



# Historic Perspectives

Preservation of Prince William County's Historic Resources

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## PRINCE WILLIAM Historic Preservation

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## 275 Years Later- Rippon Lodge Historic Site

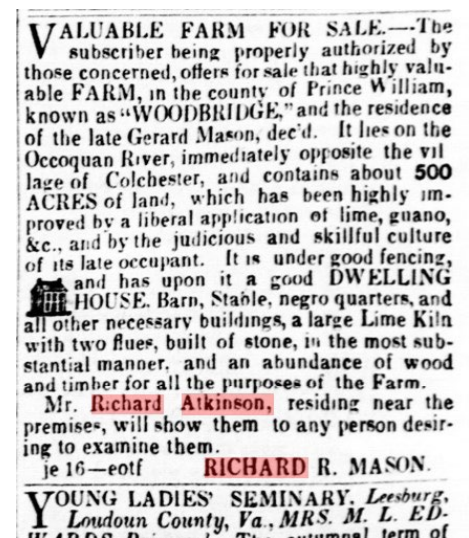
After twenty-three years since being acquired by Prince William County and extensive research by past staff, new stories and mysteries of Rippon Lodge Historic Site are still being discovered. During the year-long 275th celebratory anniversary, museum staff concentrated on gathering new information and finding more clarity to the home's interesting and complex past and its owners.

The first important discovery was seeing the portraits of Bushrod Washington and Julia Anne Blackburn Washington in one of the guest meeting rooms of the United States Supreme Court. There are only three known painted portraits of the original family in existence: the two of Thomas and Christan Blackburn, and their daughter, Julia. Only black and white photographs of her portrait were available online. It was an honor to be invited to see her painting in person. Not only were we able to discern that she had blue eyes like her parents and had curly brown hair, but also could see the sheet music that she was holding in her lap and the simple wedding band on her finger.

A trip to Mount Vernon and time at the archival library provided more insight into the dynamics of the Blackburn family. Looking at several letters of correspondence between the family members, staff finally

understood how very human and relatable these individuals were. Thomas was a very doting father, always wanting to provide a cow or a horse to his children while speaking about politics and legal matters with Bushrod, his son-in-law. Christian always relayed information about family members to her daughters, continually expressing concern over their health. Julia and her sisters were very close, with the death of one of their younger sisters, Polly, being extremely difficult for them. Thomas traveled to Barbados later with Christian for health reasons, and suffered from Saint Elmo's Fire, known today as shingles.

The Atkinson family history has always been a puzzle since much historic data has not yet been uncovered or has been lost to



Virginia Gazette 1851

time. The family owned the house much longer than any tied to the location, but there has always been little to no information about them. Thankfully, this year staff found additional data on their successes and struggles. It is not known how Richard Atkinson died, and how his wife Ruth tried for several years to hold on to the property and businesses for her young children until her untimely death. The descriptions of the area during the mid-1800s were more detailed, including things we had not known they owned, such as the post office. New maps of the land were discovered too, detailing how the property was divided between the Atkinson siblings and their niece and sediment in Neabsco Creek made the river almost unnavigable by 1870.

Thanks to supporters and strangers, new images and oral histories were shared. For instance, a digital color photograph of Wade Hampton Ellis and his wife Dessie was emailed to staff. Taken possibly only a few years before Mr. Ellis's death in 1948, this was the first true color photograph ever seen of the couple. Additionally, a gentleman emailed staff regarding his memories of Rippon Lodge when it was owned by Admiral Black. As a young man, he dated the daughter of the cook who lived here in the Chauffer's Cabin. In his email, he recalled his first introduction to the Admiral in 1974 citing, "As I was walking toward the house there was a huge explosion. Just getting back from Vietnam a few years earlier I dove to the ground. Then I heard some laughter and people talking. I walked towards the voices to see what the explosion was. Admiral Black was talking to a friend and I went up to them and introduced myself to them. I asked them if they were ok and



*Julia Blackburn Washington - Artist Unknown*

what was the big explosion I just heard. He pointed to the ground behind him and said that's what

made that explosion. It was a small canon. ... He was a very nice old man." It was my pleasure to walk through the house this year with Deborah Black Decco, Admiral Black's daughter, listening to her memories of the house, along with learning she met Dessie Ellis as a young child.

