

The Rosewellian

“America’s Magnificent Ruin”



Newsletter of The Rosewell Foundation, Inc.

Spring 2016

100 years since the fire that changed Rosewell history

March 1916

March 2016



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The fire that changed Rosewell history

By Mary Claycomb
Rosewell Board of Directors



Today we know the once stately Rosewell mansion as a ruin with four chimneys, crumbling remnants of brick walls, and an interior overgrown with brush. We know that the house was destroyed by a fire that began in the overnight hours of March 23 and 24, 1916, but there are no remaining eyewitnesses to give accounts of the conflagration. So, in this centenary year we can only piece out the story from fragments of mid-20th century interviews with those who were there.

The fire apparently started near the same location of a fire that had caused considerable damage when the house was under construction in the 1720s.

Judge Fielding Lewis Taylor, his wife Ellen Deans Taylor, and their 23-year-old daughter known as Nellie, had spent the evening of March 23 at home with their after-dinner guest, Joseph Tabb. The southwest room on the first floor where they chatted was a combination dining and sitting room, which accommodated a piano as well as a dinner table, chairs, and cabinets. The four sat around the hearth where a small fire burned to dispel the spring chill. After three or four hours of conversation and music, Tabb left about 11:00 p.m., and the Taylors retired to bed, leaving the fire to be banked by a domestic helper. There is a common assumption that a spark later jumped from the hearth onto a nearby rug.

In the early morning of March 24, Nellie, whose second-floor bedroom was immediately above the dining-sitting room, was awakened by the smell of smoke. She quickly rose and ran downstairs to look for a fire. When she opened the door of the southwest room, she discovered what she later called "a light blaze." According to the most straightforward narrative, she hurried back upstairs to alert her parents, who slept in the southeast room across the hall from her bedroom. Nellie and her mother led her father, partially disabled by a recent stroke, to the top of the main stair,

asking him to wait while they gathered up a few necessary items and valuables. So thick did the smoke become in the few minutes it took them, that when they returned for him, they could only join together by calling out to each other.

After shepherding her parents down the stairs and out the north door to the lawn, Nellie returned to her room to rescue a trunk. Because of its weight, she was only able to drag it to the top of the main staircase, where, with smoke too dense for her to take it farther, she left it to return to her parents.

Probably hearing a fire bell, neighbors began to gather on the lawn to try to help. Among those closest were a tenant farmer, Monroe Horsley, and a handyman, Charley Banks, who was probably descended from Rosewell slaves. Both men were remembered moving furniture and other household goods from the northwest room on the first floor, which was slow to catch fire.

About 6:00 a.m., Cecil W. Page, Sr., waking at his home "Shelly," saw smoke coming from the opposite shore of Carter's Creek. Rousing a neighbor, Josh Minor, he and Minor rowed downstream and across to Rosewell, and as they came within sight of the mansion, they witnessed the roof falling into the interior. After pulling the boat ashore and running through a field to the mansion, they found the Taylors on the lawn in their nightclothes among the gathering spectators. Page remembered Mrs. Taylor sitting on a stump, writing a telegram.

Despite so much water on three sides of the Rosewell estate, there was no way to douse the flames, and though the fire died down when the falling roof demolished the three floors below, embers continued to burn at ground level for two weeks. There were numerous rumors about the treasures lost, and the verified losses included a 17th century portrait of Augustine Warner, as well as the communion service and record books from Abingdon Church and the Taylor family silver. At least two of the communion vessels, restored in the early 20th century, are still in use at Abingdon.

See *The Fire ...* continues on page 3

From the President's Pen



Dear Friends of Rosewell,

As I look over the past year, I am so proud of what the Board of Directors has accomplished, thanks to our member support and hard work. Some of the projects that we have discussed for years are finally coming to fruition.

The Visitors Center was painted which was long overdue after 16 years since opening. The only part left is the roof and that will take a special someone to take care of that. We are a working Board, but are not that daring.

We have discussed permanent signage at the ruins since I became associated with Rosewell in 1997. Thanks to some grants, the first three signs of the nine sign project will be installed this spring. We hope to have them in place for our opening April 2, 2016. The remaining signs will be added when funding is in place, but all are designed and ready to go so the project is a cohesive unit.

