

The Pittsylvania Packet

Summer 2006

Number 61



Pittsylvania Historical Society

Chatham, Virginia

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MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

SATURDAY, JULY 8th is the date for the 2006 Pittsylvania Pilgrimage Tour, 8:45 a.m.–4 p.m. It will be the Summer Meeting of the Pittsylvania Historical Society (if we have *enough participants*) and will depart from the parking lot adjacent to People's Bank on South Main Street, Chatham.

On an air-conditioned bus we will explore many sites of significant local history, driving northeast on modern-day routes that developed from Pittsylvania County's earlier Stagecoach Road and Hickey's Road. (Cars cannot be permitted to follow this bus.) Watch the *Star-Tribune* for additional information about visits to homes depicting the eras during which they were built and other historic sites we will visit. Also, descriptive information is available in the "upcoming events" section of <http://www.PittsylvaniaHistoricalSociety.org/>

The bus tour ticket for \$35 includes a gourmet lunch and refreshments during our visits.

An alternate treat for members or guests who cannot spend the day on the bus is the opportunity to join this tour at 12:30 for an exceptional lunch and view of all the rooms at the LAVALETTE HOUSE in Gretna. This ticket is \$20.

The deadline to procure tickets is Friday, June 30th from SUSAN WORLEY at the Star-Tribune offices on Main Street in Chatham; LANGHORNE JONES (434-432-9261); or MARY CATHERINE PLASTER (434-432-8945). If you wish to order by mail, please do so by Friday, June 23rd, designating bus or lunch on your check, to Pittsylvania Historical Society Bus Tour, P. O. Box 1148, Chatham, VA 24531. (Tickets ordered by mail will be held until arrival at the bus departure site or lunch location.)

**The Virginia Historical Society to Open
Beaver's Mill Wheel Exhibit on July 22nd, 2006
in Richmond, Virginia**

The "Virginians at Work" exhibit will commence with a free open house on July 22nd. This new exhibit will feature sections on Virginia's Colonial Economy (1600–1780); Commercial Economy (1780–1865); Industrial Economy (1865–1945); and Service Economy (1945–2006). A section of Pittsylvania County's own Beaver's Mill waterwheel (which is believed to be the oldest surviving American wooden wheel) will be on display.

The exhibit is planned to be continued long-term at the museum and visits will be free on Sundays; on other days the charge is \$5.00 for adults, \$4.00 for seniors (\$2.00 on Tuesdays for museum galleries only); and \$3.00 for students and children.

The Virginia Historical Society is located at 428 North Boulevard, Richmond, Virginia. The museum is open Monday to Saturday 10 am to 5 pm and on Sunday from 1 pm to 5 pm (galleries only; library and shop closed).

Deadline for Submissions

Please submit any announcements, articles, etc. for the next issue of *The Pittsylvania Packet* by September 1st, 2006. Queries and articles are always welcome!

Memorial Day Ceremony at 1813 Clerk's Office

By Susan Worley

“Memorial Day provides an opportunity to honor those who paid the price for freedom,” said Robert E. Friend Jr., who was guest speaker at the Pittsylvania Historical Society’s Memorial Day service Sunday afternoon. “We must stop and remember what those valuable warriors were fighting for,” he said, “and honor them for dying to preserve the values, morals, and freedoms enjoyed today.”

Friend, who is pastor at Mount Vernon United Methodist Church in Danville, has combined military service with service to God by serving as a chaplain in the military. He recently retired from the U.S. Army after 23 years of service. Friend explained the significance of observing Memorial Day, reminding the 40 people in attendance that it is not a day to honor veterans. It is a day to honor those who gave their life in service to their country. “This is a time to honor those who never experienced the benefits of their labor, but gave all that we might enjoy what we have,” he added. “Memorial Day,” said Friend, “was first observed on May 30, 1868, when an effort was made to decorate the graves of those who died in the Civil War. On March 11, 1950, Congress requested the president call upon the American people to pray for peace and to set aside the last Monday in May at 3 pm to pause and remember those who gave their lives to preserve freedoms Americans enjoy.”

