The Importance of Cemeteries and Their Connections to a Community

A Case Study in Local History for Chesterfield County, Virginia

By Teresa Webner, 2010

In Virginia, recently developed rural areas will probably have within their boundaries several small family cemeteries. This is the case in southeastern Chesterfield County. Cemeteries here are found in the middle of new housing developments built on former estates. Houses built in the nineteenth century were often the victims of fires, leaving cemeteries as the only remaining artifacts of an area's first settlers. It is here, with these gravestones' chiseled inscriptions, where we can find not only the names of the buried people, but also names that may correspond with nearby street names, housing developments, or even strip malls. The monikers chosen for streets or other municipal or commercial properties are not chosen at random. The names are chosen to connect the present with the past.

Cemeteries are useful in connecting a community to its past. Graveyards are seen as endpoints in life; however, for making connections from present to past, they can serve as starting points. Beginning with tombstone sizes and inscriptions, one can discern who was prominent in a community. By starting with the name on a family cemetery's grandest stone, one is led on a journey into the past as that inscribed name appears and reappears in connection with other historical events and important people. These farm cemeteries and the historical inquiry they inspire resemble a spirelli, a type

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of string art, leading us from one historical event to another, showing how connected we all are.

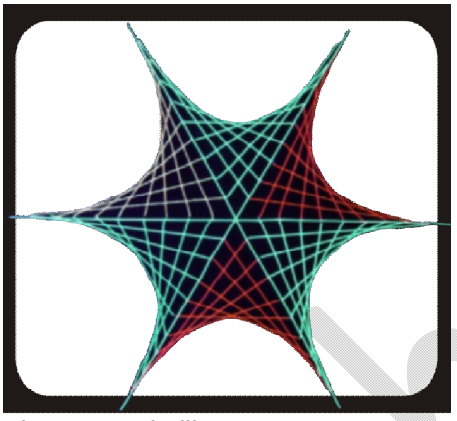


Figure 1: Spirelli

A spirelli uses nail heads to guide the thread from point to point (see fig. 1).[1] Each nail plays an important role in the overall design. If one of the nails is missing, a section of the design disappears. So it is with a historical inquiry or quest. Each artifact is important to a search as it points to the next location; if an artifact is missing, we lose an opportunity to make a historical connection. Like the spirelli with the missing nail, a missing artifact can conceal a historical pattern of connectivity.

A cemetery is an important artifact in a historical spirelli. When a tombstone is missing or damaged due to vandalism or neglect, our connections to the people buried there is lost. Knowledge of the existence and impact an area's earlier settlers endured can create a bond to them and to the community one now calls home. With that bond come pride, respect, and appreciation. What one appreciates, one will take care of. Benjamin Franklin said, "Show me your cemeteries and I will tell you what kind of people you have."[2] The state of cemeteries mirrors the community where they are

[1] Google Images

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located. A well-cared for community that has pride and respect for its heritage will have well cared for cemeteries. When a community's history and ancestry are neglected, both cemeteries and the community suffer. These connections to our past must be preserved through education, which will then lead to appreciation. Education is necessary to foster appreciation for the people now gone and for the impact they had on the community. As education about cemeteries' importance has increased, their care and preservation has increased. This has been the case for two cemeteries located in southeastern Chesterfield County.

The area of southeastern Chesterfield was one of first areas settled in Virginia; however, most suburban development began in the 1990's. The area contains new subdivisions, consisting of new single-family houses on medium size land tracts. Old family cemeteries exist within these new subdivisions, leftovers from when large farming families populated the area. These family cemeteries resemble most of the other old cemeteries found in Chesterfield County. Few cemeteries have inscribed tombstones because of the lack of easily worked native stone. Many graves remain unmarked. Wooden memorials may have been placed on the unmarked graves, but the wood has long since disintegrated. Evidence of prior fencing surrounding these cemeteries exists; however, most fencing has deteriorated over time.[3] Similar to most burials in rural Chesterfield County, graves are located near the family home. In some cases, multiple families shared a cemetery due to the intermarrying between neighboring families. The

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[2] Thomas H. Keels, *Images of America: Philadelphia Graveyards and Cemeteries* {Charleston: Arcadia Publishing. 2003} 6.

