? Why is the word "all" inserted in the bill? ...

[9] Who, then, is to settle this guestion as to the boundary of Texas? Shall Congress do it? Certainly not; she is a party to the controversy. The question is one between her and Texas, and she cannot decide in her own case. I repeat the interrogatory: who, then, is to settle the guestion? and how is it to be settled? Sir, the bill I have presented provides a mode and manner of its settlement, in accordance with the wishes and rights of all. It declares "that a new State may be created out of and including all that territory ceded to the United States by the treaty of peace, friendship, limits and settlement made with the Republic of Mexico, concluded the 2d February, 1848." It does not define, by metes and bounds, the lines of division between the new State thus created and the State of Texas. It grants all that is ours to the new State; and the new State takes it upon these terms in her grant. And then the question arises between Texas and the new State proposed to be created as to the true boundary between them; California holding all we had to give; Texas holding all she was entitled to as against Mexico, when she created us her trustee to adjust it. The Constitution, on its very face, in express terms, has provided and declared that "the judicial power shall extend to controversies between two or more States." And thus the whole question is submitted to the judicial tribunals for their decision and their adjudication.

See how beautifully the system works. Behold how harmoniously and beautifully and wisely those who framed it made it to work! These agitation questions, upon which we have voted and combated and de-

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claimed, one party affirming and the other disaffirming the boundary of the Rio Grande, upon which we have gone into war, and which have entered into our Presidential contests, and engrossed all our party feelings and exertions, are all hushed and made silent by this bill; and the question is taken from this stormy tribunal, and from the popular agitations of the day, to that which has been provided by the Constitution into the lower story of the Capitol [the location then of the Supreme Court]. where judgment will be pronounced, with all the justice and all the equity which do not belong to us, and with all the acquiescence which does belong to all American communities, under the solemn decisions of her supreme judicial tribunals. This furnishes another reason why I have presented and now urge this bill.

I will now proceed a moment with the details of this bill. ... It consents to the creation of a State by the people of California and New Mexico, to take effect hereafter, on a day fixed in the bill. I am not going into the constitutional question. I have prepared, and have before me, a constitutional argument on that subject. I have not time, under the onehour rule, to present it now. When the bill is brought forward if the proviso is offered, I shall attempt to show that the question of the right of prescribing the Wilmot proviso is a very different one when applicable to a State, in the creating of a government and constitution for herself, from the question when applicable to a territorial government, such as is provided by the bills now on your table, in which that proviso is inserted.

I will merely state the points on which I rest the question. I have not time to elucidate them by argument. If the bill I advocate should find favor with the House; if the Territorial bills should be superseded; if investigation and examination shall induce gentlemen to come to the conclusion, that the condition of our country, both here and in California, requires that a State government should be created for the Territories — that the people there are entitled to such form of government gentlemen of the North may insist on inserting this anti-slavery provision into this bill, as the condition on which the Territories will be permitted to create a State government.

The clause of the Constitution which guaranties to every State a republican form of government, does not authorize Congress to interfere in the formation of a constitution. To say that we have the power to prescribe, is to declare that the people shall not create a constitution themselves. The very fact that you prescribe terms in its formation takes from it all its virtues — all its power — and subverts every principle on which its rests. ...

But again: The idea that this guarantee subjects the constitution of a State to the action of Congress, is in precise subversion and opposition to the principle on which it was made. That was a guarantee to each State against all the States. It was a guarantee that the State which had a republican form of government should not, by coming into this Union, be under the control of other States to abrogate or alter the constitution which they themselves have formed.

My fourth point is, that this clause of the Constitution is not that Congress shall have the right to enforce this guarantee. The clause does not confer a power upon Congress. It simply imposes a duty upon the States to make good the rights and republican forms of government created by the people of the States for themselves.

But there is another position: Those who made this Constitution did no work of supererogation or folly. The guarantee operates upon the State when admitted, and requires you to preserve a republican form of government, and that is the whole extent of the guarantee. I state that the framers of the Constitution did no work of supererogation. They guarantied to Virginia a republican form of government. Suppose that her constitution was such as at this day, according to our ideas, was bad in its character, and opposed to your views and opinions, have you the power to cite us here to try our constitution, and see whether it suits you of the North, or you of the West? Why, the power is one which was intended for substantial purposes — for real purposes of self-government. Suppose a State was admitted with a constitution prohibiting slavery, and the next day she turned round and repealed the provision: where is the power on earth to alter it?

Will you, gentlemen of the South, vote against the passage of this bill? Do you come forward and say, we will have a territorial government <u>nolens volens</u> — that slavery shall go there, or this Union shall be severed? Will gentlemen from the North say that this Government shall be dissolved if you take it there? Will neither party agree to surrender this territorial power? ...

[¶] Do you ask me to stand there, and stand there by my vote and by my own will resist this great principle of constitutional liberty and popular supremacy in the State governments? If you do, I will not stand with you. The people will not stand with you. Justice is not with you. You war against the fundamental principle upon which our Government rests; upon which our institutions in the South can alone repose in safety.

