



# Historic Perspectives

Preservation of Prince William County's Historic Resources

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## PRINCE WILLIAM

Historic Preservation

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 Preservation Division

### NEWSLETTER STAFF

Editor in Chief: Dan Goldstein

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## Who Were They?

As we reflect on the 275 years Rippon Lodge Historic Site has existed, there are still many people connected to the homestead yet to be discovered. Over the past year, staff continued its research efforts to find more information on those who lived and worked at the site. Whether it is newspaper advertisements from the Library of Congress, or primary resources at Prince William County archives, new vaults of information are leading to new discoveries, and even more mysteries. One of the most exciting things that a historian experiences in their career is the discovery of new primary sources. These sources can include gravestones, probates, inventories, and interviews just to name a few. Some of the new primary documents we have found include references to former owners of Rippon Lodge and the enslaved. Records kept by owners of enslaved people often times did not mention surnames of an enslaved individual if they even had one. Other times, those records would not include the first name of their enslaved people, making the documentation of these individuals nearly impossible. Much of the information that historians rely on that detail the enslaved people of a property would come after the deaths of the owners.

The Atkinson family owned Rippon Lodge from 1811 to 1911, and despite the 100 years of ownership by the family, finding information

Courtesy of Prince William County Clerks office

about them has been difficult. There were two obituaries for Richard Atkinson. In one, we find he died of apoplexy. This term's origins are from the 5th century BC when Hippocrates named the condition describing someone suddenly becoming unconscious. Today, medically this is a sudden form of cerebral hemorrhage or stroke. The lengthier one of the two, found in the Alexandria Gazette from March 16, 1855, states that "Mr. A. was a remarkable man, combining as he did an industrious habit, with great enterprise, and an indomitable energy. For the last few years of his life, he had greatly multiplied his business operations, so much so that some of his friends expressed to him their fears that

he was overtaking his energies.”

Only a few years later, in 1857 Ruth Ann Atkinson also died of an illness. Before her death, she tried for nearly two years to rent out Rippon Lodge, the Store House, and then blacksmith shop, along with hosting public sales of items from their store, a long boat, and 500 flour barrels. There is yet no mention or record of any enslaved being sold in advertisements by Ruth after her husband’s death. In fact, staff have thus far only found one sale of two enslaved men by A. H. Saunders for the benefit of Richard Atkinson in July 1852. After her death, the probates from both Richard and Ruth Atkinson compared to the census of 1850 revealed some details of their personal belongings but also provided us with more information that we had yet to come across until now.

The 1850 census, taken during Richard Atkinson’s ownership offered little more than the ages, color, and gender of the enslaved person. After a week of extensive research and help from Dr. Sheri Huerta and the folks at the Prince William County courthouse archives, we now have more documents detailing the enslaved people of Rippon Lodge during Richard Atkinson’s ownership. We now know more about their worth to Richard Atkinson and their approximate ages. Until more research can be done, the jobs they performed on the estate is unknown. But perhaps the most important thing to come out of

this research so far is finding out their names. We can now bring their names back to this site and remember them and their time in bondage.

The hope is that as more time goes on and more primary sources become available to us, the stories of the people who lived and worked at Rippon Lodge will continue to be brought forward, including the Atkinsons and the enslaved people. If you are interested in learning more about the enslaved people of Rippon Lodge, then join us for “Who Were They?” on February 18th at 10am and 1pm. This special tour focuses

on enslaved population that called Rippon Lodge home, the research methodology, the documents found, and the questions raised during the research process.

Kayleigh Seng  
Historic Interpreter  
Rippon Lodge Historic Site

Jessica Maria Alicea  
Site Manager  
Rippon Lodge Historic Site

#### OBITUARY.

The untimely death of our much esteemed friend and fellow-citizen, RICHARD ATKINSON, which has already been announced in the Gazette, has cast a gloom over our community from which time alone can free us, and it is the universal sentiment, that the vacuum occasioned thereby, cannot readily be filled. Mr. A. was a most remarkable man, combining as he did an industrious habit, with great enterprise, and an indomitable energy. For the last few years of his life, he had greatly multiplied his business operations, so much so that some of his friends expressed to him their fears that he was overtaking his energies. Nevertheless, in attending to his various operations, and often lending a helping hand, was seen, wet or dry, hot or cold, pursuing the even tenor of his way. But alas! in the vigor of manhood, and in the midst of a useful life, he is stricken down by that relentless foe, our common enemy. No more shall we be greeted with his bland smiles. No more shall we be favored with his kind offices. No more shall we be invested with his kind regards. No more shall we enjoy the pleasures of his kind hospitality. No more can the poor ask alms, or seek employment at his hands to secure their daily bread. No, no, he has quit the theatre of his usefulness. He has passed to that bourne whence no traveller returns, and his bereaved family are left to mourn over their sad and irreparable loss, whilst his numerous friends can but deplore such a dispensation of Divine Providence. The deceased was one of the most liberal supporters of a Christian Church; and with a heart constantly overflowing with the milk of human kindness, he was always ready for the exercise of those finer virtues which so eminently adorn the christian character. That his spiritual life will prove peaceful and happy, none will doubt. NEABSCO.