[3] Jeffrey M. O'Dell, *Chesterfield County: Early Architecture and Historic Sites.* {Chesterfield, Va: {Chesterfield County Planning Dept, 1983}, 483-485.

following cases follow the threads of two cemeteries in Chesterfield County and where those threads lead.

Historical Spirelli No 1A: The Strachan Family Cemetery

The Strachan Family cemetery was located in the woods, inaccessible by car, until a recent condominium's opening. Now the cemetery nestles between a complex of condominiums and blends in with its surroundings. The cemetery measures 100 feet by 100 feet. There are twelve grave markers; however, similar to other cemeteries in Chesterfield, there are also many depressions without headstones. There are several different family names on the stones there. Some names are traceable to early ownership of the land called Point of Rocks or to membership at Enon Baptist Church. Others show no connection to the church or to Point of Rocks. Periwinkle, commonly planted in cemeteries, blankets the cemetery. Until recently, the cemetery languished in disrepair and suffered from neglect.

The family burial plot has undergone renovation and now has a new iron gate matching the surrounding condominium's gates. Without entering the cemetery, one can see the largest stone - a nearly six foot tall obelisk that bears John Strachan's name. John Strachan is the first person's thread we will follow as it winds around the Bermuda Hundred District of Chesterfield County called Enon.

The inscription on Strachan's stone reads as follows:

Rev. John A. Strachan
Born
Jan. 21, 1814
Died
Mar. 24, 1875

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Emily A.
Wife of
J.A. Strachan
Born Dec. 23, 1832
Died Oct. 12, 1906

"Blessed are the dead
which die in the Lord
from henceforth; Yea
saith the Spirit, that they
may rest from their labors;
and their works do follow them."[4]

If a tombstone from the nineteenth century included an inscription, it was often of a religious nature. Not all were from biblical passages like this one, but most had some reference to resurrection. After 1930, tombstones in Chesterfield usually only list names and dates with occasional short statements like "At Rest" or "Asleep in Jesus." These contemporary tombstones, with their uniformity, are almost as uninformative as those unmarked graves from earlier times.[5]

Using Reverend Strachan's epitaph as the starting point in the historical spirelli, we see an informative lead about John Strachan and his life. He is designated a Reverend on the stone. Following this first strand of information, we have on Strachan we are led to nearby Enon Baptist Church. At the church, John Strachan's photo proudly hangs designating him as Enon Baptist Church's founder. *History of Enon Baptist Church 1849-1949*[6], written by a former pastor of Enon Baptist, and *Enon Baptist Church: The First 150 Years*[7], recorded by the Church Historian, helped guide

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[4] *Gone But Not Forgotten: Gravestone Inscriptions & Burials of Chesterfield County* {Chesterfield: Chesterfield Historical Society of Virginia, 1998}, 129-130. Scripture *is from Rev. 14:13.*

[5] O'Dell, 489.

[6] Shawen, Rev. W.C. *History of Enon Baptist Church, 1849-1949. S.l:s.n, 1949.*

and connect Strachan with other people, places, and events that left a lasting impact on this area of Chesterfield County now called Enon.

John Alexander Strachan was born in Chesterfield County at his maternal grandparents' home called Point of Rocks, in 1814. His grandfather was Captain John Stratton whose daughter, Jane, married Dr. Alexander Glas Strachan of Petersburg. John's parents raised him in Petersburg, but he returned to Point of Rocks in 1845 after the passing of his grandfather, Captain Stratton. John had recently married Emily Adkins and brought his new bride to live in the house and land known as Point of Rocks. This land had a long history dating back to Sir Thomas Dale and the stockade he built in 1611 after abandoning Jamestown for a better environment. The first patent for land referred to as "Point of Rocks" occurred in 1643 to Abraham Woods.[8] Point of Rocks takes its name from the adjacent sixty-foot sandstone cliffs located on the Appomattox River. The land was re-patented only a few other times before final conveyance went to the ancestors of today's owners, the Cox family.

