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## The Genesis and Dissolution of William Preston's Smithfield

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Smithfield, the eighteenth-century plantation home of William and Susanna Preston in Montgomery County, Virginia, consisted of a manor house and unknown other structures at the time of the death of William Preston in 1783. Those structures were probably located near the southern edge of the property of 1,860 acres, in reasonable proximity to the manor house and cemetery. Smithfield in the twenty-first century has been reduced to 11.76 acres owned by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA) and surrounded by former Smithfield lands that are now a part of the campus of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg. What follows is an attempt to chart the progression of the ownership of the lands passed on through several generations of Prestons ultimately to a university campus, a family farm, and a modern housing complex, leaving only 11.76 acres in historic preservation.

A map reconstructing William Preston's Smithfield lands shows 1,770 acres and the source from which Preston put together the tract in 1773-74.<sup>1</sup> Another map showing the original Smithfield tract superimposed on present-day Blacksburg can be found on pages 72-73 of volume 6 of *The Smithfield Review*. Preston's will showed 1,860 acres.<sup>2</sup> The Preston's fourth son and eighth child, James Patton Preston, was born at Smithfield June 21, 1774, the first person born there.<sup>3</sup> He inherited the property in 1783 but his mother retained use of the property until her death in 1823.<sup>4</sup> James Patton Preston prospered, and in 1826 there were about 3,000 acres in the Smithfield estate.<sup>5</sup> He served as governor of Virginia from 1816 to 1819, and died intestate in 1843.

In the division of lands after James Patton Preston's death in 1843<sup>6</sup> the central part of Smithfield went to his son William Ballard