Again: Gentlemen of the North, will you insist that the Wilmot proviso shall pass <u>nolens volens</u>? Why, your orators demonstrate day after day that there can be no slavery there. A gentleman the other day demonstrated to his satisfaction that the people who were there when we took the country do not desire the institution, and he demonstrated further, that those who are going there do not desire it. He showed to you — and it may be true, I make the passing remark — that in this effort, this career to reduce the country to our possession, the North had the advantage over us — that those in favor of free institutions had the advantage over us, which no power could check.

[¶] Look for a moment at Virginia and the South. If a slave holder wants to emigrate and to take his slaves with him it is a work of time. His business affairs must be arranged. He is a man of substance and property. He has to collect the last year's hire; he has to collect the proceeds of the sale of his farm, and that is not the work of a moment.

[¶] But that is not the case with those emigrating there from the North. Many of them are bold, intrepid young men, living on the Atlantic borders, who take ship and, on the wings of the wind or with the velocity of steam, go there before a slave holder can turn round.

[¶] Who from the West can go there? The hardy hunter, who has no home except that bounded by the heavens and the ocean. He throws his rifle on his shoulder and, in the spirit of freedom, reaches it through boundless forests and trackless prairies. It is his country and his home; and he will arrive there and appropriate it while the slave holders are lingering about Virginia and South Carolina, attempting to get rid of their stock, and their lands, and the thousand cares which surround us.

[¶] Why, then, do gentlemen say, we will have the Wilmot proviso, <u>nolens volens</u>? Is it in the mere consciousness of strength and of power? Is it merely because, in the wantonness of power, you choose, like Perditus, to despoil the lioness of her young? You cannot do it, you will not do it. I offer this remark in no taunt. I say to gentlemen of the North, if you want this thing, leave it to a great principle — leave it to natural causes — leave it to the principles upon which the Government is formed. I tell you, if you do not, the reproach and responsibility will belong to you and attach to you, in this wantonness of power, of forcing upon us issues which are unnecessary to your ends, and intended for our degradation. I beg gentlemen to remember, it would be of all things the greatest fatuity and the greatest folly. That strong man of old who pulled down the building and perished amid its ruins, "was blind as well as strong."

What is the argument with which our northern friends meet us? They say New Mexico is not prepared for a State government. She must undergo territorial tutelage. Territorial tutelage! Why, look at it! In the beginning, when Kentucky, Tennessee, and Vermont were the objects upon which the minds of the framers of the Constitution rested, did they think that they needed territorial tutelage? Was it to teach them principles of freedom? No; the reason was, that they were so few in number that they could not constitute a government.

[¶] Tutelage! You, in the great day and the great hour of this question — are you to stop, like a mere pedagogue, to teach New Mexico and California the A B C of political liberty, while the destruction of an empire and a government might learn you the last lesson of its over-

throw? Who, then, wants this delay? The demagogue may want it. He who wants to agitate a Presidential question — who wants a sectional advantage; he who, because he believes he is with the stronger, is willing to keep the question to oppress the weaker — he may defeat it; and when it is defeated, it is a defeat by the union of the pedagogue and the demagogue, neither of whom recognizes the principles on which this Government is founded.

Sir, the territory is said to be too large. It is said that the population is sparsely, thinly scattered over it. Let it be so — what of it? Take the State which the Senator from Illinois [Mr. Douglas] wants: it includes almost all the good land in that country. The residue is a barren and desolate region, where the population will be forever sparse. But what if it be? Cannot they, under their State government, govern it as well as we? Are we, through all time, to convert this hall from a hall of legislation upon grave questions, pertaining to the sovereignty of States, into one of municipal legislation for distant and remote provinces? No; it cannot and it ought not to be.

Mr. Chairman, in adopting the course of policy which I have this day advocated, and in offering this bill, my opinions have been supposed to be adverse to those of the Commonwealth which I in part represent. It may be so. If it is, I do not know it. I say this is a question which we are bound here to settle before this Congress adjourns. The acquisition of California has already cost us much of feeling, of treasure, and of life. But frugality, industry, and enterprise may restore the lost treasure and replenish our exhausted exchequer. New generations will rise up and supply the places of those whom battle and disease have removed from among us. But still it will cost greatly beyond its value, unless by our wisdom and moderation, in these halls, we hold fast to those things which were given us, and which still remain to us. It will cost too much, though all her high mountains were mountains of gold, though her broad ocean may repose on reefs of coral and on heaps of pearl, unless her pacific wave shall flow tranquilly, harmoniously, calmly to our shore, in submission and homage to that standard of freedom and of union you have planted upon it.