The memorial brick sidewalk is ready to be installed, hopefully late spring or early summer. The Annual Bar-B-Que and Ghost Tours continue to be successful, thanks to the diligent work of the Event Chairmen.

I will be stepping down this May from the Board and I am proud to say that Rosewell is in better shape now than when I took office, but it was the hard work of our staff and Board of Directors that made all of this happen. I know that there are more great plans for the future and with the support of all of our donors and supporters, Rosewell will continue to thrive and be an even greater testament to history.

I thank you all for your help in make Rosewell what it is today and to stand proud for years to come. It was an honor to serve.

*Thank you all,
Sandy Paït*



The Fire ... continued from page 2

Rosewell was not rebuilt, and the Taylors went to live at another Gloucester house, where Judge and Mrs. Taylor died in the early 1920s. In 1922, Nellie married Gennad Greaves, a U.S. Army officer. Gennad's sister Elizabeth had married Cecil Page in 1919, and thus was the sister-in-law of Nellie Taylor Greaves. In 1979, Gennad and Nellie's children, Col. Fielding L. Greaves, and Nellie Deans Greaves, bequeathed the remnants of the Rosewell mansion and over seven surrounding acres to the Gloucester Historical Society, which formed the Rosewell Foundation in 1989 to protect the ruin.

Sign



This signage mock-up was displayed at the annual BBQ

your way into Rosewell History!

How? By becoming a Rosewell signage project sponsor. Rosewell needs \$18,000 to complete the **Signage at the Ruin** project. The first of three signs are currently in production and will be installed at the ruin upon completion. The 35" x 23" signs will: have a provision for an audio story; present narratives of the unique architectural and interior features of the house; have a history of the early Page family; and have an overview of the three families who owned the house after the Pages sold it.

You can sign your way into Rosewell history for your sponsorship gift of \$2000. Your name will be placed on the sign you sponsor as a lasting tribute to preserving the history of the ruin.

Contact the Rosewell office (804) 693-2585 for more information about becoming a **Signage at the Ruin** project sponsor.

Thank You!

Your contributions during 2015 helped the Rosewell Foundation achieve many of our long outstanding goals. Your generosity helps us continue to protect, preserve, and present the Rosewell Story for years to come.

STUDENT - \$10 OR LESS

Aldrich, John
Burnette, Rachael B.
Cockrell, Joseph & Claire
Doyel, Chris
Goodhart, Sally S.
Herr, Barry
Millar, John F.
Ours, Linda A.
Rice, Michael & Robin
Terretta, Alexis
Terretta, D. & Susan



INDIVIDUAL - \$25 TO \$49

Butler III, James T.
Carlton, Patricia B.
Carrell II, William P.
Cassin, Alice
Clagett, Anne M.
Corvino, Mark
Crosland, Page Dahl
Dickinson, Charles W.
Dragoo, Christine W.
Drummond, Phillip O.
Dycus, Gary L.
Fary, Ann A.
Field, Bonner M.
Fillingane, Hulon P.
Fowler, Lloyd
Geddings, Bernice S.
Goggin, Judith Page
Gunn, Margaret
Hadlow, Maria S.
Hall, Patsy L.
Hancock, James R.
Hicks, Hilarie M.
Hobbs, Carl
Horne, Janis M.
Jarvis, F. Edwin
Kohlhepp, Nancy Wilson
Loveland, Kathryn R.
Marks, Robert A.
Mooney, Barbara B.
Murphy, Helen Turner
Oh, Pek Ean
Page IV, William E.
Page, Jeffrey Robert
Palmer III, George C.
Randall, Marion C.
Randolph, Sarah Gayle
Read, Bryan
Reid, Bagley
Robbins, Page
Robertson, Daphne & William
Sharp, Tyrrell C.
Spang, Joseph P.



Spruill, Joseph L.
Stolz, Betty & Richard
Sycamore House
Ulsaker, Margaret M.
Wagner, Armand W.
Wells, William T.
Weymer-Carter, Ellen J.
Williams, Kenneth D.