Even though our celebratory year is coming to an end this November, there are more legends and mysteries to either debunk or confirm, new artifacts to locate and display, and new exhibits to install for Rippon Lodge Historic Site. After all this time, the evolution of this county landmark continues to grow, and promises new and exciting discoveries to find.

Jessica Maria Alicea  
Site Manager  
Rippon Lodge Historic Site



PWCS Newsletter 1971

*Chauffer's Cabin at Rippon Lodge Staff Photo*

# Preservation Corner

## Children are Different (2008.2.1)

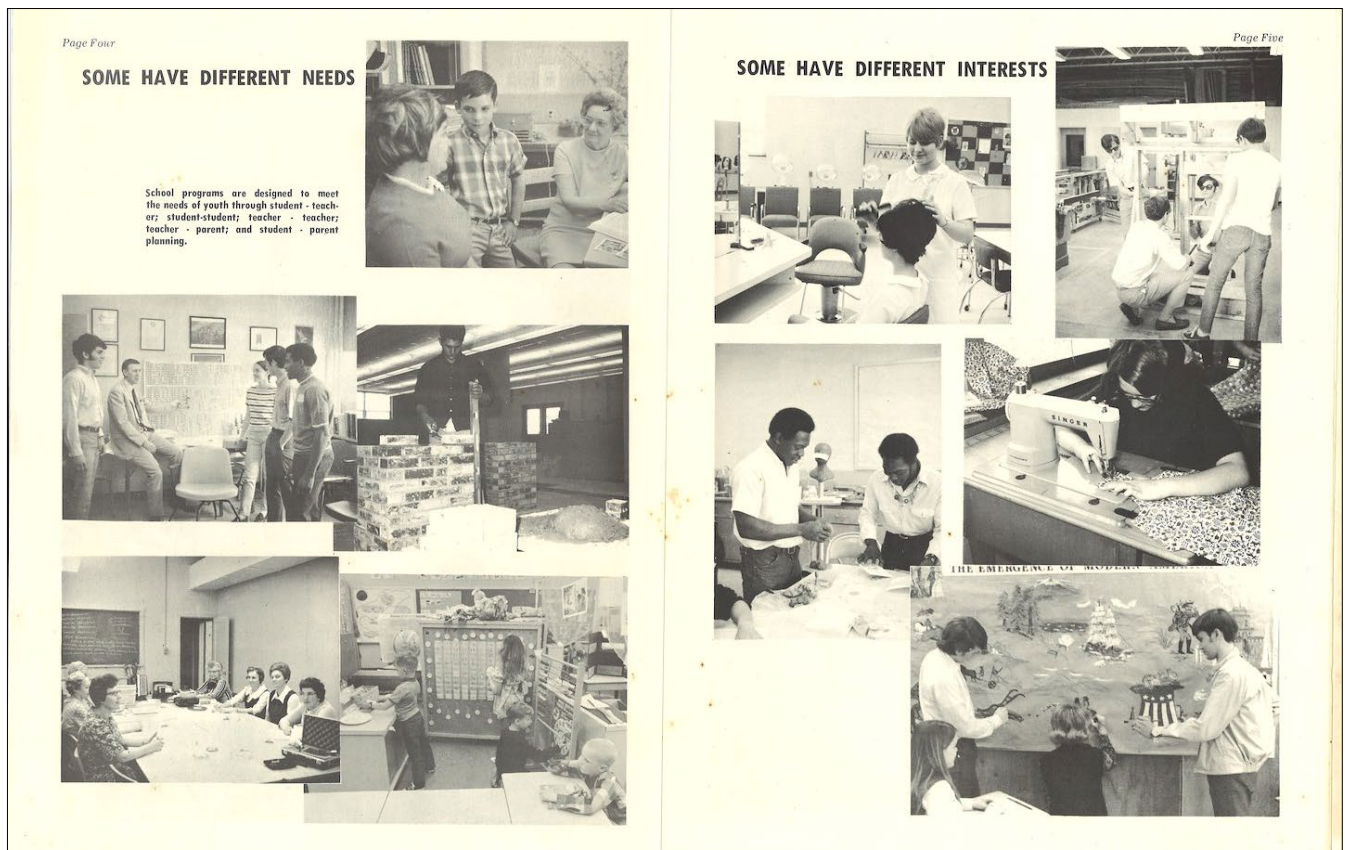
The second half of the 20th century saw an enormous population growth in Prince William County. A growing population meant more homes, more roads, and of course more schools. In the 1970-71 school year the Prince William County School Board produced this newsletter. While a portion of the newsletter shows the current population of students within the county and a projection of new students, it interestingly focuses more on the different learning abilities and techniques for children.