The task is <u>ours</u> to arrest the evil — the <u>duty</u> is upon <u>us</u> to confront the danger. The glory will be ours if we are true to ourselves to meet and overcome it. Sir, some may suppose that there is individual hazard and danger in the struggle — that some of us may be lost and overthrown in the conflict. I do not believe it. But let it be; it is but the attendant and the incident to all actions that are ennobling and elevating. Sooner or later, it will come to all of us, never on a field more worth of the patriot. Let us attempt it <u>now</u>....

In the proposition which I have submitted, and in the views which I have expressed to-day, I may not, in the opinion of some gentlemen,

have met the views and opinions of Virginia. I tell you, Mr. Chairman, I have had my eyes full upon her. I have looked and dwelt and thought calmly and patiently upon this whole question. I have this day devoted myself to what I regard as her true honor, her present safety, her future glory and welfare. I have anxiously sought to serve her in the brief hour which is allotted me. I believe all her interests are indissolubly connected with the Constitution and <u>the Union</u>, and in their maintenance I feel, humble as I am, I do her service. Sir, I may be mistaken, but I cannot be regardless or unmindful of her interest: how could I be? "She was and she is a mother to me." I owe her sacrifice if her interest or honor demands it. And I am only worthy of <u>her</u> when I am wholly regardless of <u>myself</u>.

The principles which I this day advocate are wide and universal great principles that belong exclusively neither to the North, the South, the East, nor West. I ask gentlemen to come forward and submit to that controlling principle that will settle this question. I ask them to forget their party relations for a moment. I ask them to look around this broad empire, and see the feverish, the painful, the unreasonable excitement that pervades all classes and all ranks. I ask them to witness the speeches which year after year are delivered — the feverish, the morbid and sickly excitement that pervades this Hall. Recognize this principle — adopt the remedy imbodied in this bill, and it will come over this House and over this nation like the sweet breath of spring to the chamber of disease — healing, strengthening, renovating all of us, so that we shall take up our beds, like the man of old, and run the great and glorious republican career which lays so full before us.

[¶] Come up, all of you, and settle this question. There may be an extreme party at the North, there may be an extreme party at the South. I say to you in confidence, (I am no prophet, and pretend to be none,) this is the only door through which these Territories can be safely incorporated into our system — the only just, patriotic, and harmonious manner in which this question <u>ever can</u> be settled. You may defer it now; but the men who defer it, who put it aside, saying that they are not ready now, and that they will attend to it at a "more convenient season," will be regarded as unwilling guests.

[¶] There is a great conservative party in the country, to be found north and south, in every portion of the Union, who see, feel, and appreciate the principles on which this bill rests, and the propriety and necessity of sustaining them: a broad clear highway is before them; they will read it in security and confidence. I do not mean the Whig or the Democratic party; it may be and will be constituted of both. But upon it will be found that great republican national party who can and will sustain the Constitution and the Union. [¶] There are extremes to be found both north and south on this question. They who suppose this Union can be or will be dissolved on this issue of the Wilmot proviso, must and will be signally disappointed. I trust and believe the whole country will sustain the principle, and heartily and sincerely submit to the principle of popular and State sovereignty on which the proposed measure rests.

The bill Preston supported failed of passage, though it enhanced his political stature. His term in Congress was nearly over. In the previous year, during the 1848 presidential election season, he had championed Zachary Taylor for the nation's highest office. When Taylor won the Whig nomination and the national election, he first considered offering Preston the office of Attorney General and then nominated him to be Secretary of the Navy. Preston served in that capacity from March 1849 until July 1850, after Taylor had died and Millard Fillmore had succeeded him.

Preston returned to Smithfield. That same year, 1850, Congress agreed to admit California (the present-day version, not the entire region that Preston had envisioned) as a non-slave state as part of the Compromise of 1850. He had reason to hope, though little reason to believe, that the nation had put the slavery issue safely behind it.

Part Three. Fourth of July, 1852 Montgomery County, Virginia

As Independence Day approached in 1852, two years had passed since William Ballard Preston returned to his home in Montgomery County, Virginia, a private citizen, not a Congressman. not a member of the Cabinet. The great issues that had threatened to sunder the nation during Preston's time in the nation's capital — what should become of the vast new lands acquired from Mexico, how they should be organized and whether open or closed to slavery — had subsided. The Compromise of 1850 had offered a contentious people at least an interlude of peace, and two years later that peace still held.

Preston prepared an address for July Fourth that year. The handwritten speech is in Preston's papers in Special Collections at Virginia Tech. Some of what he said can be understood in more than one way — a man hoping desperately for "Union," but prepared to consider disunion; "slavery" an abomination that ought to exist nowhere or, rather, a continuing measure for white men to measure their freedom against — but his fervent faith in the Declaration of Independence was undeniable, as was his hope that the peace would continue to hold. An abridged version of that speech follows.⁵ Fellow Citizens:

The Seventy Sixth Anniversary of American Independ[e]nce is with us...

Let us remember that we are the only free people on this vast Globe — what a case for Exultation! What a sense of gratification and Triumph!

