

Brief Notes and Documents

A Letter from Janie Preston Boulware Lamb¹

Mrs. Brockenbrough Lamb²
“Smallacres” Sunset Lane,
Richmond, Virginia.

Mr. J. Adger Stewart,³
4780 Crittenden Drive
Louisville, Kentucky.

My Dear Mr. Stewart:

Thank you very much for sending me the *Filson Club History Quarterly* containing Mr. Tapp’s able account of John Floyd.⁴ It is a great addition to my collection of Preston family documents I am trying to collect. There is so much of interest about this fascinating clan and the thrilling times in which they lived that I get a real thrill when a new item comes to me.

Thank you, too, for Cousin Anne Lee’s letter, and today the copies of the Floyd and Lewis letters come. It is so very thoughtful of you to give me these, and I do appreciate them. I do want to give Cousin Anne Lee a copy of Letitia Lewis’s letter, as Cousin Anne has not got one, and she should have it as the sequel to Mrs. Floyd’s letter, which Cousin Anne has. She tells me that the original of Letitia Floyd’s letter was in the possession of a descendant, Mrs. Daniel Trigg of Abingdon, Virginia, and was published in the Richmond paper, as you know.⁵ She tells me that the rats ate the original, but fortunately it was published in the papers for all to read first. (One consolation I have for our Preston Papers⁶ being in Madison, Wisconsin, eighteen volumes of them, is that the rats did not get them,⁷ and they are well preserved for us to copy, at least.) And, by the way, we hope to get copies of them some day to put in our Virginia Historical Society here.

But, to return to the Floyds. The letter from Mrs. Letitia Floyd's daughter, Mrs. Lewis, was given to me in Blacksburg, a copy, I mean, two summers ago by Dean Price⁸ of the V.P.I. College there. He is a Historian and has written some good papers on Southwest Virginia History, and knew I would like a copy of this letter. I will ask him where he got it, and let you know. I am sure he must have told me at the time, but I do not remember.

I sent Cousin Preston Davis a copy, or rather, I got Dean Price to send him a copy, to use in his book he is writing on the Preston Family. I believe "Cavan" is the name of the Floyd home at the time of Letitia's writing,⁹ but will check on this too, and let you hear.

I am much interested in the restoration of the Floyd-Breckenridge Burial Ground, and would like to hear more about it as the work progresses.¹⁰ The folder of the Garden Club of Kentucky tour looks most intriguing, and "Liberty Hall"¹¹ is, of course, the most interesting place of all. Some day I hope to come on the tour and see all the places I have read of with such interest.

About "Smithfield" today, my brother, William Ballard Preston Boulware[,] and I own it, and we rent the farm to the V.P.I. College which adjoins it. The old house is lived in by a College Farm laborer, I regret to say, but we keep it weather-proof and in pretty good order. The farm is in beautiful shape, it looks like an English place – beautifully cultivated, and used for the agricultural department of the College, and for experiments in growing things. One of the things the College specializes in [is] growing roses, and the experimental plots are well worth seeing. The most exquisite roses are there in profusion. Though, of course, not one can be cut.

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A good many visitors come to Smithfield and I have a Visitor's Book there and the woman who lives in the house has a copy of my magazine account of the place to show people when they ask questions. She keeps the house clean and neat, and of course the old grave-yard up on the hill is of great historical importance.¹²

Colonel William Preston himself and his wife, Susanna Smith[,] are buried there, and their eldest son, General John, and their third son, William[,] who married Caroline Hancock and went to Kentucky, and many others too numerous to mention. Many of the tomb stones are gone with Time, but I have a drawing of the place showing many. And we hope some day to restore it as the Floyd-Breckinridge one in Kentucky you wrote me about.

And, the lovely old house should be a Shrine of History, as the Brown home, Liberty hall, is. But these things take Time and Money, with a capital M, you observe, and with my large family of five children and my busy Lawyer husband,¹³ it is hard for us to go often to Smithfield and to spend the time and money required, as you can well understand. Some day, if we live long enough, and finish our very expensive program for our children, which we are now in the midst of, I hope to make Smithfield a Shrine, and restore the graveyard. This is a large order, and I just hope I live long enough to do it. Cousin Preston Davie [*sic*] is much interested in the plan, but at the moment, with conditions as they are, we are not making any great progress. Last summer I had the space measured to build a stone wall round the grave-yard, but the man has never sent in the estimate yet.

The huge powder plant being constructed at Radford, seven miles away, is taking every workman in that part of the country.¹⁴ I am driving up to the mountains, to Blacksburg, next week, and will see what has become of our estimate. We go to Smithfield every summer for about a week, and sometimes drive up there for a few days in between times, as now. There is a little Hotel in Blacksburg called "The William Preston," which is quite comfortable.¹⁵ I must confess it always gives me a shock to see that name in Neon lights. I never thought I should.