The 1970s saw more studies in the education field and lessons drawn on how to provide a more effective education instead of the traditional instructions relying on rote memorization.

One aspect of a new vision on children's education is page nine of the newsletter, "How Family Trips Can Help Children Learn". While teachers still had an important role to play, this reflects a new emphasis on parents playing an important role in their children's development. Some of the advice foretold some of the lifelong learners groups

that are still around today. For example "Answer children's questions to the best of your ability. If you don't know the answer, help them look it up when you get home. Some of their questions are silly? Don't be so sure. One father smiled and shook his head pityingly when his small son asked, 'What makes grass green, Daddy?' Yet Charles Kettering, an engineering genius, spent years seeking the answer to that 'silly' question."

Bill Backus  
Curator, Office of Historic Preservation



PWCS Newsletter 1971



# Image Spotlight

## Ellis Period Nordic Bench

Ever since its construction in 1747, Rippon Lodge has seen many pieces of furniture pass through its halls, each with their own story, and this particular bench is no different. Intricately carved from oak, this Nordic lift seat bench was acquired by Wade Hampton Ellis and used as an antique period piece to decorate the 19th century stairway addition, giving the room a rustic and “colonial” feeling. Judge Ellis and his wife Dessie were known to travel abroad to Europe and it was most likely during one of their international escapades that they came into possession of the bench. While sturdy enough to accom-



Staff Photos

modate two sitting guests, the bench most likely was not used in this fashion, but rather as a decorative furnishing. Additionally, opening the seat reveals a space where one might store household items and other such commodities. When Dessie sold Rippon Lodge to Admiral Richard Black in 1952, this bench, along with the rest of the Ellises’ furniture, remained in the home, preserved for decades first under Admiral Black, then later under Prince William County’s stewardship.

Curiously, some visitors think the animals featured on the bench might be dragons and who could blame them, especially with their tongues sticking out of their mouths? In actuality, every animal motif visible on the bench is that of a lion, a creature likely chosen due to its regality. Having a piece as majestic looking as the bench also reflected the high social standing of its owners, as the Ellises were very prominent

Washington socialites who routinely hosted garden parties and engaged with high-profile guests on the very property where Rippon Lodge stands today. Regardless of where the bench was acquired and its original purpose, one thing is certain: this Nordic bench served to furnish a recently renovated home to conjure a familiar, if nostalgic, colonial feeling to a home that Wade H. Ellis and later Admiral Black wanted to preserve for generations to come.

Matt Schuller  
Historic Interpreter  
Rippon Lodge Historic Site





# History Corner

## Native American Heritage Month

The Prince William Office of Historic Preservation observes the month of November as Native American Heritage Month, a time to celebrate the rich and diverse traditions and histories of Native cultures and to acknowledge the important contributions of Native people.

In the early 1600's, Prince William County was not only home to two major tribes but was also a vital and often violently contested hunting ground

and travel corridor for many surrounding, regional indigenous nations, including the Susquehanna to the north, Piscataway to the east, the Patowomeck and Rappahannock to the south, and the Iroquois (mostly Seneca) to the west. The Patowomeck, for whom the Potomac River was named, were an Algonquian-speaking, semi-independent member nation of the Powhatan Confederacy originating in current Stafford County.