FAMILY - \$50 TO \$99

Ball, Anne G.
Barker, Eirlys M.
Bogley, Robert W.
Bolger, Anita S.
Brown, James R.
Brown, Katharine L.
Burnett, Omer
Carr, Elizabeth A
Clements, Marian P.
Colony III, John J.
Crabill, Norman L.
Crawley III, John L.
Davis, Dorothy S.
Doley, John P.
Dwyer, Page W.
Emerson, Dennis
Fore, Julian W.
Garrett, Della P.
Gerstman, Regina L.
Goddard, Hannah L.
Goodall, Anne Hill
Greene, CDR J.S.
Gwaltney, D. E.
Hegler, Denise P.
Henry, Lawrence
Hewitt, Marilyn
Hollerith Jr., Richard
James, Clayton
James, June Mitchell
Johnson, T. Page
King, Julia A.
Lehman, Marjorie E.
Lighl, A. Heath
Lineberry, Joseph
Lorence, Rodney E.
Mann, Betty B.
Marble, Joan C.
McClaskie, Melanie
McManus, Margaret M.
Montague, Robert L.
Morgan, Harvey B.
Mullins, Donald
Nichols, E. Jane
Ouzts, Willaim G.
Owen Jr., John C.
Page, Valerie



Phillips, Ann Edwards
 Phillips, Bruce C.
 Rowe, Carolyn
 Salake, Janice
 Sheetz, Katherine
 Sites, Crawford M.
 Spetko, Eloise
 Thompson, Debra
 Weaver, Bill & Madelyn
 Wiatt, Roberta A.
 Williams, Cam G.
 Wright, Margaret
 Zahn, George A.



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 Colony Electric Inc.
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 Daum, Janet B.
 Dolan, James E.
 Doyel Communications Sales, Inc.
 Farmer, Evan
 Field Sr., Lawrence H.
 Finney, Sarah G.
 Fitzgerald, Tazewell
 Foster, Bruce
 Frischkorn, Page S.
 Gallagher, Joann L.
 Gates, Joan B.
 Gresham, Richard Wells
 Hall, S Jenean
 Hampton Inn Gloucester
 Hart JR., R.P.
 Haskell, Elizabeth
 Healey Jr., Roger
 Hodgkin Trust, Sarah S.
 Host, Ann W.
 Joseph, Adrienne
 Laird, Tillie Page
 Longsworth, Charles R.
 Loring, Roger Dale
 Marks, Edward
 McCoy Jr., Charles H.
 McArthur, Linda
 Miller, Hugh C.
 Morton, Martha T.
 Munger, John H.
 Muron, Dr. David & Marilyn
 Nelson, S Page
 Newton M.D., David E.
 Ottarson Construction
 Owens Jr., Carroll W.
 Owens, Maureen
 Pace, Sandra
 Page Foundation
 Page, Janice C.
 Page, John
 Page, Mari Elizabeth



Peebles-Host, Janet
 Perreault, Mark D.
 Perrin, Susan M.
 Putnam, Thomas P.
 Reagan & James Wealth
 Richardson, Selden
 Rouse, Sarah
 Seale, William
 Simpson, John P.
 Smith, E. G.
 Smith, Susan
 Smith, William & Nancy
 Stone, Kearfott M.
 Swedo, Lorraine A.
 Theberge, Louise
 Tidewater Physical Therapy
 Toler, Rod
 Tucker, E.W. Marshall
 Vanleeuwen, Evan B.
 Verbyla, Elsa C.
 Warden, Page Laubach
 Warthen III, Harry J.
 Wason, Harry H.
 Webb, Anne
 York River Inn B&B



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 Macdonald, Alastair S
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 Randol, Gayle K.
 Starmer Jr., James E.
 Wenger, Mark
 Wilmoth, Susan D.