“They loved us enough to give their lives for our freedom and it is up to us to make sure they did not die in vain,” said Friend. The afternoon service also included an update on the society’s historical pre-

servation and restoration projects. The latest museum exhibit was dedicated. It features the display of two Army uniforms, one worn by Walter Cocke of Gretna during World War I and the other worn by Lt. Col. James Powell Morgan of Danville who served in World War II and the Korean War.

Cocke, whose uniform was donated by Suzanne Brown of Gretna, wore the uniform when he was an aide to General Pershing. He was the son of Beverley and Sally Cocke of Gretna and was married to Nannie Bennett Cocke.

Morgan, whose wife Dean donated his uniform and attended the ceremony, was a 1940 graduate of Hargrave Military Academy and answered the call from the government to serve a year in the U. S. Army Coast Artillery at Fort Story. He was home for three months when Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese and he was called back to Fort Story. Morgan began training as a pilot in the Air Corps, but just before going to flight training, the president said there would be no more pilots and he went into the infantry. He was assigned to the Field Artillery and sent to France and Czechoslovakia. Morgan received the Croix de Guerre medal and participated in the liberation of France by Gen. Charles De Gaulle. He remained in the National Guard after World War II. His unit was called up again in the Korean War. Morgan received six Battle Stars and a Bronze Star. He served his country for 33 years and retired as a lieutenant colonel.

Restoration Efforts

Status of the restoration of the Southern Railway Depot in Chatham was reported. It will house a Veteran's Museum dedicated to area servicemen. Through the securement of grant money, work has begun on removing the roof prior to replacement. The

museum will be a repository for servicemen's records and artifacts and will be a location to dispense the collective history of all area men and women who served in the military and offer recognition of the families who contributed to the war effort.

Preserving Memories of the Past

Society board member and teacher Patrick Touart reported that his students at Tunstall High School are collecting information from veterans. The students are researching biographies which are archived and recorded. "As someone who sleeps under the blanket of freedom provided by those who have served, I feel it is my obligation and most importantly my responsibility to make sure it is preserved," said Touart. "When our children of the future ask what it was like to be a soldier in Korea, they will be able to pull up a video of their great, great grandfather and see them talking about it, and learn," he added.

Society board member and county archivist Desmond Kendrick spoke about his work of preserving family scrapbooks and other county records. He stressed the importance of teaching children about their family history. "You need to teach your children their family and community history," said Kendrick. "This is the legacy that you leave. Whatever you preserve today, 100 years from now will be worth something in history."

David Newman, leader of the Korean Happy Warriors in Danville, spoke about the Veteran's War Memorial which is being constructed at Dan Daniel Park in Danville. "The first goal of the War Memorial is to honor veterans and the second goal is to leave a history lesson for generations to come," said Newman.

*Editor's Note: Special thanks to the **Star-Tribune** for allowing us to reprint the above article.*

**Third Lieutenant Dryden Wright, Pigg
River Invincibles, Co. C2, 46th Virginia
Infantry:
Letters to Home—September 1863 to
April 1864 (Part II)**

by Stephen Thornton

Introduction

Dryden Wright's letters were recently found while researching soldier letters at The Library of Virginia. They were acquired in 2003 after having been sold on the internet to a historic-minded person who, in turn, offered them to the library. The article shows us how much information can be gleaned from four "letters to home" – much of it highly useful to the examining historian in documenting the company's service.

Highly interested in all of the various companies that were formed from the Pigg River area, Co. C2, 46th Virginia Infantry is of intense interest to the author because of its association with a seldom-studied brigade. I am working on graduate research and writing and attempting to focus, when possible, on the county or general area. Current project includes creating a detailed map of the northwestern portion of the county in 1860. Determination of public or private roads and farm locations in this area, and/or information (diaries, letters, artifacts, oral history, photos – including buildings) concerning any soldiers from the area urgently sought for assistance in current and future projects.