Look at the European World... and tell me its Condition! Oppressed, Manacled, and Enslaved....

While <u>We</u> surrounded by the blessings of Heaven are enjoying the gifts of Freedom, the happiness of peace, and the delights of Independence —honored abroad and happy at Home. ...

It is a condition ... peculiar to ourselves and which we should labor to preserve with uncommon diligence and Exertion. ...

What is it that has distinguished us so highly among the Nations of the earth? Why is it that the name of America has filled the World?... No Sirs! It is the principles set forth in this unequaled Instrument ..., and I had rather be the Father of this declaration as it now Stands, than be the Author of Newton[']s Principia, upon which rests his collossal Fame.

I[m]perfection is however the fate of all human Institutions and Productions — and it is impossible for any Legislator or Convention of Legislators, however great their Wisdom, or Experi[e]nce, or foresight, to behold the evils of the coming future. Their province is to provide for the exigencies of the present, and by a judicious management of those exigencies to meet the demands of the future. And my belief is that one of the greatest difficulties with which this government has had to contend, — is that its citizens have failed to act in strict accordance with the teachings of the Declaration of Independence (as near perfect as any human production can be).

If they had studied its great truths — heeded its seer like advice — to-day instead of being divided by sectional differences — torn by discord, we should have had a Union harmonious as it is vast, and splendid as Harmonious.

And you will give me credit for candor when I tell you, the times are <u>ominous</u> on that very account. Thrice has this Confederacy, agitated by Conflicting Elements[,] shaken from Centre to Circumfer[e]nce — True apparently a calm has succeeded the Storm — Peace at present is found in our borders-plenty spreads her lap on every hand — The Farmer, the Mechanic, the Lawyer, the Physician, Each and all follow their respective avocations in Peace and tranquility. — But as sure as there is a God of Destiny above, this very calm is ominous of Evil — The Giant but Sleeps — and when refreshed, he shall but begin his slaughter with renewed energy and vigor.

I am now about to read the Declaration of Independence, and I call

upon you <u>AMERICANS</u>! As you value the boon left you by your forefathers; as you prize the liberty they achieved! As you glory in America its hallowed Remembrances of the <u>past</u>, its <u>present</u> happiness and prosperity, its Boundless hopes and mighty destiny in the <u>future</u> — Hear it to-day as a voice from the Tombs of the Mighty Dead who pledged to its support their Lives, their Fortunes, and their sacred honor. And let the same spirit that burned in them animate your bosoms — Inspired with the same Holy Zeal and Lofty Ambition, Go forth, to preserve, protect, defend, the Legacy they have left you. — Battle against Oppression, Usurpation, and Tyranny, from whatever quarter it may come. Labour to preserve the Union — but not at the Sacrifice of Truth and Justice, Liberty and Equality.

Yea! I call upon you by the shades of Washington and Jefferson, of Clay and Calhoun, of all the mighty Dead — prove yourselves worthy sons of Revolutionary Sires! of those Mighty Spirits who won for us the Blessings we now enjoy — Who are to-day hovering around us — who[se] names, circumscribed not by the Limits of Earth, have already passed the abyss of time and are now enrolled on the Scroll of Immortality!

Then let me bese[e]ch you Read this Protest of the Immortal Jefferson — Drink deep of its philosophy — ponder profoundly its great truths — learn willingly its holy teachings — fortify yourselves from this arm[o]ry — Then let the De[]mon of Contention rage — let the North and South sunder the Union if they will — let this proud Colossus pass away as "the baseless fabric of a vision," Influenced by its principles, we shall stand a "Mountain of Light," … to which the Nations of every clime and kindred and tongue shall come bearing Votives celestial to the Deitess of Liberty.

Then reinvigorated from this day's festivities, let us go forth to meet the enemies of our Common Country, with nerve of steel and heart of brass — let us combat the Hydra Error wherever found; and if fall we should as fall we may,

Let us fall with our back to the field, our feet to the foe,

And leaving no blot on our name,

Look proudly to Heaven from the Deathbed of Fame.

Preston continued to practice law in the 1850s. He could not ignore that decade's ominous political developments on the national scene, but he could nonetheless proceed to take care of business at the local level.

When the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad came through Montgomery County in 1854, it furnished to agricultural production in the area a much less expensive outlet to distant markets, and Smithfield produced for those markets. By the time the census taker made his rounds in 1860, Montgomery County's residents included 2,219 slaves, or 21 percent of the entire population. Fifty of those slaves lived and worked at Smithfield, and as many more belonged to Preston's two brothers, James and Robert, who lived nearby.⁶ Preston was much wealthier as well as much older in the 1850s than he had been in the 1820s, when he had owned no slaves. The institution of slavery had moved to the very center of his part of the world.