March 13, 1855.

DIED, at Little Rock, Arkansas, on the 28th of January, 1855, Mrs. MARY CREASE, consort of Judge George C. Watkins, and daughter of John H. Crease, esq., formerly of Alexandria.

DIED, on Tuesday evening last, at ten minutes past 7 o'clock, Mr. JEREMIAH SULLIVAN, in the 60th year of his age, long a respectable and esteemed citizen of Washington.

Courtesy of Prince William County Clerks office

**PUBLIC AUCTION AT NEABSCO MILLS, PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY, VA.—**  
I will sell at Public Auction, on Monday, the 28th day of May, 1855, a large stock of GOODS, embracing all articles usually kept in a well conducted country store, such as DRY GOODS, GROCERIES, HARDWARE, TIN, WOODEN, AND EARTHENWARE, GLASS, CHINA, LIVERPOOL, TOILET, AND OTHER SOAPS, FANCY GOODS, MEDICINES, &c., &c. These goods are new and in good order. I will also sell 500 flour barrels, new and in good order. Also, a large lot of new Ploughs which were selected expressly for the neighborhood. I will also sell at the same time one Long Boat and rigging complete.— Also, the half of one Long Boat in complete order. Also, a large lot of Cedar Posts. One set of Black Smith’s tools nearly new. The sale to continue from day to day until all are sold.  
TERMS OF SALE.—Nine months credit on all sums above \$10, the purchaser giving bond and approved security; \$10 and under cash—no property to be removed until the terms of sale are complied with.  
At the same time and place I will rent the Store House and Blacksmith Shop. I will also hire the Blacksmith for the balance of the year. The location is a good one and commands a good trade. A Post Office may be kept at the store. For any further information, address  
**RUTH ANN ATKINSON, Executrix of**  
Richard Atkinson, dec’d.  
All persons having claims against the estate will present them properly proven. All those indebted are requested to settle the same Neabscos Mills, my 12—eots. R. A. A.

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Learn about our many events throughout the year, see candid photos, get up to the minute accounts through Facebook Live and Twitter as well as find out interesting facts about Prince William County history.



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PWC History



Prince William Historic Preservation Division

**PRINCE WILLIAM**  
Historic Preservation

# Collections Corner

## Ogden's Speciality Prints

The nineteenth century is probably the most important century in the history of the United States. During that raucous period the country transformed from a young republic centered mainly on the east coast to a continental country. A Civil War and industrial revolution transformed the country and its people into the foundation of our modern society. All this change caused concern with many people; while they benefited from modernization, they worried that industrialization and immigration were changing the country into a new society. This, coupled with the recent centennial of the American Revolution, made looking back toward the American colonial time period a popular, and profitable, past time.

By the late nineteenth century a cottage industry sprang up to cater to this demand. Of the many mediums, prints were some of the most popular. Thanks to the industrial revolution, quality art prints could now be purchased at very cheap prices. One artist that took advantage of this market was Henry Alexander Ogden. Born in the 1850s, Ogden received an artists training in time for the centennial of the American Revolution. For the rest of his career, Ogden specialized in military art, specifically around the colonial time period. Acquired by Admiral Black of Rippon Lodge, today the Prince William County



Prince William County Office of Historic Preservation

Office of Historic Preservation holds six of Ogden's specialty prints. Created in 1885, the six prints in our collection depict American infantry, artillery, musicians, and generals of the Continental Army. As idealized prints, all the characters are in pristine uniforms, with the dirt and smoke of the army camps

nowhere to be seen. Although these images are a poor representation of what Continental soldiers actually looked like, they give us a picture of the idealized version held by many 19th century Americans.