After settling into his new home with his bride, John Strachan started holding church services at his home. Raised in the Church of England, John converted to Baptist beliefs. The closest Baptist church was Salem Baptist located fifteen miles away. The Portsmouth Baptist Association constituted a new Baptist church for the area in 1849 and granted membership into its association in 1850. Membership was at twelve members – nine whites and three blacks. It is possible the three blacks were John's slaves, since he was a slave owner. Others slaves or free blacks may have

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[7] Evelyn L. Cox, *Enon Baptist Church the First 150 Years. 1999.*

[8] Francis Earle Lutz and Dorothy Fuller Silver. *Chesterfield, an Old Virginia County {Chesterfield, Va: Chesterfield Historical Society, 2003}, 47.*

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attended First Baptist Church of Bermuda Hundred, a predominately-black Baptist church established in 1850 also located in the area. John served first as the Clerk and then as a delegate for the church. The church's membership moved from the Portsmouth Association to the Middle District Association in 1852, which was the traditional association for churches in Chesterfield County. John Strachan donated one acre of land in a deed dated 1851 for a church.[9] William Francis Gill, a prominent man in the community and son of the founder of Gill Grove Baptist Church, donated lumber for the church. With the help of the community, the men built a one-room church building measuring 30'x45'.

Enon became the name for the church. Enon comes from a reference in the Bible: "John also was baptizing in A'enon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized."[10] This part of Chesterfield County is located between two rivers, the James and the Appomattox. These two rivers satisfied the need for the abundant water necessary for baptism by immersion. William Gill not only supplied lumber for the church, but also offered use of his dock for baptisms in the James River. Baptisms occurred here at the James until the 1950's. The area in the Bermuda Hundred District of Chesterfield County is still called Enon today and Enon Baptist is a thriving church.

John Strachan was ordained a minister in 1858 and became the Pastor of Enon Church. By 1860, membership was at sixty. John also pastored Broadway Baptist Church in Prince George County. This church was located across the Appomattox River from his house at Point of Rocks. There are accounts of the pastor rowing his boat

[9] Cox, 8.

[10] Cox, 5 and John 3:23.

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across the river with his brindled dog following on the days he went to preach there. Life was peaceful for such families in this part of Chesterfield County until the start of the Civil War.

Life in the small community of Bermuda Hundred changed with Virginia's entry into the Civil War. With many of the men gone, attendance at the church plummeted. However, nothing could prepare the community for the arrival of the Army of the James' 38,000 troops under the command of Benjamin "Beast" Butler. Not only did Butler's arrival affect the area, his arrival also affected Enon Church and the Reverend Strachan. When Butler arrived, his and John Strachan's lives intertwined for the next several years due to the connections both had to this land called Point of Rocks**.** A spirelli can have more than one color thread in a design. Here we would see a contrasting color representing Butler's introduction into the design. Butler and his men took over the Strachan's house at Point of Rocks as headquarters for the Petersburg Campaign. The pastor and his family fled to his father-in-law's house located near the Chesterfield County Courthouse for the duration of the war. While there, Strachan preached at nearby Salem Baptist Church. Great demands for chaplains left many churches without pastors and John faithfully served his new congregation for two years until the Civil War finally ended.[11]

With Point of Rocks under possession of Butler and Union forces, the need for a hospital arose in preparation for impending battles. Butler ordered the dismantling of Enon Church for its materials. Using the material from the church, Butler's troops constructed a hospital on the land at Point of Rocks. The hospital at Point of Rocks was

[11] William Russell Pankey, *The History of Salem Baptist Church Organized 1794, Chesterfield, Virginia* {Richmond, Va.?: Salem Baptist Church?, 1965}, 40.