Preston provided leadership on the educational front in the 1850s. He served as a trustee of the new Montgomery Female College, of which, even today, College Street in Christiansburg serves as a reminder. Moreover, he served as a trustee of the new Olin and Preston Institute in Blacksburg. The school that bore his name proved a precursor to Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, established in 1872 and known today as Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

In the late 1850s Preston joined in an effort to bring direct shipping between western Europe and Virginia's port city of Norfolk. To that end he left Smithfield for London, England, in August 1857 and then went on to Paris, France. Nothing came of the effort, and he finished out the decade back at home in his private world. But he remained in touch with the political developments of his state and the nation, ready to step again into public life if that seemed necessary.

Part Four. Virginia's Year of Secession: 1861 The Virginia Secession Convention, Richmond

In November 1860 enough voters across the North gave their votes to Abraham Lincoln, the candidate of the new Republican Party, to give him the presidency of the United States. During the winter of 1860-61, South Carolina seceded in December, and then one more Deep South state after another met in convention and committed to secession. Various Upper South states, among them Virginia, elected conventions that waited while delegates pondered what to do in the aftermath of Lincoln's election and the Confederacy's establishment. William Ballard Preston, as he had done so often before, participated in Virginia's deliberations at this time. Elected on February 4, he went to Richmond as a convention delegate.

Preston went to the convention committed to oppose Virginia's secession, as long as secession seemed avoidable. He continued to hope that, by his lights, the state could remain in the nation. During this period, the delegates divided into three groups of fairly equal size — those who had already determined that the state must secede; those who were committed to remaining in the Union; and those who, like Preston, held that Virginia had the right to secede, knew that developments might force them to decide to act on that right, but insisted that the time had not yet come. The second and third groups clearly outnumbered the first when, in a vote on April 4 on a proposal to secede, they combined to defeat it by nearly two-to-one, 45-88.⁷

The convention appointed a Committee on Federal Relations, which reported back on March 19 a series of amendments to the United States Constitution that, it advised the rest of the convention, might supply the basis for perpetuating Virgina's remaining in the Union. Those amendments illuminate the issues that most members, including Preston, perceived as vital to securing what, a week later, he would term "guarantees ...of protection in regard to the institution of slavery."

Even if no state seceded and permanently left the Union. Virginia demanded such guarantees, but, if several slave states went out and staved out, then Virginia slaveowners felt particularly vulnerable to hostile majorities in Congress and in need of those amendments. According to one section, the Constitution was never to be interpreted as giving Congress authority "to legislate concerning involuntary servitude" in any slave state or to curtail the interstate slave trade. Other provisions protected slavery in the District of Columbia, reinforced the fugitive slave clause, and protected slaveowners from discriminatory federal tax rates. The issue of slavery in the western territories would recede, the Committee urged, if the 36-degree, 30-minute line of the Missouri Compromise were extended to the Pacific and no slaveowners could be prevented from sending or taking slaves to territories south of the line. In future, the United States might acquire new territory only if a majority of the Senators from each class of states, those with slavery and those without, approved. These and other constitutional protections of slavery were to be amendable only with "the consent of all the States."8

On March 27, 1861, the Richmond Daily Dispatch reported the gist of Preston's remarks to the convention the day before. He gave the following speech in his guise as a conditional Unionist, someone not yet convinced to support secession. The speech appears as the newspaper reported it — in the third person, not first person, and not in the exact language Preston used. Worried about the precipitous behavior of South Carolina and the Deep South states that had already seceded, Preston showed that he was, like his Deep South counterparts and his pro-secession colleagues, troubled even more by the crisis of Lincoln's election. He urged others at the convention to wait, however, and see what Lincoln's administration would actually do with its power.⁹

After alluding to the great responsibility resting upon him as a member of the Convention he went on to consider the practical issue now before the country. For years there had been a regular course of sectional hostility, which excited the apprehensions of all of us.

[¶] The election of last November resulted in a manner that shook the Commonwealth to its very centre, and the people took the necessary measures for meeting the crisis, and had sent a Convention here clothed with powers to make and unmake. The aggressions upon the South were no longer to be borne, and he for one was ready to repel them. Virginia, on the 4th of February, was not ready for disunion, but she took a prompt and decided stand against any measures of coercion or force. When we met here, the choice and purpose of Virginia was to have proper amendments to the Constitution, with a view to restore the Union upon a basis to secure permanent protection to her rights. It was further her purpose, in case no sufficient guarantees can be secured, to withdraw from the Union, and protect herself out of it. ...

[¶] He then alluded to the determination of the Commonwealth to stay all impediments by way of coercion on the one side or precipitation on the other[, w]hile the representatives of the people could deliberate with the calmness of peace, and if possible restore the Union. The Convention interposed its moral power — saying to the Federal Government, you must not use measures to coerce those who have seceded from the Union; you must not possess yourself of the forts or the commerce. She said to her sister, South Carolina, let there be no war; it would be hurtful to those who are deeply interested in your institutions, but are not so impulsive, and want time to reflect. They had paused. The Government had acknowledged its inefficiency, and we were not now in the danger that we had previously been. He could not say how long it would be so, though he hoped it might be permanent. But we were here to-day, with no external cause for alarm, and enabled to deliberate calmly upon all subjects of agitation.