Bill Backus  
Curator  
Office of Historic Preservation



# Image Spotlight

If you have recently driven down Bristoe Road through Brentsville, you might have noticed some changes at the Williams-Dawe House as we begin to repair the roof! One of the most important things to have for the successful preservation of a historic building is a functioning roof to deflect the weather. The current roof at the Williams-Dawe House was damaged several years ago, when one of the stacks of the double chimneys collapsed onto the structure, piercing the

metal, and cracking the wooden frame below. Work recently began to repair the roof before winter hits, but as with many home projects, it is never easy. Damaged bricks were replaced, and new lime mortar was installed to secure the bricks to stabilize the exterior walls. The roof will be replaced with a brown metal roof to match the color of cedar shingles that the roof historically had. Once the roof is repaired, staff will be able to go in and continue clearing the house of any modern objects

and furniture left behind and move forward with architectural and environmental reports to better understand the current state of the building.

The preservation of a historic building is a long and arduous journey, follow us on our social media channels as we continue to provide updates as we work to preserve one of the oldest standing residential structures in Brentsville!

Paige Gibbons Backus  
Site Manager  
Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre



HP Staff



# History Corner

## James Robinson and Dangerfield Newby

The stories of James “Gentleman Jim” Robinson and Dangerfield Newby have connections to Prince William County and, in Newby’s case, was carried over to the national stage.

### James “Gentleman Jim” Robinson

Little is known of the early life of James Robinson. According to family lore, James was born October 6, 1799 on Pittsylvania Plantation in Prince William County. Virginia records list James as mulatto, being of mixed racial parentage. Family oral history suggests that James’ father was Landon Carter, Jr., owner of Pittsylvania, and his mother was one of the slave’s named Annah, who was freed by Carter before James’ birth. If this is true, James was a half-brother to Judith Carter Henry.

In 1824, as required by Virginia law, all free blacks had to register with the county court. James presented a legal certificate to the County Clerk verifying that because his mother was granted freedom from slavery prior to his birth, and Carter granted him free a birth, James was born free. James learned to read with Carter’s two daughters and his teacher showed him kindness. So, in 1847 he accepted his teacher’s last name of Robinson as his own.

It was common for free blacks to serve a period of indentured servitude in order to learn a marketable trade. Based on



Robinson House, National Park Service

his testimony to the post-war Southern Claims Commission, James stated that he was “bound out” until age 21 and worked for Thomas Hampton at Brentsville Tavern. In 1831, Hampton wrote a letter of recommendation for Robinson, which referred to him as a “waiter” at the tavern.

In 1840, James purchased 170 acres of land on Henry Hill from John Lee of Willow Farm. Within eight years, property records show that James sold off 20 acres and built a modest, one-and-a-half story log dwelling. Jim became smitten with a slave by the name of Susan Gaskins, known as “Suckey”. Starting a family was fraught with difficulties especially for black people. A free man could not marry a slave, so due to Suckey’s status as a slave, they could not obtain a marriage license, so there is no documentation that they ever legally married.

John Lee died in 1847 and his

will stipulated that several of his slaves would be freed upon the occasion of his death. A codicil (addendum) in the will promised freedom to Suckey – James’ wife, and his daughter Henrietta (Henry) one year after Lee’s death. Because Susan was a slave when their children were born, by Virginia law, they were all enslaved. James endeavored to purchase his children from slavery even before Lee’s death. In 1846, James purchased his son Tasco from John Lee, and also received permission for his daughter Jemima and her children Pendleton and Dinah to live with him. It is not clear if the will provided for their freedom. Likely then remained in a status of servitude, by law, while living with Jim.

Robinson also had two other sons, Alfred and James, Jr. Before the War began, both sons were sold off by their owners to the

owner of a sugar plantation near New Orleans, Louisiana. Alfred eventually was able to find his way home after the war. The fate of James Jr. remains unknown.

By the 1850 census, James Robinson was listed as a head of household with 100 improved acres of crops, assorted outbuildings, and a surplus of property in peaches and apple trees, wool, potatoes, butter, hay, pigs, cows, and chickens. The census recorded nine people living on the Robinson farm. They are James, Susan, daughters Jemima and Henrietta, sons Tasco and Bladen, two grandchildren Dinah and Pendleton, and an elderly 75 year old black woman names Annah who was possibly Jim's mother.

James Robinson became the third wealthiest free black man living in Prince William County prior to the Civil War.

The Robinson home on Henry Hill became more than just a residence. "During the Second Battle of Manassas, a Union general commandeered the house and farm for his soldiers. Soon it was turned into a field hospital, as well as the headquarters for Union commanders. Gentleman Jim helped the soldiers as best he could then sought shelter under a stone bridge on Young's Branch. He sent his family to neighbors.