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busy during May 1864 while Butler and his army made Bermuda Hundred their base of operations for an assault on Richmond. The Union forces also built a pontoon bridge over the Appomattox River, connecting Point of Rocks with Prince George County for the siege on Petersburg. Butler also erected signal towers for communication between the many troops now in the area. Notable people came to the area during the occupation. Abraham Lincoln toured the site after his meeting with Grant at City Point and Clara Barton served as superintendent of nursing under Butler at Point of Rocks.[12]

After the war, a clash occurred between Butler and Strachan over Point of Rock's ownership. Strachan desired to return home and rebuild his life. Butler wanted the land to become a freedmen's village for the former area's slaves. John Strachan wrote to Major General Oliver O. Howard, commander of Freedmen's Affairs, in a letter dated June 22, 1865, asking for the return of his land. He stated how he had "done nothing during the rebellion that was any way detrimental to the Federal Government"[13] and how there was other property for sale if the government desired a freedmen's camp to be in the area. Benjamin Butler also wrote to Major General Howard on July 12, 1865 concerning Point of Rocks. Point of Rocks had served not only as headquarters and as a hospital for the Union troops, but it also served as a resting place for those who died during the Bermuda Hundred Campaign. Butler requested that the land "should not be permitted to go back into the hands of the former disloyal owner, because, among other

[12] Chesterfield Historical Society of Virginia, *The Bermuda Hundred Campaign Tour Guide,* {Chesterfield, VA: Chesterfield Historical Society, 2009, 11.

[13] United States Department of the Interior National Parks Service, *National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet, OMB No. 1024-0018,* Section 8, page 6, Point of Rocks File found at Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

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reasons, hundreds of our soldiers' graves are in the cemetery near it."[14] John's request returned without action and the US Government kept possession of the property until 1866 when John was successful in proving title in US Court. The Strachan family returned to their land and John continued farming and preaching at the rebuilt Enon Church until his death in 1875.

The story thread of John Strachan and his land called Point of Rocks did not end when the Civil War ended. The impact of the Civil War and Butler's arrival to the area caused John Strachan's and Butler's threads to intertwine and extend into nearby City Point – now known as the City of Hopewell.



Figure 2: Map showing distance between Point of Rocks, Cobbs Hall, and City Point National Cemetery

Historical Spirelli No 1B: City Point National Cemetery

City Point was a bustling area during the Siege of Petersburg in 1864. While Butler encamped at Point of Rocks in Chesterfield, General Ulysses S. Grant headquartered at Appomattox manor in City Point. Similar to Point of Rocks, the Union forces built a hospital at City Point to accommodate the impending casualties of the

[14] United States Department of the Interior national Parks Service, Section 8, page 6.

siege. (See fig 2)[15] President Lincoln came to City Point during the final days of the Civil War and visited hospitals around the area. When he left the area on April 8, 1865, it would be for the final time – within a week Lincoln would be dead by an assassins' bullet.

After the turmoil of Lincoln's death, the Confederates' surrender, and the discontinuance of Union occupation, the matter of soldiers' burials needed addressing. Soldiers' bodies, hastily buried on land adjacent to the hospitals or on the battlefield, needed a permanent final resting place. An act of Congress in April 1866 stated:

> That the Secretary of War be, and he is hereby, authorized and required to take immediate measures to preserve from desecration the graves of the soldiers of the United States who fell in battle or died of disease in the field and in hospital during the war of the rebellion; to secure suitable burial-places in which they may be properly interred; and to have the grounds enclosed, so that the resting-places of the honored dead may be kept sacred forever.[16]

One of these cemeteries is the City Point National Cemetery located in Hopewell. Mostly Union soldiers from nearby battlefields and hospitals rest here, including those buried at the hospital at Point of Rocks. The stone wall surrounding the cemetery is said to come from those found at Point of Rocks. Another thread leading to the City Point cemetery from Point of Rocks is the monument erected by Benjamin Butler. The former occupier and general at Point of Rocks commissioned a monument's placement where his former soldiers now lay. Inside the cemetery's stone walls, there is a twenty-foot white marble obelisk with the following inscription on the south side of the monument:

ERECTED
BY THE DIRECTION OF
MAJ. GENL B.F. BUTLER

[15] Google Maps

[16] Thirty-Ninth Congress. Sess. I Res. 21 April 13, 1866. {Accessed at the Library of Virginia, February 18, 2010}.

