



William Ballard Preston (1805–1862)

An engraving by A.H. Ritchie of a daguerreotype by Brady. Signed "Wm Ballard Preston". He had a distinguished career: he was a delegate and a senator in the Virginia General Assembly, a United States congressman, Secretary of the Navy, and a Confederate senator. (Photograph courtesy of Aubin Boulware Lamb, younger son of Janie Preston Boulware Lamb.)



SCENE NEAR V. P. I.—SMITHFIELD.

Smithfield Manor House, circa 1903

The Owners of the Historic Smithfield Manor House

Wirt H. Wills

Visitors to Smithfield often ask questions about the ownership of the Smithfield manor house after its construction. Those questions are often answered by saying that only Prestons owned the house until it was given to the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA) in 1959. This brief article will identify all of its owners, and a longer article in a future issue of this journal will describe the history of William Preston's entire Smithfield land holdings until the present.

The manor house of Smithfield was constructed in the mid 1770s by Colonel William Preston on land that he purchased in 1773. His will, made in 1777 and proved in 1783, listed 1860 acres in the Smithfield estate.¹ Smithfield was inherited by his fourth son, James Patton Preston, who was the first child known to be born at Smithfield and who later became Governor of Virginia. Col. William Preston's widow, Susanna



Left: Aubin Lee Boulware (1843–1897), the husband of Jane Grace Preston. They resided in Richmond at 1 East Franklin Street (now demolished). He was an educator, lawyer, and banker, and an original director of the Southern Railway. During the War he served with the 9th Virginia Cavalry, C.S.A. Right: Jane Grace Preston (1849–1930), called "Janie". She married Aubin Lee Boulware on 14 November 1878 at Smithfield. She was the mother of Janie Preston Boulware Lamb, who gave Smithfield to the APVA in 1959. (Photographs courtesy of Brockenbrough Lamb, Jr., older son of Janie Preston Boulware Lamb.)

(Smith) Preston, retained a right to residence there by terms of William's will, and she resided there until her death in 1823.²

Governor Preston prospered, and by 1843 when he died, he had accumulated approximately 3,000 acres of Smithfield land,³ including the parts later known as Solitude and White Thorn.

Upon the division of the land among the heirs of James Patton Preston, the oldest son, William Ballard Preston, inherited the Smithfield manor house.⁴ Three years after William Ballard Preston's death in 1862, approximately 994 acres of land were divided by the commissioners of his estate into six parcels, one for each of his five surviving children and a dower parcel of 270 acres to be held for the use of his widow, Lucy



*Lucinda Staples Redd Preston (1819–1891). She married William Ballard Preston on 21 November 1839.
(courtesy of Aubin Boulware Lamb)*

(Redd) Preston.⁵ The house, always central to the history of Smithfield, was on the dower lands, and Lucy Preston resided there until her death in 1891.⁶

One of William Ballard Preston's heirs was his daughter, Jane Grace Preston, who married Aubin Lee Boulware, a lawyer from Richmond, in 1878 at Smithfield.⁷ After a series of purchases, the two of them possessed the entire dower parcel and three of the five parcels left to her and her siblings. Details of these acquisitions will be described in a subsequent article. After the death of A. L. Boulware in 1897, his widow Jane Boulware, in 1904, placed Smithfield in a trust for her lifetime use and benefit with a provision that, upon her death, the remainder of the trust would pass to her three children.⁸ Apparently without having disposed of any land, Jane Boulware died in 1930. During the period of the trust, the house was often rented, and sometimes was vacant. Occasionally, some former inhabitants return as visitors with stories of days long ago when they lived in the house. One of her sons died in 1924 without heirs, and the other son in 1956, intestate and without issue.⁹ At that point the entire Smithfield property, including the house, descended to Janie Preston (Boulware) Lamb, the last survivor, and the trust was dissolved.

Smithfield was then parceled into twelve unequal parts, and a central parcel of 4.65 acres including the house (Parcel XI), was deeded by Janie Preston (Boulware) Lamb to the APVA in 1959. Heirs of Mrs. Lamb deeded an adjoining parcel of more than seven acres to the APVA in 1979 (Parcel XII). The other surrounding parcels were sold to the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in a series of transactions, leaving the last remains of the estate as the historic old manor house on about 12 acres of land surrounded by Virginia Tech property.¹⁰



Mrs. Janie Preston (Boulware) Lamb,
last private owner of Smithfield.
(Photo of a portrait at Smithfield, courtesy
of Teri Hoover.)

Endnotes

1. Montgomery County Circuit Court Records, Montgomery County Will Book B, pp. 55-61.
2. John Frederick Dorman, *The Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield in Virginia* (Louisville, Kentucky: The Filson Club, 1982), p. 13.
3. Montgomery County Circuit Court Records, Montgomery County Deed Book I & J, p. 404.
4. Montgomery County Will Book 10, p. 116.
5. Montgomery County Will Book 10, p. 116.
6. Dorman, p. 261.
7. Dorman, p. 264.
8. Montgomery County Deed Book 51, p. 445.
9. Montgomery County Deed Book 274, p. 183.
10. Montgomery County Deed Book 421, p. 268; Plat 9-205; Montgomery County Deed Book 274, p. 183; Plat 4-45.