A Note from the Editors

Following the early settlements along the eastern American coastline, an enormous migration of people began moving ever westward. As this migratory tide began to cross the sub-continental ridge of Virginia in the 1700s, many frontier towns emerged — quite often to exploit commercial advantage on desirable land along a well-traveled road to the west. So it was with the community of Draper’s Meadow and then later with the Town of Blacksburg, Virginia.

As a part of Blacksburg’s bicentennial celebration, The Smithfield Review is publishing four articles that document a small portion of the American frontier story. The first, “A Story of Continuity and Change: Blacksburg, Virginia 1798–1998,” provides a summary of early Blacksburg history. It was written by James Paxton, the Resident Interpreter at Smithfield, who recently received his masters degree in history from Virginia Tech.

The second article, “Ties to External Markets: Imports and Exports in the New River Valley, 1745–1789” provides insight into various commercial aspects of frontier America. It was written by a native son of Blacksburg, Scott Crawford, who received his Masters of Arts degree in history from Old Dominion University, and now teaches at Patrick Henry High School in Roanoke, Virginia.

Dr. Wirt Wills, currently the director of Smithfield, and June Stubbs, an active Smithfield Board member, have collaborated to provide the second part of a letter written in 1843 by Letitia (Preston) Floyd. The
letter gives a vivid account of 18th century frontier life in southwest Virginia and Kentucky, and reveals the role of Blacksburg residents in settling various parts of Kentucky. It also tells the remarkable story of the exploits of John Floyd, Letitia's father-in-law. The first part of the letter, published in Volume I of The Smithfield Review, relates, among other stories, an account of the Draper's Meadow massacre — a pivotal event in Blacksburg's history.

Next, Laura Katz Smith, Manuscripts Curator, Special Collections Department of the University Libraries at Virginia Tech, has compiled a "Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections of the Preston Family." These collections are found in libraries in six states and the District of Columbia. Some of the original material found in these extensive collections was generated in Blacksburg and documents the considerable influence that its early residents had on significant national events.

The remaining three articles analyze specific events in other areas of Southwest Virginia in a later era.

Dr. Gil Bollinger, Professor Emeritus of Geology at Virginia Tech, describes the second largest seismic shock in the southeastern states in "The Giles County Earthquake of 1897 — Virginia's Largest Temblor."

Dr. Robert Whisonant, a professor of Geology at Radford University, relates the crucial role of Virginia's geology resources in the Civil War. The article, entitled "Mineral Fights — Civil War Battles for Southwestern Virginia's Lead and Salt," provides the reader with a new appreciation for some of the Civil War battles that were fought in southwest Virginia.

The final article, "Desertion and Unionism in Floyd County, Virginia, 1861-1865," relates a fascinating story of deteriorating support for the Confederate cause in a southwestern Virginia county. The story was extracted by Rand Dotson from his 1997 Master of Arts thesis in history at Virginia Tech.

For the benefit of our readers who have not seen Volume I, a brief orientation is appropriate. 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 regional structures of that period to survive. It was the last home of Colonel William Preston, a noted surveyor and developer of western land, 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, Smithfield is a museum that is interpreted and administered by a local group of volunteers. *The Smithfield Review* originated as a Smithfield publication designed to ensure that the often-neglected history of the region is made available to the general public in a way that is both interesting and enlightening. Following the publication of our first issue, we are pleased to announce that both the Smithfield Preston Foundation and the History Department of Virginia Tech have joined in sponsoring our effort.

*The Smithfield Review* continues to focus on the history of the area west of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia and adjacent states. We seek articles that 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.

Hugh G. Campbell, Editor
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