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GEORGE SUCKLEY
SURG. U.S. VOLS
COLONEL AND MEDICAL DIRECTOR

H.B FOWLER
SURG. 12, N.H. VOLS
SURGEON IN CHARGE OF
POINT OF ROCKS HOSPITAL

GEO. JONES
HOSPITAL CHAPLAIN

1865

On the opposite side the inscription reads:

SACRED
TO THE
LAMENTED DEAD
OF
THE ARMY
OF THE JAMES[17]

These two contrasting individuals, Revered Strachan and General Butler, show how historical events can forever bind and intertwine the lives of people and places together. John Strachan is forever tied to Chesterfield County through his ancestral home at Point of Rocks, his founding of Enon Baptist Church, and his final resting place in Enon. However, Benjamin Butler's thread overlaps and crosses John Strachan's threads with his wartime occupation of John's home- Point of Rocks, his destruction of Enon Church, and his memorial to those who died at Point of Rocks and elsewhere during the occupation of Chesterfield. These two contrasting individuals, Revered

[17] United States Department of the Interior, National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet, Section 7, page 1, City Point National Cemetery file found at Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

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Strachan and General Butler, show how historical events can forever bind and intertwine the lives of people and places together.

Two other names bound to Virginia and Chesterfield County are Pocahontas and John Rolfe. The next spirelli deals with the decedents of the Rolfes, the Bollings and Robertsons, and their family cemetery located at "Cobbs," also in the Enon section of southeastern Chesterfield County. This spirelli uses more genealogy to trace the connections between people in the early founding of Virginia and shows the bond between three of Virginia's first families, the Rolfes, the Bollings and the Robertsons, and the impact they left on this area.

Pocahontas and John Rolfe met at the City of Henricus, now part of the Bermuda District of southeastern Chesterfield County, and married at Jamestown in 1614.[18] They had one son, Thomas Rolfe, who was raised and educated in Britain after the death of his mother. Thomas Rolfe returned to Virginia in 1635 and married Jane Poythress in 1644.[19] Thomas and Jane had one daughter, Jane Rolfe, who married Colonial Robert Bolling. Robert and Jane's son, John Bolling, is the only great-grandson of John Rolfe and Pocahontas. John's Bolling's descendents are called the "Red Bollings," referring to their Indian heritage from Pocahontas. Colonial Robert Bolling remarried after Jane Poythress Bolling's death and those descendents are referred to as the "White Bollings". The "White Bollings" have no direct lineage to Pocahontas or John Rolfe.

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[18] Stuart E. Brown, Lorraine F. Myers, Eileen M. Chappel, and Wyndham Robertson, *Pocahontas' Descendants: A Revision, Enlargement, and Extension of the List As Set Out by Wyndham Robertson in His Book Pocahontas and Her Descendants (1887)Combine with Two Volumes of Corrections and Additions {Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co, 1994}, 1.*

[19] Julian Hart Robertson and James Samuel Patton, *The Family of William and Elizabeth Bolling Robertson of Richmond, Virginia, 1585-1981* {Salisbury, N.C.:J.H. Robertson,1981},17.

John Bolling is whose thread we will follow, showing his ties and connections to this section of Chesterfield County.

Historical Spirelli No 2: The Bolling/Robertson Cemetery

The family tree of John Bolling is as follows:

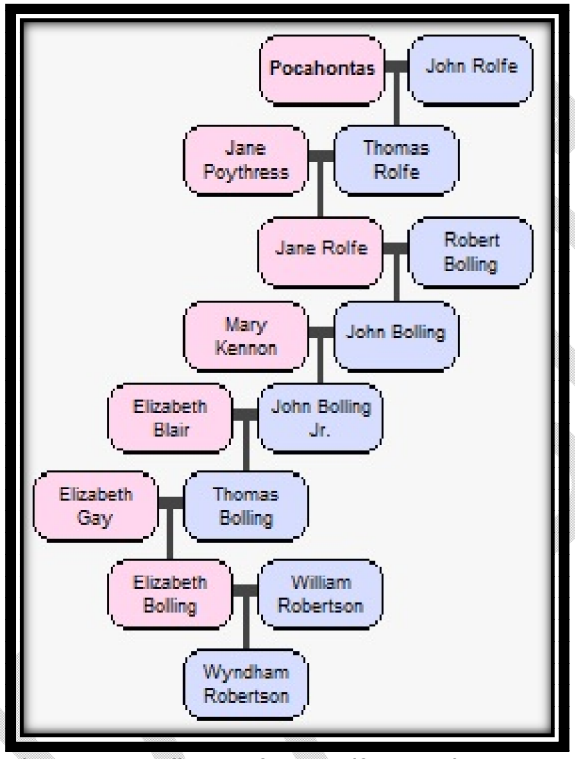


Figure 3: Family tree from Rolfe to Robertson

A historical marker placed at the road leading to the Bolling/Robertson cemetery gives the first clue of its significance. The sign reads:

COBBS HALL
Home and
burial place
of
Col. John Bolling,
only Great grandson
of
Pocahontas
and
John Rolfe.

ERECTED BY FT. HENRY CHAPTER
1966

The cemetery is located at the end of a caudle-sac, with a row of newly built houses between it and the Appomattox River. The four-foot high stone wall surrounding the graves measures twenty-five feet by twenty-five feet and does not have an entryway. Inside the walls stands a large granite monument, which reads:

Around this Stone Lie the Remains of
Col. JNO. BOLLING of "COBBS,"
Great-Grand-Son of
ROLFE and POCAHONTAS
B. 1676, - D. 1729
He was prominent in his day. Represented his County (Chesterfield) in the House of Burgesses, and was long
"Lieutenant," an office of great dignity
and importance. Being the only great-grand-child of Pocahontas, he was the ancestor of all who derive their lineage from her.

Also Lie Here Unmarked,
The remains of a large number of her descendants, whose tombs - save one that of Elizabeth, eldest grand-daughter, were destroyed during the occupancy of "Cobb" by the Federal Troops in 1864.

Among Those Buried Here Were
WILLIAM ROBERTSON,
B. 1750 – D. 1829
Member of Council of State.
His Wife
ELIZABETH BOLLING,
And their youngest son,
WYNDHAM ROBERTSON,
B. 1803 – D. 1888
Sometime Governor of Virginia
and by whose direction this monument is erected.

This monument, erected around 1888, contains an abundance of historical information. The commissioner of the monument, Wyndham Robertson, lets us know who he feels is of most importance. Those names include the patriarch of the family, his great-great-grandfather, John Bolling; his father and mother, William and Elizabeth

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Bolling Robertson; his sister Elizabeth; and himself. The monument does say that there are a large number of other descendants of Pocahontas buried there, but does not list their names. These names include Wyndham Robertson's great-grandfather and great-grandmother, John Bolling, Jr. and Elizabeth, and his grandfather and grandmother, Thomas Bolling and Elizabeth Gay.(See fig. 3)[20] There are approximately thirty-eight other relatives buried there also.[21]

The land at Cobbs has a similar history to the land called Point of Rocks. In fact, the lands are adjacent. (See fig. 2)[22] Ambrose Cobbs received a patent for 350 acres of land in 1639[23]. Colonel John Bolling acquired the estate in 1704 and four generations of Bolling families lived there**.**[24] Accounts written about John Bolling describe him as a good businessman, involved with the importing and exporting of merchandise. Cobbs, located on the Appomattox River, aided his involvement in trade and John became very wealthy. As mentioned in the monument, John was active in politics and served both Virginia and Chesterfield County.[25] Cobbs was a lively place during this time and the Bollings' hospitality was well known.

John, Jr. inherited Cobbs after his mothers passing around 1740. Similar to his father, John, Jr. also served in the House of Burgesses. His grandfather, Robert Bolling,

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[20] Robertson, *The Family of William and Elizabeth Bolling Robertson of Richmond, VA, 1585-1981,*16-44.

[21] Robertson and Patton, 34.

[22] Google Maps

[23] Lutz and Silver, 47.

[24] Robertson, 24.

[25] Robertson, 35,41. The author points out that the inscription refers to Chesterfield County because it was realized that few would recall that Chesterfield at that time was part of Henrico County until 1749.