If you have any information to share, please contact Stephen Lee Thornton, 10218 Natural Bridge Rd., Richmond, VA, 23236 or thorntons@vcu.edu

At the end of the last article, the company had reached Charleston, South Carolina on September 18th, 1863. We resume:

Once at Charleston, the 46th Virginia was stationed at Camp Duke along the Wappoo Cut which joined Wappoo Creek to the Stono River only several miles

southwest of the city.¹ Wise's Brigade was positioned to protect the Charleston & Savannah Railroad from attack along the Stono River and to be within supporting distance of James' Island. The regiment was ordered over to the island on November 4th, bivouacking at Dill's Bluff that evening before coming to camp the next day "on the Fort Johnson road in readiness to support the commands at Fort[s] Johnson, Haskell, Ryan and Tatum."² Wright described the camp's surroundings on the following day:

Camp on Jams's Island³
near Charleston S.C.
Nov. 6th 1863

Dear Pa. It is again my privilege and my duty without waiting to hear from home, since I wrote, to commit to mail the words I am well.⁴ Since I wrote we have moved to this place which is near or that is one mile west of Ft Johnson. We have a nice camp here though the water is warm and not very good. By walking a few hundred yards to get to the edge of the field we can see the whole Yankee Fleet and thier Monitors and also Batteries Gregg Wagner +c +c +c.⁵ We can see fort Sumpter as the Yankees fire and see also the Shots Strike the fort. although they throw some 300 shot + shell during day and night and more than half takes effect or that is strike the fort it is believe they do not injure it of any consequence but only batters it down in a more compact bulk thereby rendering it more formidable than when first built.⁶ On yesterday I was out on the edge of the field up in a pine tree where with the aid of a spy glass which I procured I could see all over the enemys camp on Morris's Island and I tell you it was a right grand sight to view.⁷ This is the One Hundred and seventeenth day of the siege and it is still progressing day and night with seeming little effect since the evacuation of

Morris's Island. We were reviewed on Monday last by the president who was here on his way to Richmond from Tennessee. he left for Richmond Friday morning.⁸ I heard that Buck had left for this place. we need Him very much here as things are scarce and hard to get such as tobacco paper Ink Pens eatables +c. I am anxious to hear from home and the people in the neighborhood also. as I have nothing of interest to write I will close.

Give my love to all.
Your affectionate son til death
Dryden Wright⁹

The next day, the regiment moved up to Fort Johnson where they waited under arms for seven days; ready for an attack that did not materialize. They returned to Camp Duke on November 14th after being relieved by the 4th Virginia Heavy Artillery (later designated the 34th Virginia Infantry).¹⁰ Although he could not have known it at the time, Wright was looking at the enemy's camp where fellow Pittsylvanian Captain Isaac Coles of the 6th Virginia Cavalry was held prisoner under friendly fire as one of "The Immortal 600."¹¹

Buck was likely another servant on the Wright plantation bringing a load of provisions to sell. Although they were not among those slave and free blacks who rendered official auxiliary service in various capacities to the Confederate army, the individual contributions of Buck, Lewis and others were of inestimable value to the soldiers in the field and are often unnoticed but for similar letters.

Wright's next correspondence was written after the brigade had shifted further down the Savannah Turnpike, still protecting the railroad. Covering a considerable area, Wise dispersed his regiments to cover the approaches from Federal-held Kiawah and

Edisto Islands. The 46th Virginia's base was located at Adam's Run at a camp known to the men as Camp Dismal.¹² In mid-January 1864, companies C and K were sent to Willtown on the Edisto River "to strengthen batteries and fortifications," where they were apparently short on rations but had comfortable quarters in the abandoned houses of the town.¹³ Recalled for an expected move on February 19, the detachment rejoined the regiment on the next day and the 46th Virginia was sent on February 22 to cover from Rantowles on the turnpike to Church Flats on the Stono River; an area previously covered by the 59th Virginia.¹⁴ An action fought on John's Island in February in which the regiment arrived too late to participate was apparently missed altogether by the Willtown detachment, a fact not readily discerned from either the Official Records or Collins' 46th Virginia Infantry, but documented by Wright's letter.