Residing along eastern Prince

William's Potomac shore and river tributaries, the Algonquian-speaking Tauxenent, or Doeg, lived in at least four villages centered above Aquia Creek. In 1608, during Captain John Smith's exploration of the region, he noted the primary Doeg village called Tauxenent near Mason's Neck, Pamacocack, along Quantico Creek, Yosococomico, beside Powells Creek, and Niopsco, on Neabsco Creek. The sedentary Doeg had a structured society revolving around a chief, or "werowance," and lesser tributary werowances in the smaller hamlets. While Werowances were



*The towne of Pomeiock and true forme of their houses, covered and enclosed some w<sup>th</sup> mats, and some w<sup>th</sup> barks of trees. All compassed about w<sup>th</sup> small poles stuck thick together in stead of a wall.*



John White's watercolors of a tidewater Algonquian warrior and village

always male, they traced their lineage and authority through female descendancy. Although the Doeg hunted and fished, they planted crops of corn, sunflowers, squash, beans, and tobacco in fields adjacent to their villages. By 1650 with colonial encroachment, the Doeg had splintered into multiple bands, the majority of which had resettled in either Caroline County, VA, or north to join Maryland's Piscataway nation. German explorer John Lederer noted while visiting the piedmont in 1670 that the Doeg were no longer living in their original homeland. The last mention of the Doeg is as a part of the Nanzatico tribe in Caroline County as late as 1720. Long gone now, the Doeg culture is found in present day, well-known local place names such as Occoquan, "at the end of the water," and Quantico, "by the long stream."

Living in what would become western Prince William County, a lesser-known indigenous group, the Manahoac, were part of a Siouan-speaking population that

occupied the Northern Piedmont woodlands and Appalachian foothills above Virginia's fall line. The Manahoac first enter the written record when John Smith in 1608 stumbled across a party of hostile Indians while exploring the Rappahannock River falls near present-day Fredericksburg. During a brief skirmish, a native named Amoroleck was injured and captured. Amoroleck described to Smith that he was the brother to a king of Hasininga where his people lived, and mentioned three other towns, Stegaora, Tauxuntania, Shakahonea, and the hunting village of Mohaskahod. Today, it is not clear if the Manahoac were separate people or northern part of a larger Monacan Nation, but they certainly were allied with and shared cultural ties to central Virginia's Monacan, Saponi, and Tutelo tribes. Archaeological investigations reveal similarities between Monacan and Manahoac material culture and burial mound traditions are unmistakable. Stone tools made

from endemic milky quartz and pottery tempered with quartz and sand, often using fabric, net, or cord motifs as decoration, have been unearthed throughout the region. Thought to be semi-nomadic, the Manahoac, like most Virginia Native Americans, supplemented their diet with crops of corn and squash, but the Piedmont Indians had also learned to burn the forest to create grassland and attract deer and buffalo, their chief sources of food.

The arrival of the colonists in this area proved to be a disaster for the native Indians. Decimated by the Europeans' diseases for which they had no resistance and overwhelmed by the settlers' firepower in battle, they were soon driven away. Remnants of Manahoac bands were last mentioned in the records of Fort Christianna, Brunswick County, in 1723, when they were adopted by the Saponi and Tutelo.