Not surprisingly, the soldiers used the items found in the home for themselves, and the house sustained damage. In August 1862, Robinson petitioned the Federal Government to reimburse him for "supplies taken by the Army of Virginia, Army of the Potomac."

"Gentleman Jim" was the only one in the State of Virginia to sue the government and win an award for the damages done and the crops destroyed. He requested \$2,080.00 and was awarded \$1,249.00.

Jim played a significant part in



Public Domain

*Dangerfield Newby*

helping newly freed black Americans during the Reconstruction period. Over the years, he greatly increased his land holdings. When James died of heart disease at the age of 76 on October 15, 1875, he owned approximately 1,500 acres. Susan lived to be 97 and died on May 27, 1902. Their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, and their families remained here to add to the story of Gentleman Jim. In 1924, the home as sold to the Manassas Battlefield Park and became a historical landmark.

### **Dangerfield Newby**

Born into slavery in Culpeper County, Virginia, Newby married an enslaved woman by the name of Henrietta. Newby's father was Henry Newby, a landowner in Fauquier County. His mother was Elsey Newby, who was a slave not owned by Henry, but a neighbor John Fox. Elsey and Henry lived together for many years and had several children. Although interracial marriage was illegal in Virginia. Dangerfield was their first child. Dangerfield Newby,

his mother, and his siblings were later freed by his father when he moved them across the Ohio River into Bridgeport, Ohio. John Fox, who died in 1859, apparently did not attempt to retrieve Elsey, Dangerfield, or any of his siblings. Dangerfield's wife and their seven children remained in bondage. A letter found on his body revealed some of his motivation for joining John Brown and the raid on Harpers Ferry.

Dangerfield Newby's wife, Harriet Newby, was the slave of Jesse Jennings of Arlington or Warrenton, Virginia. She and her children were sold to Louisiana after the raid. Newby had been unable to purchase the freedom of his wife and seven children. Their master raised the price after Newby had saved the \$1,500.00, they had previously agreed on. Because all of Newby's other efforts failed, he hoped to free them by force. Harriet's poignant letters, found on his body, proved instrumental in advancing the abolitionist cause.

On 17 October 1859, citizens of Harpers Ferry set to put down the raid. Harpers Ferry manufactured guns, but the citizens had little ammunition, so during the assault on the raiders they fired everything they could fit into a gun barrel. One man was shooting six-inch spikes from his rifle, one of which struck Newby in the throat, killing him instantly. After the raid, the people of Harpers Ferry took his body, stabbed it repeatedly, and amputated his limbs. His body was left in an alley to be eaten by hogs. In 1899, the remains of Newby and nine other raiders were reburied in a common grave near the body of John Brown in North Elba, New York.

David Born  
Historic Interpreter  
Ben Lomond Historic Site



**Take a Sip  
of History:**

**George  
Washington**

**Feb. 22, 2023  
6:30-8:00 p.m.**

**FREE**

**Donations  
Welcome**

Commemorate Presidents Day by raising a glass and learning about the Father of our Country and first President of the United States, Virginian George Washington. Panelists will discuss the man and the myth of Washington. Who was George Washington? Come and find out from local historians.

This is a joint program hosted by Tin Cannon Brewing Company and Prince William Historic Preservation.



**Tin Cannon Brewing Company**  
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## Staff News

Historic Preservation Staff member Paige Gibbons Backus was appointed by the Governor of Virginia to the Board of Regents for the James Monroe Museum and Memorial Library.

Historic Preservation Staff member Warwick Steer graduated December 15, 2022, with his master's degree in history from George Mason University. Congratulations Warwick. Job well done!



HP Staff

Rippon Lodge Historic Site kicked off the 275th Anniversary of the house with an educational event for county students. Over 450 students enjoyed learning about the Revolutionary War from reenactors. Students learned about Revolutionary medicine from a surgeon, an African American soldier's experience in Washington's army from a member of the 2nd Rhode Island Regiment, Calvary, and Native American's participation in the War.



HP Staff

Historic Preservation welcomes Lance Russell back to the department after a short time away. Lance is now a permanent part-time employee assigned to Bristoe Station Battlefield. We are happy to have him back with us!

On December 14th the PWCHP Staff went on their annual holiday excursion and lunch. This year we went to Berryville and Millwood, VA. Staff toured the Burwell - Morgan Mill and the Josephine School Community Museum. Everyone enjoyed the comradery and holiday cheer.



HP Staff

Rocking Around the Boardwalk presented by Prince William County Parks and Recreation was an outstanding success in its inaugural year. Thousands of people enjoyed strolling the boardwalk at Neabsco Creek taking in the lights. The lights were up from November 26th through December 30th.