**Doyel
 Communications
 Sales, Inc**

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 Armstrong Foundation
 Bemiss, Margaret
 Community Foundation (AMAZING RAISE)
 Grant, Letitia M.
 Hankins, Jane H.
 Hill, William & Ruth
 Kathryn M Kohler Estate
 Messina, Ray
 Page, Philip & Anne
 Page, Rosewell
 Pait, Sandra
 Treacle Foundation



Rosewell Unearthed



By Thane Harpole
Co-Director, Fairfield Foundation

Over the past year and a half we have been doing limited archaeological testing around the Rosewell ruin in preparation for the installation of new interpretive signs as well as for tree re-plantings. We do this work because the Rosewell site is under a protective historic easement held by the Department of Historic Resources, and because the buried layers and artifact have many stories to tell us about the history of this iconic landscape.

The work has also been timed to coincide with the last two Rosewell barbecue events because archaeology is best when it can be shared with the public, engaging visitors in the discovery of fragments of the past. Often the children are the most intrigued by being able to scrape away thin layers of soil that tell a story about a particular chapter in history, or by shaking dirt through the screen and watching fragmented pieces of brick, nails, and glass appear. These artifacts are tangible connections to the past— a past that holds many stories we do not fully know, but can uncover bit by bit in the ground at Rosewell.

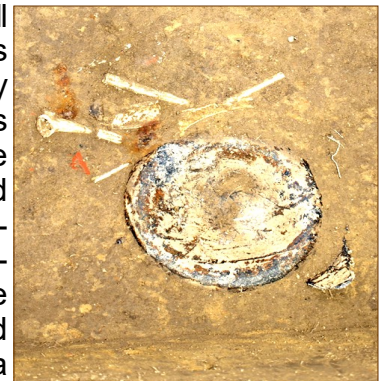
The old adage about not being able to dig a hole in Virginia without turning up history is amplified at Rosewell. The grounds surrounding the house appear to have escaped the plow, leaving multiple layers intact to tell the site's story, rather than one jumbled layer. Because of this complexity, and the richness of the archaeological record, we want to preserve as much as possible for future research, and so we only excavate a limited number of tests to mitigate the impacts of new signs and trees. Although each of the tests excavated so far has interesting information to reveal about Rosewell's history, eventually the results will be combined with previous archaeology to get a more complete picture of landscape changes across the property through time.

One test unit in particular, excavated in front of the ruin, uncovered a series of buried layers including a small cache of wine bottle glass and tobacco pipe fragments. This material was found more than a foot below the ground surface, underneath both the mod-



Test Unit 221 in progress, showing cache of wine bottle glass and pipes.

ern topsoil and a fill layer that likely dates to the mid-18th century after the mansion was completed and the grounds were cleaned of construction debris. The glass includes a complete wine bottle base and two bottle necks of a type common at the beginning of the 18th century.



Some of the glass and tobacco pipes from Test Unit 221D and E

The pipe fragments, several of which were marked with the initials 'AS' on the side of the heel, date to a similar time period. The 'AS' mark potentially represents a pipe maker in Westminster, England known as Anthony Sidwell, who worked from 1696 to 1717. Both wine bottles and pipes were imported to Virginia in large quantities and the Page family purchased many of these items for their use. They were also fragile items and readily discarded once broken, so we recover many fragments of these everyday items. However, to find such a concentration in a small space suggests a different story.

Perhaps this was one bucket of refuse dumped in a small depression in the yard, or possibly somebody knocked a couple of bottles and pipes off a shelf and quickly disposed of them. Archaeology may not reveal all the details of how these objects were used and discarded, but it offers new insight into what happened at Rosewell, and gets us a little closer to understanding what life was like in centuries past.

The Best Barbecue ... and the food was good too!

By Philip Page
Vice Chairman, Rosewell Board of Directors

Another gorgeous day (70 degrees and sunny) brought the Rosewell ruins to life on Sunday October 18. Almost 187 people attended our annual BBQ-at-the-Ruins fundraiser.