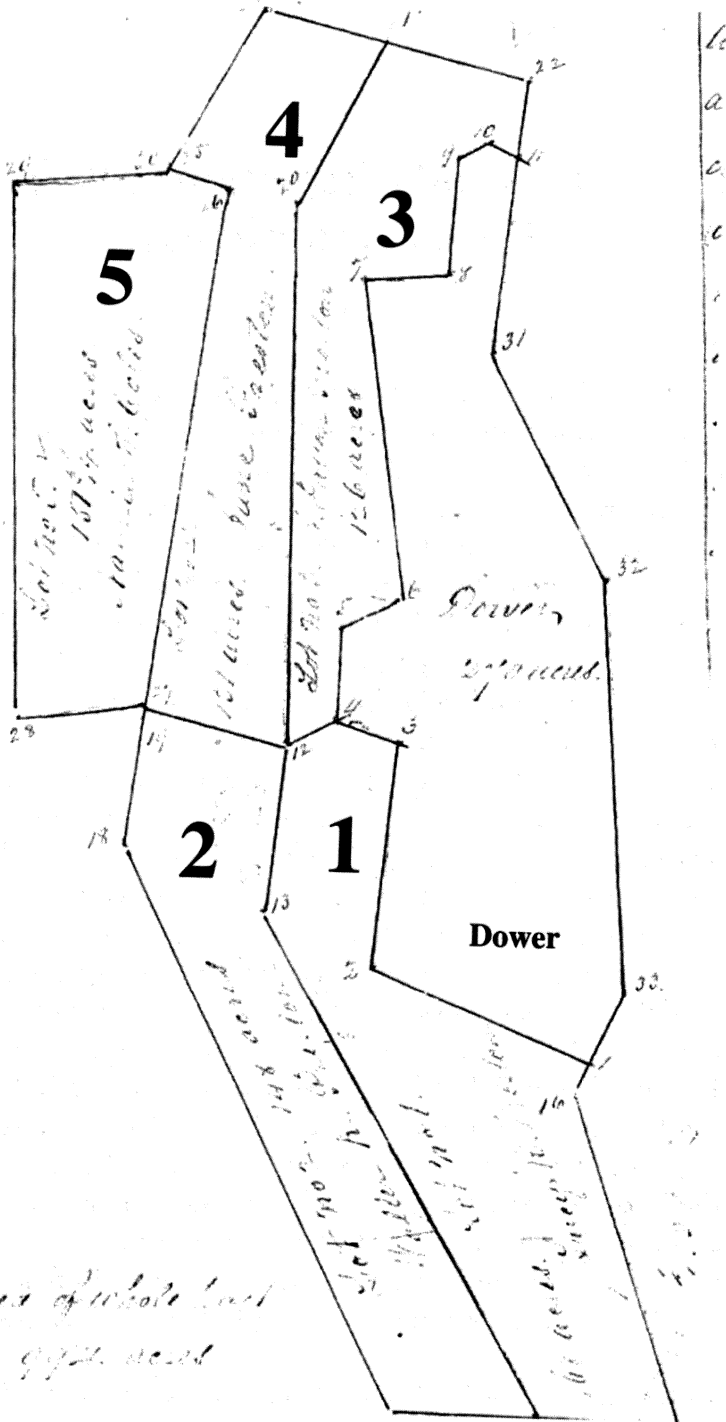


Figure 1

Preston; Solitude, an adjoining part to the north-east, to Robert T. Preston, and the western part — called White Thorn — to James Francis Preston, the latter two also his sons. A fourth surviving child, Catherine Jane Preston, wife of George H. Gilmer, had interests in Smithfield lands, but died childless, and George Gilmer sold her 662-acre share to the three sons of James Patton Preston in 1852.<sup>7</sup>

The White Thorn property was conveyed to Isabella Heth, wife of Stockton Heth, in May 1891,<sup>8</sup> by the heirs of James Francis Preston, who also conveyed some land not part of the Smithfield lands to Heth.<sup>9</sup> Lot 2 of the Smithfield estate of William Ballard Preston was also conveyed to Isabella Heth in May, 1891 (Figure 1).<sup>10</sup> Lot 5 was conveyed to Isabella Heth in 1885<sup>11</sup> from Sarah A. Preston, who had received the land from Walter and Nannie (Preston) Coles in 1866,<sup>12</sup> as Nannie Cole's share in the William Ballard Preston division of land after his death in 1862 (Figure 1).

The Solitude property was first sold by the Barger family to James Patton Preston, who conveyed it to Granville Smith, whose heirs sold it back to J. P. Preston in 1822.<sup>13</sup> It was acquired by Robert T. Preston from James Patton Preston's estate, and 244 acres were sold to the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, the predecessor of Virginia Tech, in 1872.<sup>14</sup>

With the separation of White Thorn and Solitude from Smithfield, William Ballard Preston had 994 acres to be divided, after his death in 1862, among five surviving children.<sup>15</sup> The Commissioners of the estate set aside 270 acres in dower land for the use of the widow Lucy Redd Preston for her lifetime.<sup>16</sup> They then assigned five lots as follows; lot 1 to daughter Lucy Redd Preston, 168 acres; lot 2 to Waller Redd Preston, 131 acres; lot 3 to James Patton Preston (1845-1911), 126 acres; lot 4 to Jane Grace Preston, 131 acres; and lot 5 to Anne Taylor (Nannie) Preston, 151½ acres (Figure 1). The fate of the five parcels is the substance of the rest of this narrative.

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*Figure 1. A photocopy showing the division of William Ballard Preston's land (Smithfield), 1866. The lots are identified on the map as follows: Lot 1: 168 acres to Lucy R. Preston; Lot 2: 148 acres to Waller R. Preston; Lot 3: 126 acres to J. Patton Preston; Lot 4: 131 acres to Jane Preston; Lot 5: 151¾ acres to Nannie T. Coles; and the Dower Lot of 270 acres. From Montgomery County Will Book 10, p 116. (Lot numbers superimposed on original deed book map.)*

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As stated above, Lots 2 and 5 eventually were sold to Isabella Heth, wife of Stockton Heth, and — along with the White Thorn holdings of heirs of James Francis Preston — became the Heth family holdings.