HP Staff

## 2022 Year-In-Review

It has been a GREAT 2022 for the Prince William Office of Historic Preservation. We have had one of our busier years in projects, programs, attendance, and more... Our visitation is now back to pre-Covid levels, and we are seeing an increase in school programs after years of working to market our educational programs to educators. We saw the addition of TWO new historic sites with Thoroughfare Historic Park and the Williams-Dawe House at Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre. We also had an influx in capital maintenance projects at Rippon, Ben Lomond, Bristoe, Brentsville and Thoroughfare. This has allowed us to make some much needed repairs,



HP Staff

*Williams-Dawe House*

open new areas for public use, and make our current sites more accessible. We received several grants that have supported work at Thoroughfare Historic Park for Ground Penetrating Radar and at Rippon Lodge Historic Site to update the exhibits.

Usually in the past December was a quieter time outside of



HP Staff

*Thoroughfare Fence*

our Holiday programs, but this December has been VERY busy. We had holiday programs at all of our historic sites including holiday themed tours at Rippon Lodge and a HUGE turnout at the Neabsco Boardwalk “Rocking Around the Boardwalk” Light Show. We also had started work at the caretaker’s house at Ben



HP Staff

*Flory Center*

Lomond (the old Flory Center) and cleared brush around Potters Cemetery at Thoroughfare and installed a new fence. Finally, masonry and roof repair/replacement continues at Williams-Dawe House.

Rob Orrison  
Division Manager  
Office of Historic Preservation

## Foundation Update

The Prince William Historic Preservation Foundation is proud to support Prince William County’s efforts to preserve our past and fund important work that restore county-owned historic properties and structures. This year the Foundation was able to raise over \$18,000 in support of on-going historic preservation efforts within the county. This year the Foundation has been able to complete the new exhibit installation at Rippon Lodge Historic Site. Not only incorporating new historic research, this exhibit now allows visitors to explore the historic at their own pace through self-guided tours. The Foundation has also facilitated funds for additional

cultural resource identification work at the County’s new Thoroughfare Historic Park. The Foundation could not have achieved these 2022 goals without your much-appreciated support and continued financial assistance. As this year draws to a close, we again invite you, our members and any new patrons, to work with us in preserving the County’s treasured past. This can only happen when history-loving individuals and organizations come together in this lofty endeavor to protect and interpret our historic treasures.

Bill Backus  
Curator  
Office of Historic Preservation

**Register Online Today for Our Programs, and Events**

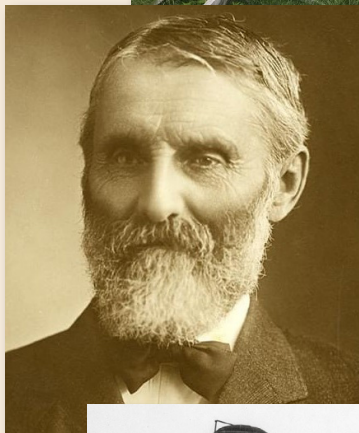
**Look for History Themed Summer Camps, registration opens early in March**

**[pwcparke.org/historicprograms](http://pwcparke.org/historicprograms)**

**Visit our website: [www.pwcva.gov/history](http://www.pwcva.gov/history)**

# “HISTORIC COMMUNITY OF CHANGE”

THE EIGHTH ANNUAL PRINCE WILLIAM/MANASSAS HISTORY SYMPOSIUM



## MARCH 25, 2023

Old Manassas Courthouse, Manassas, VA

Prince William County has many different layers to its history, and many individuals have shaped the County's complex past. Their contributions have also made Prince William the diverse and inclusive community we enjoy today. Come learn about some of the early pioneers in County history and how we still see their impact on modern Prince William County at the Eighth Annual Prince William/Manassas History Symposium.

### Topics Include:

- Parson Weems and his Washington Anecdotes
- Jim Robinson of Manassas
- George Carr Round
- Railroads of Prince William County
- The Community of Thoroughfare

\$10 for all day symposium (8:30-4:00) Spaces are limited, reservations required.

Release of the Fifth issue of the Journal of Prince William History, which will be on sale for the special one-day price of \$5.

Symposium will take place inside the Old Manassas Courthouse Building  
9248 Lee Avenue, Manassas, VA 20110

**PRINCE WILLIAM**  
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Co-sponsored by the Manassas Museum, Prince William County Historic Commission, and Historic Prince William.

For more information contact 703-792-4754 or register at [www.pwcva.gov/department/historic-preservation/events](http://www.pwcva.gov/department/historic-preservation/events)

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