He could not agree with those who said this was the moment to secede. It was the very time when we ought to go to work to carry out the wishes of the people, as expressed at the polls on the 4th of February last. ...

 \P [T]here must be thorough and efficient guarantees of equality in the Government, and of protection in regard to the institution of slavery....

Mr. Preston ... could see no efficiency in any guarantees, except by suitable amendments to the Constitution. The first section of the committee's report, he conceived, covered the question of exact equality, and the North must respond aye or no to it. If the response is "aye", you have a guarantee of faith for the full and ample protection of the institution in which we are vitally interested. ...

After pointing out the efficiency of the remedies proposed, he said the cry of "inadequacy" still came up; we still heard of the deep-seated hatred and sectional hostility existing at the North. He asked if we were to get rid of this hostility by flying from it. Due weight, he thought, should be given to the conflicting passions in Congress, which had given an impulse to sectional hostility.

[¶] The slave question, he argued, was at the bottom of it all, but if this cause of agitation could be cut off, much would be done towards restoring the friendly feelings of the two sections. Everything was favorable now to a submission to the demands we were to make of the North. It was not to be made in a crouching or an humble attitude; but we were to make, for the first time, an appeal to the Northern people — not to the politicians; and if they were not granted within a reasonable period, we separate from our brothers of the past, and separate forever. This was his idea of true chivalry — to make of them a firm demand, not in the language of bravado; but to say to them, if you accept, well; if you do not accept, well. ...

He had come here for the purpose of carrying out their [his constituents'] will. If it became necessary to divide, after a full and fair consultation with the border slave States, then we would go out peacefully and quietly. Although the propositions presented might not be so full as he could desire — if anything better came up, he would be ready to accept it — he still thought they were the best we could do. He came from the West, and in the name of his loyal people was prepared to make a demand for full security of their rights. He did not conceive it to be his duty to consult the wishes of the North in making demands, but the wishes of the people of Virginia. He urged gentlemen not to say, where Liberty is, there is my country; but say where my home is, there shall Liberty be. [Applause.]

[¶] He closed with an appeal to all to stand by the Commonwealth, and to vindicate every right that belongs to her. His ancestors had fought and died in her defence, and with the help of God this should be his destiny. If, said he, I fall elsewhere, I ask to be brought back to the consecrated earth of his mother Virginia — to be buried in his own meadow. Then it may be said of Ballard Preston, "after life's fitful fever he sleeps well." He would go to the North or to the South, or to the judgment seat of God, in vindication of the rights of Virginia. [Applause.]

Within two weeks of Preston's speech, the convention appointed him one of three men assigned the task of traveling from Richmond to Washington, D.C., to ask the new president what policy he planned to pursue regarding the Confederacy. The convention ensured that each of the three great groups of delegates had a representative. Preston's comrades were George Wythe Randolph, an enthusiastic advocate of secession, and Alexander H. H. Stuart, a strong Unionist. Preston himself initiated the proposal for such a conference with the president. As he explained:¹⁰ [A large majority of convention delegates agreed that] there is no power on the part of the Federal Government to coerce one of these seceding States ... [T]he people of Virginia will never consent that the Federal power, which is in part our power, shall be exerted for the purpose of subjugating the people of seceded States to the Federal authority. ... I should feel that I had failed to discharge my duty, if I were to return to my constituents and say to them ... that I could not tell what the President of the United States and his Cabinet intend to do on the momentous questions of war and peace. ... This is an enquiry addressed to our agent, to our Government, to know whether ... [the president] intends to make war upon sovereign States; war that must involve me and my people, my friends, in its consequences and results.

The next day, Preston said more in support of his proposal. He recalled the April 4 vote against immediate secession and, as he saw it, the responsibilities that came with that vote.¹¹

Sir, upon the vote which occurred on the 4th day of April, in this body, I felt that a new condition of things had arisen in this Hall, that there were new relations and new obligations imposed upon me and upon all who acted with me. The contest had gone on for months in this Commonwealth as to what was the remedy under the circumstances for the difficulties that surrounded us. One portion believed it to be secession. Another portion, among whom I have been and am and will be while there is a just hope of procuring our rights and maintaining our institutions-maintained that the remedy was under and within the Federal Constitution and Government as it is.

[¶] On the fourth day of April we vanquished our adversary, but thereby imposing upon ourselves the entire obligation, the high duty of providing safety and protection for the Commonwealth of Virginia by such other remedies as we might desire. It is a high, a responsible trust ..., the trust of preserving our rights within this Union against the judgment of those who believe our only security is in separation. It is the judgment of this Convention ... that our rights shall be preserved in the Union, and all the obligation, all the responsibility, ... all the disasters that may befall the Commonwealth are upon us who have remained instead of departing.