From the Highway, Route 11, Blacksburg is only seven miles from Christiansburg, and the College there is very handsome. I believe it is built on original Preston Grant land, and the home of Colonel Robert Preston, called "Solitude[.]" is on the Campus now, and owned by V.P.I. The third Preston place there is called "Whitethorn" and is now owned by the Heath family, a widow and her young son. These three Preston brothers, Robert, James[.] and William Ballard, lived at these three places just outside of Blacksburg, and now Smithfield is the only one left in our family.¹⁶ If you drive to Smithfield[.] you will see the most beautiful country on the world. You probably know this already.

I was delighted to see you had been in touch with Prof. Green about his book. I am keen to see it when it comes out.

Please forgive this long letter, but you see I am writing about my pet hobby and never know when to stop once I get fairly started.

Thank you again for all the items of thrilling interest to me which you have given me. I await with eager delight all the news you will receive from the Wisconsin papers. Who knows what may be unearthed about the early history of the family in those pioneer days? Though Letitia Lewis assures us that nothing can ever be uncovered that is not of the very finest and best. Hurrah for Letitia!

Again please forgive this lengthy epistle! Will you find time to read it? I believe you will.

Sincerely yours,
Janie Preston Boulware Lamb.

April 23, 1941.

Endnotes

1. A copy of the original letter can be found at Historic Smithfield© and was used for this section of *The Smithfield Review*; the original is located at Preston Papers, Joyes Collection, Mss\A\P937, box 6, folder 66, Filson Club Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky (note: this endnote and those that follow were added by the editor).
2. Janie Preston Boulware Lamb (1891–1964) was a fifth-generation descendant of Col. William and Susanna Smith Preston. She donated the Preston plantation, Smithfield, to the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities in 1959, stipulating that the 200-year-old house be opened to the public (“House Joint Resolution No. 167,” 2014 Session [of the Virginia House of Delegates], lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?141+ful+HJ167E+pdf). Lamb was the daughter of Aubin Lee Boulware and Janie Grace Preston Boulware. She married Brockenbrough Lamb in 1915 (Find a Grave, “Janie Preston Boulware Lamb,” www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=84803216).
3. Joseph Adger Stewart (1877–1954) was a businessman in Louisville, Kentucky, who provided genealogical research and correspondence materials regarding his various family lines, which traced back to the eighteenth century or earlier, to collections held by The Filson Historical Society in Louisville (The Filson Guide, “Guide to Selected Manuscript and Photograph Collections of the Filson Club Historical Society,” (1996), www.filsonhistorical.org/archive/guide7.html). He wrote several articles for the historical society’s *Filson Club History Quarterly* from January 1934 to 1936 (The Filson Historical Society, “Index to the *Filson Club History Quarterly*, 1926–2002,” filsonhistorical.org/wp-content/uploads/FCHQ_index1.pdf).
4. Hambleton Tapp’s article on Floyd, entitled “Colonel John Floyd, Kentucky Pioneer,” appeared in the *Filson Club History Quarterly* in January 1941 (The Filson Historical Society, “Index to the *Filson Club History Quarterly*). The subject of Tapp’s article was Col. John Floyd, a native Virginian who became a schoolteacher and surveyor, eventually working at Smithfield for Col. William Preston. Floyd’s second wife was Jane Buchanan, granddaughter of Col. James Patton (for information on Patton, see Jim Glanville and Ryan Mays, “The Mysterious Origins of James Patton, Part I,” *The Smithfield Review* 15 (2011) 35–64) and a niece of Col. Preston. The Floyds moved to Kentucky (Kentucky Genealogy Trails, “Biographies: John Floyd,” 2017, genealogytrails.com/ken/floyd/johnfloyd.html, and Letitia Preston Floyd (Wirt H. Wills, introduction; June Stubbs, transcriber), “John Floyd, Kentucky Hero, and Three Floyds and Prestons of Virginia,” *The Smithfield Review* 2 (1998), 39–52”). One of the couple’s sons, also named John, married his cousin, Letitia Preston, a daughter of Col. Preston (Jim Glanville and Ryan Mays, “A Sketch of Letitia Preston Floyd and Some of Her Letters,” *The Smithfield Review* 19 (2015), 77–120, and Glanville and Mays, “Letitia Preston Floyd: Supplementary Notes,” *The Smithfield Review* 20 (2016), 69–78).
5. For information on Letitia Floyd’s letters, see Glanville and Mays, “A Sketch of Letitia Preston Floyd,” and Glanville and Mays, “Letitia Preston Floyd’s ‘My Dear Rush’ Letter,” *The Smithfield Review* 20 (2016), 79–109.