Warwick Steer  
Historic Interpreter  
Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre

## Register Today For Our Upcoming Programs



[www.pwcparks.org/HistoricPrograms](http://www.pwcparks.org/HistoricPrograms)

Advanced tickets may be purchased online at: [www.tinyurl.com/pwctickets](http://www.tinyurl.com/pwctickets)

## NOVEMBER

### 275TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION FINALE FOR RIPPON LODGE

All Ages | Rippon Lodge Historic Site  
Nov 4 | 11:00a-3:00p | Sat | FREE

### NATIVE AMERICAN CAMPFIRE

Ages 6+ | Brentsville Courthouse  
Nov 3 | 6:30p-7:30p | F | \$5

### \*NEW\* CALLIGRAPHY II CLASS IN THE BRENTSVILLE SCHOOLHOUSE

Ages 13+ | Brentsville Courthouse  
Nov 11 | 10:00a-11:30a | Sat | \$15 | 380002 HP01

### POTOMAC PEOPLE INDIGENOUS TRIBES OF EASTERN PRINCE WILLIAM

Ages 6+ | Neabsco Creek Boardwalk  
Nov 18 | 9:00a-10:30a | Sat | \$5 | 380001 N05

### PREPARING A 19TH CENTURY THANKSGIVING DAY MEAL

Ages 8+ | Ben Lomond Historic Site  
Nov 18 | 11:00a-1:00p | Sat | \$15 | 380003 HP05

## DECEMBER

### \*NEW\* CIVIL WAR CHRISTMAS AT BEN LOMOND

All Ages | Ben Lomond Historic Site  
Dec 9 | 11:00a-3:00p | Sat | \$5 | 380003 HP04

### HOLIDAY EVENINGS AT RIPPON LODGE

All Ages | Rippon Lodge Historic Site  
Dec 1-2 | F-Sat | \$10, 6 and under free  
5:00p-6:00p | 6:00p-7:00p | 7:00p-8:00p

### HISTORIC HOLIDAYS & CHRISTMAS CONCERT AT BRENTSVILLE COURTHOUSE

Ages 6+ | Brentsville Courthouse  
Dec 9 | 5:00p-8:00p | Sat | FREE

### HOLIDAYS THROUGH THE AGES AT RIPPON LODGE

All Ages | Rippon Lodge Historic Site  
\$5, 6 and under free  
Dec 1-4 | 11:00a-12:00p & 2:00p-3:00p | M, F-Sun  
Dec 8-11 | 11:00a-12:00p & 2:00p-3:00p | M, F-Sun  
Dec 15-18 | 11:00a-12:00p & 2:00p-3:00p | M, F-Sun  
Dec 22 | 11:00a-12:00p & 2:00p-3:00p | F

### SANTA COMES TO RIPPON LODGE

All Ages | Rippon Lodge Historic Site  
Dec 9 | Sat | \$5 per child, parents free  
12:00p-1:00p | 380001 HP03  
1:00p-2:00p | 80001 HP04  
2:00p-3:00p | 380001 HP05



### Goldstein Named to Rappahannock Heritage Center Board of Directors

HP Staff member Dan Goldstein was recently elected to serve on the Rappahannock Heritage Center Board of Directors.

The center is a Repository/Archive for Fredericksburg area documents, photographs, and other historical material. Dan begins his term in December 2023.

### Foundation Update

2023 has been a successful year for the Prince William County Historic Preservation Foundation, and we're not done yet. A new website to showcase our projects is now live and a popular series of Take a Sip of History at Water's End Brewery has helped generate donations for our ongoing work to help with the preservation of Prince William County's history. Join us in November for our live, in-person meeting when we look forward to our 2024 projects and elect new board members. Check the Office of Historic Preservation's social media pages for more information.

Bill Backus, Curator, Office of Historic Preservation

*Prince William County Has a Past That is Worth Preserving  
Become a Foundation Member!*  
[www.pwhpf.org](http://www.pwhpf.org)



**PRINCE WILLIAM/  
MANASSAS SYMPOSIUM**  
**SATURDAY, MARCH 23, 2024**  
**8:00AM – 4:30PM**

Manassas Museum 9101 Prince William St. Manassas

**S**ave the date for the **9th Annual Prince William/Manassas Symposium!** Each year local historians and experts explore the many facets of County history through a wide variety of lectures. Tickets are \$10 for an all-day program. The Symposium also marks the release of the Sixth issue of the *Journal of Prince William History*, which will be on sale for the special one-day price of \$5.



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

Co-sponsored by the Manassas Museum, Prince William County Historical Commission, and Historic Prince William.