Preston, Randolph, and Stuart met with Lincoln on Saturday, April 13. They gained no satisfaction and, back at the convention two days later, reported their failure. Preston himself now asserted that "for myself, my mind is made up irrevocably."¹²

Moreover, he noted, "There is upon us now, if the newspapers be true, a flagrant and open war."¹³ For Preston, the middle ground had vanished. President Lincoln rendered moot the Preston delegation's task of the previous week; responding to events at Fort Sumter in South Carolina, he called that day, April 15, for 75,000 volunteer troops to put down the rebellion. Virginia had to face the question of whether it would participate in that effort and, doing so, effectively repudiate secession as an option.

On April 16, embodying a change in majority sentiment, Preston moved the adoption of the Virginia ordinance of secession. "I arise, with feelings of the deepest pain," he observed, as he offered the ordinance, offered it "on the basis of the report we brought here from Washington, and the proclamation of the President."¹⁴

The Virginia convention reversed its previous decision. On April 17, one-third of the members voted again for secession, and one-third voted once more against it, but the other third, consisting of William Ballard Preston and the rest of the swing group, switched from no to yes. Now there was a pro-secession majority, 88-55, almost as large as the anti-secession majority had been only thirteen days earlier.¹⁵

The Old Dominion determined to leave the United States of America and join the Confederate States of America. Preston served in the new nation's Provisional Congress in 1861-62. Then the state legislature appointed him one of Virginia's two members of the Confederate Senate, where he served from February 1862 until his death from heart disease later that year. He was then, as he had hoped, "buried in his own meadow."¹⁶

Part Five. William Ballard Preston and the Politics of Slavery: Consistency and Change across Thirty Years

William Ballard Preston's public life took him to the Virginia House of Delegates, the United States House of Representatives, and the Confederate Senate. It took him from one great debate in Richmond, the debate over slavery in the winter of 1832, to another, the secession convention during the winter and spring of 1861. No reticent participant, he had important things to say — proposals to offer, ideas and passions to articulate — and he said them. Thus, although his speeches do not tell us a great deal about his private thoughts and motivations, we can know much of what he said as a representative of his constituents.

Part of what we see in his political biography may be the life cycle of an antebellum Virginia politician. A firebrand in 1832, a son but not yet a husband or father, owning no slaves himself, he voiced a strident antislavery argument. Representing unhappy constituents in the West, underrepresented in state politics, he took an anti-eastern approach to the central issue of his time. He spoke of slavery as an ill, for whites and for blacks, that would better be kept out of his county, out of his part of the state, so far as that was possible.

Things changed over the next three decades. He spent a lot of time outside his native county, whether in the state capital, the nation's capital, or even overseas. He acquired dozens of slaves, and thus he invested many thousands of dollars in the labor force that gave value to the land that he owned and they worked. And he came to repudiate, it seemed, the core argument that he had voiced in 1832. He had turned from antislavery to proslavery.

And yet, on perhaps the central issue, as he conceived it, he had changed not a bit. The core of his argument in 1832 attacked the idea, propounded by proslavery legislators in Virginia, that the Federal Constitution prevented any such <u>state</u> program as he was proposing. He said then, and surely he still believed three decades later, that, whatever the state might do, the Federal government, under its constitution, had no authority to abolish slavery.

The state legislature, however, acting under the constitution of 1830, could take such action, he had argued in 1832. True, the new state constitution of 1851 expressly banned any such action by the state legislature. Proslavery interests made sure that no such proposal as Preston had supported in 1832 could again be made an issue.

But that all had to do with state action. The United States Constitution had not changed, and under it the national government had no authority to act against slavery. Preston had conceded that point in 1832, and on it he based his arguments in 1861. And yet, short of emancipation itself in the southern states, might the national government have some authority to regulate slavery — to enact something like the Missouri Compromise or the Wilmot Proviso restricting slavery from the western territories, to end slavery in the District of Columbia, even to control the interstate slave trade? If so, then his opposition must be based on policy considerations, not on constitutional limitations on the authority of the national government. Then, unless the Federal Constitution could be amended to prevent such actions, the security of slavery in Virginia might best be safeguarded only by taking the state out of the Union. It was complicated, it was important, and it was dangerous.

If white Virginians could agree to put slavery on the path to extinction, they should do it, he said in 1832. They were unable to decide to do so, but they had the right, he argued, to place slavery on a gradual path to extinction in Virginia. Slaveowners had no absolute right to their property in slaves not yet born. Virginia's state legislators had the right, but not the votes, to accomplish a containment of the growth of slavery, especially in western Virginia — even a diminution of slavery, and eventually an end to slavery throughout the Old Dominion.