In keeping with our mission of educating the public, the BBQ engaged our guests in fine colonial style: with a Revolutionary war encampment; historical figures; and an archeological dig led by the Fairfield Foundation. Archeologist Thane Harpole was on-hand to display some of the artifacts uncovered during 2015. (See *Rosewell Unearthed*, page 4) Mary Claycomb displayed two of the nine signs that will eventually be installed at the ruin, designed to help guide visitors and provide self-guided information on the history and life of Rosewell, and docent Chris Doyel gave tours of the ruins for our newcomers. Something Different Duo, comprised of Brad and Ashley, reprised their stellar performance from two years ago and graced us with their music.

Wine tasting, provided by The Philip Carter Winery, gave the guests an opportunity to sample several wines, including their signature Rosewell wine. We also revisited some Gloucester history with an oyster display provided by Tidewater Oyster Growers Association (TOGA), and VIMS (Virginia Institute of Marine Science), who set up a booth outlining the history of crabbing.

Explaining how lost or abandoned crab pots still continue to snare and pose a threat to waterlife, Dr. Donna Bilkovic introduced her design of a biodegradable door on ghost pots so the marine life can escape; thus ensuring the sustainability of our waterlife. Finally, special guest Delegate Keith Hodges talked about the proposed state park, and what the future holds for Rosewell.

The event raised over \$5,600 toward preserving the ruins, helped by local businesses and Board members who were very generous with Silent Auction donations.

Thank you for helping to make the BBQ a success:

Our Sponsors - Scotty Signs, EVB, Tidewater Physical Therapy, The Audiology, Philip Carter Winery, Bayport Credit Union, Reagan & James, Peace Frogs, Trudie's Porta Johns, Hampton Inn, B&S Refuse, Doyel Communications; **Our Workers** - David Clements and Friends of Dragon Run, Gloucester County Dept. of Parks and Recreation, David Brown and Thane Harpole of the Fairfield Foundation, Warren Deal, John Aldrich, Chris Doyel, Earl Evans;

Our Staff - Sarah Saunders and Katrina White Brown.



Quite a lot of interest was generated by the mock-up representing the signs that will be installed at the ruin. (See *Sign Your Way into Rosewell History* on page 3).



Wine tasting is a popular feature of the BBQ. Wines were provided by Philip Carter Winery



Archeologist Thane Harpole discusses some of the artifacts recently uncovered at Rosewell.



Re-enactor Warren Deal (Rosewell board member and President of the Gloucester Historical Society) and Something Different Duo vocalist Ashley Wenner.

History ... Why it Matters

The Spirit of Sankofa



By Katrina White Brown
Manager,
Rosewell Visitor
and Exhibit
Center



Mythical
Sankofa
Bird

The Akan people of West Africa believe in the importance of learning from the past. The word "Sankofa" literally translates to mean "it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot." This teaches us the importance of going back to our roots in order to move forward. That is, we should reach back and gather the best of what our past has to teach us, so that we can achieve our full potential as we move forward. Symbolically and visually, this spirit is expressed as a mythical bird that flies forward while looking backward with an egg (symbolizing the future) in its mouth. It emphasizes that "in order to understand our present and ensure our future, we must know our past."

Because we are custodians of the past, most historians thrive on the spirit of Sankofa. This spirit compels us to: challenge historical injustice, illuminate dark cornered myths, re-examine ancient legacies, and open generations of a closed past. We collect and assess memories, we construct the framework on which thoughts, actions, and behaviors are built, and we observe and reflect on how history impacts change and progress.

But historians also have a deeper moral obligation, because we cannot just be outside observers; we cannot simply watch how life events develop like cultures in a petri dish. We are forced to engage with, interpret, participate in, and imagine ourselves as part of that history, because we are. Our history paints the first brushstroke on our life's canvass. How that history is remembered, or disremembered impacts our attitude and determines how we interact socially, politically, physically, emotionally, and often spiritually, by constructing and deconstructing beliefs. The spirit of Sankofa means that even though we are not responsible for events long past, we must be responsible for the preservation and presentation of these events to coming generations.

It is not taboo to go back and fetch what we forgot, because ultimately what we retrieve helps us apply the lessons learned to the concerns of the present and the challenges of the future.

Explore History!