Lot 1 was assigned to Lucy Redd Preston, who married William R. Beale in 1866.<sup>17</sup> The Beales executed a deed of trust on this 168-acre lot on January 22, 1884 to William Ballard Preston (1858-1901, the son of James Francis Preston, the original owner of White Thorn).<sup>18</sup> The Beales retained this land, however, until it was purchased from them by Aubin L. Boulware in March 1893, who also purchased their undivided one-fourth interest in the 270 acres of dower land, which had been maintained for Lucy Redd Preston, widow of William Ballard Preston.<sup>19</sup>

Lot 2, consisting of 143 or 148 acres was the tract assigned to Waller Redd Preston.<sup>20</sup> This tract was purchased at public sale from the heirs of Waller R. Preston by William R. Beale and wife Lucy Redd (Preston) Beale in 1878.<sup>21</sup> It was conveyed to William Ballard Preston (1858-1901) in 1884,<sup>22</sup> who conveyed it to Hugh C. Preston<sup>23</sup> in 1885, who conveyed it to trustees, who conveyed it to Waller Staples, William Ballard Preston, and his wife Bessie in 1889,<sup>24</sup> who sold it in 1891 to Isabella Heth<sup>25</sup>; thus it became part of the Heth's White Thorn.

Lot 3, the tract assigned to James Patton Preston (1845-1911), son of William Ballard Preston, contained 126 acres. J. P. Preston apparently sold some of his land to Walter and Lucy Coles, as they transferred their share of this land to A. L. Boulware in 1893,<sup>26</sup> at the time that J. P. Preston conveyed his interest in Smithfield land to said A. L. Boulware.<sup>27</sup>

Lot 4 was the tract assigned to Jane Grace Preston, who married Aubin L. Boulware in 1878.<sup>28</sup> This tract was retained by the Boulwares and added to Lots 1 and 3 which had been purchased by Boulware in the accretion of Smithfield lands. The final piece of property to fill out the 695-acre estate held by A. L. Boulware was the 270-acre dower land held for the benefit and use of Lucy Redd Preston, widow of William Ballard Preston. Lucy Redd Preston died at Smithfield on

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*Figure 2. A plat of the division of Janie Preston Boulware Lamb lands as sold to Virginia Tech and deeded to APVA, 1959–1998. From plat sheet 4-45.*

September 17, 1891; this death ended the use of Smithfield as a Preston family primary residence.<sup>29</sup>

The dower lands remained undivided. In acquiring the lands of Lot 1 and Lot 3 respectively, A. L. Boulware also purchased the dower equity of the other heirs when he purchased their own shares.<sup>30</sup> In the case of the lands sold to Isabella Heth, the undivided dower equities were not sold.<sup>31</sup> Thus, upon the death of Lucy Redd Preston, widow of William Ballard Preston, the entire dower land of 270 acres fell to the Boulwares.

Lot 5, the so-called Coles land, was sold to Sarah A. Preston in March 1866,<sup>32</sup> who deeded it to Isabella Heth on September 1, 1885.<sup>33</sup>

Adding the 270 acres of dower land to the 168 acres of Lot 1, the 126 acres of Lot 3, and the 131 acres of Lot 4, A. L. Boulware, husband of Jane Grace Preston, had accumulated the 695 acres which made up the Smithfield of the 1890s. Apparently in order to consolidate an uninterrupted tract, he purchased in April 1891 a four-acre block that had been sold from the James P. Preston Lot 3 to one Thomas Wilson and subsequently to O. W. Norton, then to N. R. Stanger and then to Boulware.<sup>34</sup>

Janie Preston Boulware in 1904 put the 695 acres of Smithfield in trust<sup>35</sup> to George Thompson Boulware, trustee, for the use and benefit of said Janie Preston Boulware during her lifetime, with the remainder to go at her death to her children, B. Preston Boulware, Aubin L. Boulware, and Janie Preston Boulware; in case any of the children pre-deceased her leaving no issue, the share of the predeceased would go to the survivors of said children. The first child to die, Aubin L. Boulware, died in 1924 with no issue.<sup>36</sup> At the death of Janie P. Boulware, the life tenant, on April 3, 1930,<sup>37</sup> the trust land was vested in B. Preston Boulware and Janie B. Lamb (Mrs. Brockenbrough Lamb). B. Preston Boulware died on June 21, 1956, intestate with no issue, leaving Janie Preston Boulware Lamb as the sole surviving heir.<sup>38</sup>