Battery William Washington
near Rantowles Station C. + S. R.R.
February 22nd 1864

Dear Pa. Your very kind letter was recd on yesterday by the hands of Davy Ramsay and Bettie's was recd a few days ago dated 10th Inst.¹⁵ I have no news of interest to write tho I feel it my duty to let you hear from me. I guess you have doubtless heard before this of the little skirmish in which a part of our Brigade was engaged on John's Island on the 9th 10th + 11th Inst with it is believed about 2 Brigades of the enemy. We also had a Battalion of Cavalry + one of Artillery engaged. The skirmishing commenced on the 9th Inst between the cavalry on our side with some Infantry of the 59th Va Regt of our Brigade + the enemy's Infantry. Together with these and our artillery our forces succeeded in keeping them in check until the morning of the 10th when the most

of our Brigade and Colquitt's Ga Brigade reached their support and all things were made ready to attack them when "lo" it was found the enemy had left the Island in great haste. Our company being detached at Wiltown at that time did not receive orders in time to reach the Yanks before they had left but was turned back to Wiltown on its way. none of our Regiment was engaged at all. The casualties on our side were 4 or 5 killed some Inf + some Cavalry and some ten or a dozen wounded. Several dead Yanks were found on the field stripped of their clothing from head to foot which I readily guess was done by some of our ragged Boys. also a good many amputated limbs were found about + in their abandoned Hospital. A few days ago while at Wiltown we received orders to hold ourselves, that is our Regiment, in readiness to move to Savannah Ga or somewhere in Florida and the next morning we were ordered to relieve the 59th Va Regt at Church Flats near this place which we did and myself and 7 men detached here to guard this Battery and I guess the 59th + several other Regts have been sent to Savannah in our stead.¹⁶ I cannot come home until sometime in March as only four Officers from the Regiment are allowed to be absent at a time and three are already absent and there are two more entitled to go before me who said to me yesterday when I proposed to them to exchange turns with either of them that they were like myself they had important business calling them home as early as possible and could not exchange. If the system of giving furloughs continues which I think will I will be very sure to come before very long. If you think you cannot wait until I come you can of course do as you think best. I see today an act passed by congress of which Crisp might take the advantage and avail himself of its privileges and thereby exempt himself from service which I enclose for your

perusal + consideration which I suppose is the same grounds from which he has already applied for exemption. I hope he may be granted an exemption on one pretext if not the other. It is thought by some that we will yet be sent to Savannah or Florida if the enemy continues to press upon this section as he has done within the last week or two tho his efforts + assaults have been successfully repulsed on every occasion at Lake City Florida. The weather here is tolerably cool at present notwithstanding I could send you in this letter by putting myself to some inconvenience a February Boquett of various kinds of Flowers. As my news is exhausted + your patience doubtless wearied I must close with my best love to all and remaining your affectionate son.

D Wright

P.S. Tell Bettie I will answer her letter soon.¹⁷

Editor's Note: the article will be continued in the next issue.

(1) Darrell L. Collins, *46th Virginia Infantry*, H.E. Howard Publishing Co., Lynchburg, VA, 1992, p. 46. The camp was named after the regiment's colonel, R.T.W. Duke of Albemarle Co. This access to the Ashley River was literally a back door into Charleston Harbor and accessible from Federal-held islands.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 47.

(3) James' Island. Wright's letters are transcribed without using [sic] to denote the occasional mistakes in his spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. Like most writers of the period, Wright used a wider spacing between sentences rather than use periods. In several instances, Wright used a quotation-like mark (") to denote a new sentence where wider spacing was not used. Periods have been added for the sake of clarity, but capitalization or lack thereof has been left as written.

(4) "I am well" is twice underlined in Wright's letter. His service record indicates that Wright was absent sick on several occasions; one instance was likely a life-saving absence.

