



Smithfield is an important historic property adjacent to the campus of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia. The manor house, constructed around 1774 on the frontier, is a premier example of early American architecture and is one of few such regional structures of that period to survive. It was the last home of Colonel William Preston, a noted surveyor and developer of western lands, who served as an important colonial and Revolutionary War leader. Preston named the 2,000-acre plantation “Smithfield” in honor of his wife, Susanna Smith. Today, the manor house is a museum that is interpreted and administered by a local group of volunteers.

In 1997 *The Smithfield Review* was founded with the purpose of helping to preserve the often neglected history of the region west of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia and adjacent states. We seek articles about important personages and events, reports of archaeological discoveries, and analyses of the social, political, and architectural history of the region. Whenever possible and appropriate, the articles will incorporate letters, speeches, and other primary documents that convey to the reader a direct sense of the past.



*Smithfield in the late nineteenth century.*

*Photo courtesy of Aubin Boulware Lamb, younger son of Janie Preston Boulware Lamb. Mrs. Lamb gave the plantation house at Smithfield to the APVA in 1959. The original of the photograph is located at Mr. Lamb's farm, St. Julien, in Spotsylvania County, Virginia.*

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## A Note from the Editors

One of the most interesting aspects of studying history is to observe how earlier citizens — individually and collectively — overcame the wide variety of challenges that they encountered. This issue of *The Smithfield Review* presents four quite different situations in which adversity and daily challenges were met by our predecessors, with innovation, determination, and action enabling them to survive and prosper. Our first article shows how, in response to a disastrous flood in 1771, a special boat called a “James River batteau” was developed, which, in an era without railroads, was essential to commerce and the developing economy. The second article provides an overview of the life of a man who had a key role in early Virginia history and, in so doing, faced daunting challenges. Next is the story of Christiansburg Institute, a school built for children of newly freed slaves immediately following the Civil War — a school that survived in the midst of all types of adversities. Our final presentation, “The Diaries of James Armistead Otey” demonstrates the hardships that had to be overcome by a nineteenth-century farmer and provides a detailed view of life in Montgomery County in 1889–90.

“Batteaux on Virginia’s Rivers” describes the origin and use of boats specifically designed for navigating shallow rivers. The “James River batteau” (traditionally spelled with a double *t* in Virginia) was designed to carry cargo from the headwaters of Virginia’s major rivers down to the fall point, where the cargo was transferred to larger boats. Although introduced first on the James River, batteaux were also used on the Roanoke, New, Appomattox, Potomac, and Rappahannock, as well as on other smaller rivers. Large companies were formed to operate the transportation system generated by the heavy use of batteaux. The author, Dan Crawford, is the lead interpreter of the batteaux site at Explore Park in Roanoke.

“William Fleming, Patriot” provides us with a brief biography of an eighteenth-century patriot who devoted much of his life to the birth and growth of the new United States. He was a well-educated practicing physician in his early twenties when he emigrated from Scotland to Virginia around 1750. Fleming eventually built his home, Belmont, near Tinker Creek on land that now includes much of the old Monterey Golf Course near Roanoke. He was a friend of William Preston and, until 1774, when Preston began his move from Greenfield to Smithfield, the two men lived only a short distance apart. An interesting historical connection between this article and the previous one is that the heirs of William Fleming sold part of his former land to a company involved with batteaux transportation. The essay was written by Clare White, a retired writer for the *Roanoke Times* and the author of a recently published book, *William Fleming, Patriot*.

“On a Shallow Foundation of Freedom: Building the Campus of the Christiansburg Institute” is a fascinating story of perseverance by persons who were completely dedicated to the education of African-American children. They overcame major financial and social obstacles in creating an educational institution that survived for one hundred years. Founded in 1866 in the tumultuous aftermath of the Civil War, Christiansburg Institute predated county public schools and many state institutions, including Radford University and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. M. Anna Fariello, the author, is an Associate Professor in the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and Curator of the Christiansburg Institute museum.

With the help of John R. Garrett of the Town of Blacksburg, Sara Beth Keough and Blaine Adams have prepared a map of Smithfield Plantation as it existed in 1774 when the manor house was under construction. That map overlays a current map to enable the reader to visualize the approximate location of old property lines in relation to current landmarks. Miss Keough is a graduate student in the Geography Department at Virginia Tech, and Mr. Adams teaches Geography at the University of North Alabama.

Part I of the annotated “The Diaries of James Armistead Otey” reveals a comprehensive description of daily life in late nineteenth-century Montgomery County, Virginia. The second part, to be published in the next issue of *The Smithfield Review*, will present James Otey’s diaries some twenty years later, after he has endured tragic personal experiences. Otey’s

entries include references to numerous county citizens and college personnel during the years 1889 and 1890, thereby providing a rare first-hand glimpse of college and county activities of that era. Frequent references are also made to Smithfield and the Preston family members who lived there. The diaries were edited and annotated by James Hoge, Professor of English at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The ample notes provide detailed descriptions of persons and places, greatly enhance the reader's understanding of the diary entries, and provide an important resource for persons researching Montgomery County history.

This issue also contains a review by Brian D. McKnight, Mississippi State University, of three recent books that discuss Kentucky's involvement in the Civil War from varied viewpoints.

The editors are grateful to Lisa Hammett and Peter Wallenstein for their considerable assistance in preparing this issue.

Hugh G. Campbell, Editor

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Note: Several of the archival photographs provided for this issue are second-generation screened prints, and may exhibit some loss of quality in their reproduction herein.