Sign up for the Rappahannock Institute for Lifelong Learning (RILL) Spring 2016 Course #220—Archaeology and Early Virginia Landscapes
April 6, 13, and 20 (Wednesdays); 1-3 pm,
Instructors: Dave Brown and Thane Harpole, Co-directors of The Fairfield Foundation.

The class will visit three Gloucester County sites: Werowocomoco, Fairfield Plantation, and Rosewell. Historical archaeology can provide a new perspective on the physical layout and evolution of past landscapes. This course, repeated by popular demand, will examine recent research into three significant archaeological sites in Gloucester County: Powhatan's 1607 capital at Werowocomoco, Lewis Burwell II's 1694 manor house and plantation Fairfield, and the magnificent early 18th-century ruin of Rosewell. Students will visit these sites and discuss the archaeological findings. Class outline provided by RILL. For more information, contact RILL at www.rappahannock.edu/foundation, or call Sharon Drotleff at 804-333-6707

Rosewell Needs You!

Volunteers supply our lifeblood at the Rosewell Foundation. Our docents make it possible for us to continue unlocking the trove of historical treasures at Rosewell.

There are many ways you can help, and no experience is needed. All you need is a passion for history and a willingness to help.

We welcome anybody interested in guiding tours, fundraising and membership drives, providing in-kind service, and performing administrative tasks. Your organization, social group, study group or class, or church organization can volunteer and receive valuable community service hours. Docents receive free Rosewell Foundation membership, and also receive discounts on gift shop purchases and other exclusive offers available only to members.

Contact the Visitors Center (804) 693-2585 for more information.

Rosewell is calling ... please answer!

The Rosewellian is published bi-annually for the members of the Rosewell Foundation.

Editor: Katrina White Brown.

For more information, or to comment on anything in this issue, contact Rosewell at 804-693-2585

P.O. Box 1456 Gloucester VA 23061



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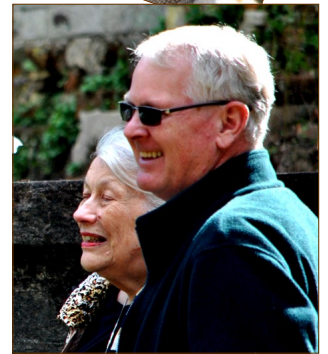


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Mark Wenger,
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The Board in action at the 2015 Annual BBQ. Photos from top Ed Marks and Sandy Pait discuss the successes of the day; all smiles are Marilyn Muron and Clayton James; David Muron enjoys the meal, Mary Claycomb and Philip Page greeted guests all afternoon, and Letitia "Tish" Grant and her husband Will Grant handled the very popular Silent Auction.

Boxwoods in Bloom



The historic boxwoods propagated six years ago from the ancient boxwood located at the far end of the Rosewell gardens that extended from the mansion (towards Carter's Creek) are once again being offered for sale. Cultivated by Master Gardener and Board President Sandy Pait, the boxwood plants are cut from the 100 + year old boxwood on the grounds. They sell for \$20 and come with a numbered certificate of authenticity. Call the Visitors Center, 804-693-2585, to reserve your boxwood; to grow your own piece of Rosewell history.



A boxwood propagation class was conducted at Rosewell in Nov. 2015 by Master Gardener Sandy



The Rosewell Foundation
P.O. Box 1456
Gloucester, VA 23061

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Upcoming Events

April

- 2** Rosewell opens for the 2016 season
- 2-3** Daffodil Festival at Gloucester Courthouse
- 20** RILL Archeology and Early Virginia Landscapes tour (see story page 8)
- 23** "Under the Trees" Gloucester County Historic Garden Week Tour at Brent and Becky's Bulbs

May

- 14** Rosewell Secret Garden Tour
- 15** Board of Directors Annual Meeting

October

- 16** Annual Rosewell BBQ at the Ruin
- 29-31** Ghost Tours

Contact Us

Visitor Center Hours

Monday - Thursday
and Saturday
10:00 - 4:00pm
Sunday
1:00 - 4:00pm
Closed Fridays

Navigation address (GPS)

5113 Old Rosewell Lane
Gloucester, VA
23061

Mailing Address

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23061
(804) 693-2585

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