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served as County Lieutenant for nearby Prince George County and John Jr. held the same post for Chesterfield County. Chesterfield County had at this time split off from Henrico County as a separate entity in 1749. John, Jr. died at Cobbs in 1757 and lies buried near his father and mother. John Jr. and his wife were the last generation to die as subjects of the King of England.[26]

John Jr. and Elizabeth's son Thomas took ownership of Cobbs in 1767 after purchasing it from his brother Edward, who had inherited it. Cobb's acreage at this time stood at five-hundred acres.[27] Thomas married his first cousin Elizabeth Gay and moved to Cobbs to be closer to Elizabeth's parents.[28] They may have thought that their children, including three deaf mutes, would be better off at Cobbs. Thomas eventually sent each of his deaf mute children to Edinburgh, Scotland so they could receive the best education possible. Scotland was home to the famous Thomas Braidwood's School, which would later serve as a model for the deaf school built at Cobbs. Their eldest deaf child, John, went in 1771 at age ten and Mary and Thomas followed in 1775 when they reached the same age. The school's cost and the looming prospect of war was of major concern to the Bollings but they thought the school was best for their children. Their concern proved correct when the Revolutionary War kept them from seeing their children until 1783. When the children returned home, the cost and

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[26] Robertson 35. The author points out that the inscription lists John Bolling as the County Lieutenant when it was actually John, Jr.

[27] Robertson, 46.

[28] Robertson, 46. Thomas's wife was the daughter of his aunt, Elizabeth Bolling and Dr. William Gay.

separation proved worthy. The children were able to communicate, to read and write, and to live a useful and enjoyable life.[29]

Thomas did not serve in politics like his father and grandfathers did. However, he did serve for a long time as Magistrate for Chesterfield County and had resigned only a year before his death in 1804.[30] Thomas left Cobbs to his wife and then when she passed in 1813, their son William Bolling inherited it. William had married his second cousin Mary Randolph[31] and they also had some deaf mute children. William and Mary Bolling had first settled at Bolling Hall in Goochland County; however, when his mother died, William decided to return to Cobbs and to start a school for his deaf mute children and others. He hired John Braidwood, grandson of the founder of the Braidwood School where William's deaf brothers and sister attended in Scotland. The school flourished for two years; however, the teacher deserted the school and students after succumbing to alcohol and debts.[32] The Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind located in Staunton, Virginia, established by an act of the General Assembly in 1838, placed a tablet commemorating the first school for the deaf started at Cobbs.[33] (See fig. 4) [34]

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[29] Robertson, 47-48

[30] Robertson, 45.

[31] Mary's grandmother was Jane Bolling, sister of John Bolling, Jr.

[32] Robertson, 32-33.

[33] Cox, Edwin P. *A Brief Outline of Some Salient Facts Relating to the History of Chesterfield County, Virginia.* Chesterfield, VA: Chesterfield Home Demonstration Club, 1936, 3.

[34] Cox, Edwin P., 4.

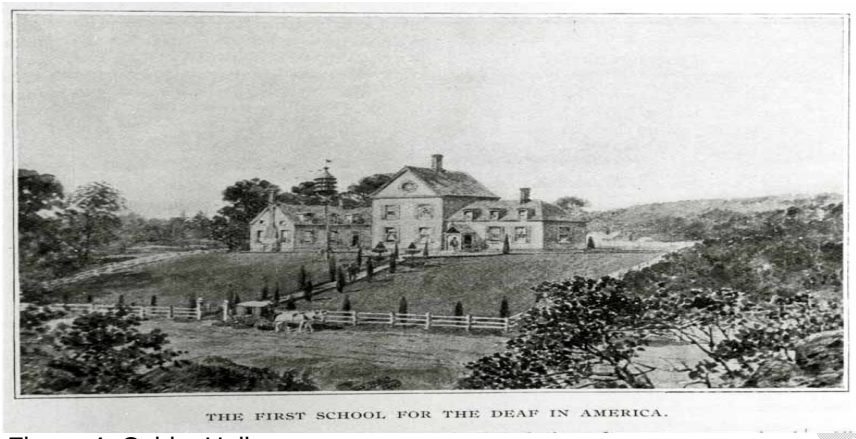


Figure 4: Cobbs Hall

William sold Cobbs in 1827, much to the unhappiness of his sister, Elizabeth Bolling Robertson and her family. William did reserve rights to one-half an acre for all time for the family graveyard. Unfortunately, the cemetery is the only structure left at Cobbs. The house was deserted and neglected, but was still standing in 1837 when William Bolling wrote about his "melancholy" return to his family's home in his diary.[35] The house no longer exists and was reportedly destroyed when the Union forces occupied Cobbs during the Civil War. The cemetery also suffered vandalism during occupation. Only one original gravestone remains – that of Elizabeth Robertson Biscoe. It reads:

SACRED
to the memory of
ELIZABETH ROBERTSON BISCOE
Born at Studley
on the 10th March 1780
And died the 19th June 1801
Age 21 Years
Ah who so chaste so innocent as thee
Who could in duty's sphere so meekly move
Or if as fair; from vanity as free
So firm in friendship and so fond in love?[36]

[35] Robertson, 33.

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It is a mystery why this one gravestone remained undisturbed. The grave marker is a box tomb that sits entirely above ground. These tombs were expensive and were exclusive to wealthy families. Elizabeth's tomb is the only one of this type that survives in Chesterfield County. The poem on the tomb is traceable to a poem written by a British poet named William Mason, 1724-1797, *Epitaph on His Wife*.[37] Elizabeth married Henry Lawson Biscoe only six weeks before her death in 1801.[38] She was the sister to Wyndham Robertson who renewed the rights to his families' burial ground. He also had the stone wall re-installed in 1884 and directed that his burial take place at Cobbs. He is the one who commissioned the large monument that honors him and his ancestors.

Even though the Bolling/Robertson spirelli does not involve many historic events, it does show the family's involvement in local history from the early eighteenth century through the early nineteenth century. The Bollings and Robertsons served Chesterfield County and the Commonwealth of Virginia faithfully throughout the years both politically and militarily. The school for the deaf at Cobbs was an innovative first attempt by William Bolling to fulfill the needs of his children and others. His early attempt led to the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind successful establishment in 1838, which is still serving children today.

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[36] Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission form, 1971, found in the Cobbs Folder found at the Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Historical Resources.

[37] Robert Cambers and David Patrick, *Chamber's Cyclopedia of English Literature* {Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1902}, 427.

[38] Robertson, 85.

Education and Preservation

The relationship between the Bollings and Robertsons to Virginia's first family, Pocahontas and John Rolfe, should inspire the community to embrace this connection to the past and to push for future preservation of the cemetery as a valuable archaeological artifact. The same is true for the Strachan cemetery. Chesterfield County Historical Society has been instrumental in educating and highlighting local history through lectures, events, signage, journals, and websites. The Historical Society has a graveyard committee, which has published a book listing every grave in the county. The committee also works with the county's zoning department over plans for future development – showing that development and graveyards can coexist.[39] The Historical Society is interested in purchasing the Point of Rocks house and land. The house has recently been listed for sale and because of its important role during the Civil War, the Historical Society desires to preserve it as an important local historical site.

Preservation efforts are ongoing at both cemetery sites. A Scout in the local Boy Scout Troop 922 recently did his Eagle Scout project in the Strachan family cemetery. With help from the condominium developers, the scouts cleaned up the area from storm damage and overall neglect. However, cemeteries need constant upkeep. Since the scout project, nature once again attempts to reclaim it rights to the land. Tree limbs litter the ground and acorns sprout new life. Without intervention, it will not be long until previous conditions return. The ladies of the Petersburg Fort Henry Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of American Colonist are responsible for the roadside

[39] Amy Biegelsen. 2008. "Developing the Dead: As Counties Face Rapid Suburban Development, There's One Hurdle That Can Come Back To Haunt – Backyard Cemeteries". *Style Weekly.* 26, no. 39: 11-13.

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marker previously mentioned at Cobbs. The first sign, placed in 1966, was recently updated with a newer sign.

Care and upkeep is essential for the survival of these family cemeteries. They are outdoor museums of our community's founding fathers and mothers. Cemeteries and tombstones serve as statues and memorials of those who may be of lesser importance statewide or nationwide, but are important locally. The names on the tombstones in these two cemeteries dot our road signs and municipal buildings, but more importantly, they connect us to our past.

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