



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 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. Today, Smithfield 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.

A Note from the Editors

The choices made by individuals and societal institutions prior to the Civil War had enormous, and often horrendous, consequences. As one of our articles points out, thirty years before the war, the Virginia legislature debated a bill that would eliminate slavery in Virginia. William Ballard Preston, a Delegate and third generation owner of Smithfield, urged the legislature to remove “the curse of slavery ... because it is subversive of the well being of society... .” The Virginia legislature, however, chose to ignore the warning and to keep slavery. Thirty-five years later, Virginia was divided into two states, its economy shattered, and many of its citizens maimed or killed. The first four articles of this volume of *The Smithfield Review* examine other choices and consequences as western Virginians coped with various underlying issues of that tumultuous period. Two of them examine the crucial, but not well known, role that Appalachia played in Civil War politics. The other two articles are on a more personal level. They document the impact of the war on two white families and one black family as they tried to cope with the consequences of prior choices made by others. The fifth, and final, article provides a comprehensive overview of prehistoric southwest Virginia.

“Reconfiguring Virginia” examines the issues and events that led to the formation of the state of West Virginia by the northwestern counties of prewar Virginia. The citizens of those counties and their leaders possessed goals and held views that may be somewhat surprising to the reader. It is fascinating to observe how various points of view, when churned by the political process and solidified by war, produce results that may not have been foreseen or desired by a majority of citizens at an earlier time. It is also interesting to notice some very strange political alliances as strong-willed groups pressed their special agendas. The author, George Gilliam, a practicing attorney in Charlottesville, Virginia, is the producer and principal writer of Central Virginia’s Public Television documentary series, “The Ground Beneath Our Feet: Virginia’s History Since the Civil War.” He has written several books and is a Ph.D. candidate in the Corcoran Department of History at the University of Virginia.

“Hickmans and Servants: Two Appalachian Families” tells the story of the relationship between a family of slaves and their masters’ family. The story spans more than one hundred years and is told through excerpts from surviving letters and documents of the Hickman family of Bath County, Virginia — not a region that one normally associates with slavery. The family papers provide vivid documentation of how both struggling families coexisted. We find sobering accounts of the treatment of people as property. Yet, after the slaves were freed, the earlier personal ties and the necessities of daily life led to continued association for many years. The old Hickman documents were inherited by the author of the article, William Gabriel of Florence, Montana. Dr. Gabriel grew up in Virginia, graduated from Virginia Tech, and received his Ph.D. degree from the University of Montana.

“The Grinch That Stole Southern History: Anthem for an Appalachian Perspective” frames an alternative way of viewing the history of the South, one that emphasizes the decisive role played by Appalachia at various points in the past. Arguing that much of southern history can best be understood as a three-cornered struggle among blackbelt whites, blackbelt blacks, and the people of Appalachia, the author argues against what he calls a “plantation approach to southern history” (the “Grinch” of the essay’s title), and more particularly a white plantation perspective. The author is Peter Wallenstein, who grew up in New Hampshire and earned his B.A. from Columbia University and Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins. For the past seventeen years, he has been on the faculty in the history department at Virginia Tech, where his courses have included Appalachian history, Virginia history, and the history of the South.

“Thomas Winton Fisher, Confederate Soldier and 19th Century Pilgrim from Wythe County, Virginia: Part 2” presents the concluding set of letters written by a farmer from Wytheville, Virginia. The letters were compiled from a variety of sources by Darlene Brown Simpson, his great-granddaughter. Fisher presents vivid accounts of the life of a Confederate soldier as he copes with battle, boredom, and unbelievable hardship. His writings provide us with insights into his innermost thoughts as he faces carnage in battle and eventual defeat after four years of service. Yet, he survives and returns home to pick up the remnants of his former life.

“Prehistoric Southwest Virginia: Aboriginal Occupation, Land Use, and Environmental Worldview” summarizes the archaeological evidence of native tribes in the region, assesses the impact of their use of the land on the environment, and reaches this conclusion:

All of this behavior and its consequences stand in marked contrast to subsequent Euroamerican occupation. And while the fact of comparatively smaller Indian populations partially explains this contrast, the more profound basis for Indian behavior and attitude toward the environment lay in their view of the world and their concept of their own place in it.

The author is Will Sarvis of Eureka, California, who received the B.A. and M.A. degrees in history from Virginia Tech and did post-graduate work at the University of Virginia, University of Missouri-Columbia, and the Mandarin Training Center in Taiwan.

Because three of the five articles in this issue pertain in some way to slavery, the reader may find it helpful to read the Book Review first. Tom Costa of the University of Virginia’s College at Wise provides an excellent review of Ira Berlin’s *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*.

The editors express gratitude to Robert E. Stephenson and Robert A. Paterson for their assistance in preparing this issue.

Hugh G. Campbell, Editor

Editorial Board:

Clara Cox

Charles E. Modlin

Lon Savage

Charles L. Taylor