- (5) Batteries Gregg and Wagner had been renamed Forts Putnam and Strong since the Federal capture of Morris Island in September.
- (6) Confederate artist Conrad Wise Chapman was attached to Wise's Brigade and painted many well-known scenes from the Charleston defenses which Wright describes. The Flag of Sumter, October 20, 1863 shows the condition of the fort at the time. Chapman's life and art is the subject of an excellent work by Ben L. Bassham, *Conrad Wise Chapman: Artist & Soldier of the Confederacy*, Kent State University Press, Kent, OH, 1998.
- (7) Wright is not entirely correct, as attacks on the city started in December 1861 and ended when the city was evacuated in February 1865. Constant fighting and shelling (essentially the siege) had been going on for 120 days since the initial attacks on Morris Island of July 10, 1863.
- (8) Incidents between President Davis and General Wise occurred throughout the war and were a contributing factor to the brigade's inactive service. One incident was the result of Wise's comments to Davis after the visit. See Collins, *46th Virginia*, p. 46. For the amazing career of the planter, politician, public servant and soldier, see Barton H. Wise, *The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia, 1806-1876*, Macmillan, New York, 1899.
- (9) Wright Letters, Library of Virginia.
- (10) Collins, *46th Virginia*, p. 47.
- (11) For Coles' recollection, see Maude Carter Clement, ed., *War Recollections of The Confederate Veterans of Pittsylvania County Virginia, 1861-1865*, pp. 71-2. A longer version is available in the University of Virginia archives.
- (12) Various company correspondences in the CSR from this period denote "Camp Dismal."
- (13) Collins, *46th Virginia*, p. 47. Willtown (a.k.a. Wiltown, Willstown, Willstown Bluff) was the site of a town laid out in the 17th century. As Charleston began to flourish as a port town, Willtown began a slow decline throughout the 18th century. There were only a few buildings left in the town by the mid-19th century when the Confederate army began constructing a battery along the bluff. The only action at the site was in July 1863 when a diversionary force ascended the river and attacked the battery (1 32-pdr. siege gun, 1 24-pdr. rifled, banded), causing the remaining civilian population to abandon the town. The central part of one modern home was the church parsonage, which the owner relates was occupied by the troops who broke up the staircase for firewood. Besides the parsonage, a single column from the old church, several colonial-era tombstones in the yard and the extant earthwork are all that remain from old Willtown.
- (14) Collins, *46th Virginia*, p. 49. While Collins states that the detached companies returned to Adam's Run, Wright's letter leads

one to believe that they may have gone to Church Flats directly from Willtown.

(15) Private David B. Ramsey, brother of William H. Ramsey (former captain of the Pigg River Greys, Co. E, 57th Virginia Infantry, then lieutenant colonel of the regiment). David was an original volunteer with the company in June 1861 and was killed in action on the Howlett Line on June 2, 1864. There is no furlough or leave on his service record – another bit of information revealed by the documents. Bettie C. Wright is Dryden's sister, 17 years old on the 1860 Census record.

(16) Wise sent the 26th Virginia and 59th Virginia to aid Brigadier General Joseph Finnegan in Florida, who had just repulsed a larger Federal force at the Battle of Olustee on February 20, 1864.

(17) Wright Letters, LVA.

Queries

I am doing research on the Hatchett families who were in Pittsylvania County between 1850 and 1890. If anyone has information to share, please contact me.

Jane Hatchett Nast, 6404 Keith Springs Circle,
Louisville, KY 40207, phone number 502-893-7148,
e-mail nastr@bellsouth.net

Pittsylvania Historical Society Books

The Historical Society books are currently available for purchase from the following retailers. Suggested retail prices do not include shipping, handling, or tax.

Chatham Books, 10 North Main Street, P. O. Box 71, Chatham, VA 24531, 434-432-2488, chathambooks@gamewood.net, <http://www.ChathamBooks.us/>

Danville Museum of Fine Arts & History, 975 Main Street, Danville, VA 24541, 434-793-5644

Mitchells Publications, P. O. Box 429, Chatham, VA 24531-0429, 434-432-0595, toll-free 1-800-967-2867, <http://www.MitchellsPublications.com/>

News and Novels, 3282 Riverside Drive, Danville, VA 24541, 434-793-3407

Shadetree Rare Books, P. O. Box 994, Chatham Antique Gallery, Chatham, VA 24531, 434-432-1400, hhurt@adelphia.net, <http://www.ShadetreeRareBooks.com/>

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Maud Carter Clement, *History of Pittsylvania County* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$22.

Madelene Fitzgerald, *Pittsylvania Homes and History of the Past* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$18.

Madelene Fitzgerald and Frances Hallam Hurt, *18th Century Landmarks of Pittsylvania County, Virginia* (Softcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$11.

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