By the the time of the presidential election of 1860, however, he saw power flowing to Congress, representing northern public opinion, which was perhaps even more antislavery than he himself had once been. With the triumph of the Republican party in that year's election, he had reason to equate northern public opinion with some kind of antislavery position — one he would not tolerate. No one from Massachusetts could presume to decide for him, or for any other white Virginian, whether he might own slaves, sell them south, or take them west. And if, under the threat of unacceptable action by Congress, a southern state should decide to leave the Union, the Federal government had no authority to take action against that state.

Sometime soon, he could see, members of Congress would almost surely take action of some sort against slavery, certainly against the expansion of slavery into territories in the western United States. In Preston's view, they might have the votes, but they had not the right, to contain slavery, at least south of the Missouri Compromise line. Just possibly, the North might agree, as the price of Union, to adopt new amendments to the United States Constitution, amendments that would — as Virginia had done in its constitution of 1851 — more clearly put antislavery proposals beyond the authority of that Constitution. If not, then Preston had already seen a new national Constitution, that of the Confederate States. He was prepared to embrace it and abandon the other. And he did so.

The anxieties Preston voiced in 1861, at the age of fifty-five, resembled far more the ones he had felt in 1849 and 1852 than the ones that had animated him long ago, when he was twenty-six. What proved constant, aside from his understanding of slavery and the Federal Constitution, was that he fought the good fight regarding the political issue of slavery. What changed was how he saw that political fight — where it must be fought and what must be the near-term outcome. When he reached for secession — though reluctantly, only as a final recourse he did so with determination.

William Ballard Preston did not live to see the results of the war that followed secession — defeat of the Confederacy; the end of slavery at Smithfield and throughout Montgomery County, throughout Virginia, and throughout the South. Whatever issues might animate southern poli ticians in the future, and whatever issues might divide Americans by party or region, slavery was at last put to rest. The political issue that dominated Preston's public life — "the great question of the age" — died only a short time after he did.

Endnotes

- * The author thanks his undergraduate research assistant, Mari Emslie, for her help in this project.
- Preston's father, James Patton Preston (1774–1843), served as governor of Virginia in 1816–19 and bore the name of a land speculator, James Patton, his great uncle. James Patton, who had much to do with the peopling of the region in the mid eighteenth century, died in the Drapers Meadow Massacre of 1755, very near where Smithfield was later located. For an account of Smithfield and the Prestons see Janie P. B. Lamb, "Smithfield' — Home of the Prestons, in Montgomery County, Virginia." Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 47 (April 1939): 109–125.
- The full text of Preston's speech is in the Richmond Enquirer, Feb. 9, 1832. A radically abridged version is in Joseph Clarke Robert, The Road from Monticello: A Study of the Virginia Slavery Debate of 1832 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1941), pp. 82-83. The best treatments of the 1832 debate are in Alison Goodyear Freehling, Drift toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831 1832 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), and William W. Freehling, The Road to Disunion, vol. 1, Secessionists at Bay, 1776 1854 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
- 3. Preston understated the presence of slaves in Montgomery County. The 1830 census showed 2,026 slaves (and 56 free black residents) in a population of 12,306 (83 percent white). The figures are in Freehling, *Drift toward Dissolution*, p. 268.
- The speech is in the Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, pp. 477–480. A full discussion is in William J. Cooper, Jr., "'The Only Door': The Territorial Issue, the Preston Bill, and the Southern Whigs," in A Master's Due: Essays in Honor of David Herbert Donald, ed. William J. Cooper, Jr., Michael F. Holt, and John McCardell (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), pp. 59–86.
- 5. The handwritten speech is in the Alice Preston Moore Collection, in Special Collections in Newman Library, at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia. So are some of his letters. Other Preston correspondence is in the Preston Family Papers in the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.
- 6. The slaveholding figures come from the manuscript census returns for Montgomery County, 1850 and 1860. Regarding the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad, see Kenneth W. Noe, Southwest Virginia's Railroad: Modernization and the Sectional Crisis (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).
- George H. Reese, ed., Proceedings of the Virginia State Convention of 1861, February 13–May 1 (4 vols.; Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1965) 3: 163. The major studies of Virginia's move toward secession are Henry T. Shanks,

The Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847–1861 (Richmond, Va.: Garrett and Massie, 1934), and Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

- 8. The amendments, as proposed (changes were subsequently offered), are in Reese, *Proceedings*, 2: 35–37.
- 9. The speech is reprinted from Reese, Proceedings, 2: 344, 757-760
- 10. Ibid, 3: 273-274.
- 11. Ibid, 3: 375.
- 12. Ibid, 3: 745.
- 13. Ibid, 3: 745.
- 14. Ibid, 4: 24. Preston gave a speech on April 16 that is described as having lasted "for some hours," but no copy of it has been found. Reese, *Proceedings*, 4: 4, 799.
- 15. Ibid, 4: 144.
- 16. Preston's gravestone at Smithfield Plantation in Blacksburg gives his dates of birth and death. An obituary is in the *Richmond Enquirer*, Nov. 22, 1862. The cause of death is given in the Montgomery County death records.

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