The resulting Smithfield lands were divided into twelve parcels,<sup>39</sup> bounded today approximately by Price's Fork Road in Blacksburg, South Gate Drive on the Virginia Tech campus, Duck Pond Drive on the campus, and Plantation Road, then a farm road on the Virginia Tech campus (Figure 2). Parcel 11, 4.65 acres containing the manor house in the middle of these 12 parcels, had been deeded to the APVA in 1959,<sup>40</sup> and Parcel 12 of 7.11 acres was deeded to APVA in 1979,<sup>41</sup>

with one acre in Parcel 12 reserved to the Lamb family, which one acre was deeded unconditionally to the APVA in 1998.<sup>42</sup> The surrounding parcels were conveyed to Virginia Tech in a series of transactions: Parcel 1 in 1967,<sup>43</sup> Parcel 2 in 1968,<sup>44</sup> Parcels 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9 in 1969<sup>45</sup>; and Parcels 8 and 10 in 1969.<sup>46</sup> Thirty acres of what had been part of Parcels 5, 6, 7 and 8, and at the time owned by Virginia Tech, were condemned in 1969 for development of the Route 460 bypass.<sup>47</sup>

The two accompanying figures show distribution of William Ballard Preston's Smithfield lands in 1866<sup>48</sup> and Janie P. Boulware Lamb's distribution of Smithfield lands to Virginia Tech and the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities from 1959 to 1998.<sup>49</sup> Although Figure 2 includes at least parts of the eastern lots (3, 4, and dower) of the land shown in Figure 1, for various reasons an exact overlay cannot be produced. We can say, however, that the Route 460 Bypass passes through the Parcels 5, 6, 7, and 8 on a line approximately midway between the Smithfield Parcels 11 and 12 and Plantation Road in a southeast to northwest path (Figure 2).

## Endnotes

All references to legal records refer to Montgomery County Circuit Court Records and will be noted as WB for will books, DB for deed books, and PS for Plat Sheets.

1. Kegley, Mary B., and F. B. Kegley 1980. *Early Adventurers on the Western Waters* (Orange, Virginia), p. 247.
2. WB B, p. 56-61.
3. Floyd Bible 1838. Letitia Preston Floyd's Bible VHS 1M1556: 4F6695:2. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.
4. DB B, p. 55.
5. DB IJ, p. 404.
6. DB P, p. 186, 30 July 1852; Kegley and Kegley, p. 255.
7. DB P, p. 186; Kegley and Kegley, p. 255.
8. DB 37, p. 594.
9. DB 37, p. 594; DB V, part 2, pp. 406-407.
10. DB 38, p. 207.
11. DB 37, p. 598.
12. DB R, p. 392; DB Z, p. 25.
13. Kegley and Kegley, p. 253; DB T, p. 14.
14. Kegley and Kegley, p. 253; DB T, p. 14.

15. WB10, p. 116.
16. WB10 p. 116.
17. Dorman, John Frederick. *The Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield in Virginia* (Louisville, Kentucky: The Filson Club, 1982), p. 263.
18. DB X, p. 549. William Ballard Preston (1858-1901) was the son of James Francis Preston, the original owner of White Thorn.
19. DB 41, p. 569.
20. WB 10, p. 116.
21. DB X, p. 551.
22. DB X, p. 551.
23. DB Z, p. 22.
24. DB 28, p. 470.
25. DB X, p. 551; DB 28, p. 470; DB 38, p. 207.
26. DB 41, p. 490.
27. DB 41, p. 570.
28. Montgomery County Marriage Register 1, p. 54.
29. Gravestone, Preston Cemetery, Smithfield.
30. DB 41, pp. 569-570.
31. DB X, p. 551.
32. DB RP, p. 392.
33. DB 37, p. 598.
34. DB 39, p. 111.
35. DB 51, p. 445.
36. DB 274, p. 183-185.
37. DB 274, p. 183-185.
38. DB 274, p. 183-185.
39. PS 4, p. 45.
40. DB 274, p. 183.
41. DB 421, p. 268; PB 9, p. 205.
42. DB 1008, p. 842.
43. DB 274, p. 183.
44. DB 282, p. 863.
45. DB 291, p. 54.
46. DB 291, p. 57.
47. DB 290, p. 655.
48. WB 10, p. 116.
49. PS 4-45.