6. Most likely, Lamb was referring to “The Preston and Virginia Papers of the Draper Collection of Manuscripts” (Madison, Wisc.: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1914), ia800201.us.archive.org/29/items/cu31924029802950/cu31924029802950.pdf.
7. Underlining appears in the original letter.
8. Harvey Lee Price was dean of agriculture at Virginia Polytechnic Institute (VPI, now known as Virginia Tech) from 1908 to 1945. Price “spent hundreds of hours tracing the ancestry of numerous Montgomery County families” (Clara B. Cox, “In Retrospect: Harvey Price: Rebel Turned Role Model,” *Virginia Tech Magazine* 29, no. 4 (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2007).
9. According to Glanville and Mays, Letitia Preston Floyd moved into a log cabin in Burke’s Garden, Virginia, about two years after her husband died and named her new home Cavan (Glanville and Mays, “A Sketch of Letitia Preston Floyd,” 102).
10. Lamb probably was referring to the Floyd-Breckinridge Cemetery in Jefferson County, Kentucky, which was restored in 1918 by The Filson Club (Find a Grave, “Floyd-Breckinridge Cemetery,” www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=cr&CRid=73160).
11. Located in downtown Frankfort, Kentucky, Liberty Hall was the home of the Browns, an important family in Kentucky. The family patriarch, John Brown, a native of Virginia, studied law with Thomas Jefferson; practiced law in Danville, Virginia; and was a member of the Continental Congress, representing Kentucky. He petitioned Congress to separate Kentucky from Virginia, and in 1792, largely as a result of his efforts, Kentucky became the country’s fifteenth state (Kate Hesselden, “Liberty Hall Historic Site,” *ExploreKYHistory*, explorekyhistory.ky.gov/items/show/195). Among contributions to The Filson Historical Society by the recipient of the letter, J. Adger Stewart, were materials related to Liberty Hall.
12. See Laura Jones Wedin, “The Preston Cemetery of Historic Smithfield Plantation,” *The Smithfield Review* 7 (2003), 48–76.
13. The Lamb children were Janie Preston, Brockenbrough “Brokie” Jr., Aubin Boulware, Margaret G., and Sarah Fauntleroy. Mrs. Lamb’s husband, William Brockenbrough Lamb, later became a chancery court judge in Richmond (“Obituaries: Lamb, Brockenbrough Jr.,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, Va.), February 28, 2016, www.richmond.com/obituaries/lamb-brockenbrough/article_a2b05ad6-afcf-5f05-8703-4334563632e3.html, and “James Patton Preston, Smithfield Prestons,” www.suddenlink.net/pages/fpreston/sfjamepr.htm#JANE).
14. Radford Ordnance Works, later known as Radford Army Ammunition Plant, was dedicated in the early 1940s. It was constructed to enable the U.S. to build its ammunition supply as the country began strengthening its national defense in case of war, which already raged in Europe (Dennis Kitts, “The Radford Ordnance Works and the New River Ordnance Plant: The World War II Years,” unpublished manuscript).
15. In “History of Blacksburg, Virginia,” Mrs. S. A. Wingard, the author, mentions the William Preston Hotel, which she said was built on the site of one of three tanneries located in Blacksburg (Wingard, “History of Blacksburg” (1939), spec.lib.vt.edu/bicent/recoll/wingard.htm, accessed April 3, 2018). In a survey of historical architecture in Blacksburg, Gibson Worsham included photographs of the hotel, located on the corner of Main Street and the extension of College Avenue and now occupied by Sharkey’s restaurant, and wrote, “Ellett’s Drugstore Building of 1900 . . . was refaced in 1934 by the Roanoke architectural firm of Eubank and Caldwell to create a portion of the William Preston Hotel” (Gibson Worsham, “A Survey of Historic Architecture in the Blacksburg Historic District, Montgomery County, Virginia” (Blacksburg, Va.: Town of Blacksburg and Virginia Department of Historic Resources, autumn 1996–spring 1997), 40–41, dhr.virginia.gov/pdf_files/SpecialCollections/MY-059_Survey_Historic_AH_BlacksburgHD_1997_WORSHAM_report.pdf, accessed April 3, 2018).
16. For biographical information on the Preston brothers, see Laura Jones Wedin, “A Summary of 19th-Century Smithfield, Part I: The Years Before the Civil War,” *The Smithfield Review* 18 (2014), 79–95. Smithfield was the home of Ballard Preston, while James Preston owned Whitethorn and Robert Preston owned Solitude.