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"A Dirty, Unattractive, Vacant Lot" Orange's Memorial Playground, 1949-50

Ray Ezell

By the late 1940s, leaders in the Town of Orange had long recognized a need for a developed and safe municipal playground for the town's youth. In 1949, under the auspices and leadership of the Woman's Club of Orange (Woman's Club) steps were taken to bring that vision to fruition. This essay documents those efforts in Orange.[1]

At a Town Council meeting in February 1949, community leaders James W. Green, B. F. Tappy, and T. Newton Sparks addressed the need to create a playground for children within the town limits. They proposed that the Woman's Club sponsor this endeavor, and in turn the town donate the use of its lot along Belleview Avenue (behind the county courthouse) to the project which then would be joined with the adjacent, larger tract owned by Orange's American Legion Post #156. However, in order for such a project to be realized, a storm sewer would need to be installed to carry stormwater to the main trunk line along Madison Road, east of these lots (Figure 1). The cost of the construction of the sewer extension was estimated at $1,200 (a considerable sum in 1949). As described in a February 8, 1949, letter from H. F. Knoell, town Manager, the council voted unanimously to complete the sewer project, which would clear the way for playground development.[2]



Figure 1. American Legion Property during Installation of Sewer Line Extension in 1949, View (looking east) from Belleview Avenue (Woman's Club Scrapbook, n.d.).

Shortly afterward in March 1949, the Woman's Club voted to stand their playground project for entry into the organization's "Build a Better Community" contest sponsored by the General Federation of Woman's Clubs.[3] The winning project would receive a prize of $60,000. The project was characterized by the planning, development, and equipping of a children's playground near the center of the town, known as the "Memorial Playground."[4] Immediately after the Woman's Club voted to proceed, the affiliated Junior Orange Woman's Club joined the endeavor as a co-sponsor of the project.[5] The committee charged with the execution of the project on behalf of the Woman's Club was composed of: Rosa Kite and Margaret Turner (co-chairwomen), Aubrey Hamilton, Jean Purcell, and Grace McCutcheon (immediate past president of the club).[6] The committee from the Junior Woman's Club was composed of: Virginia Mason, Margaret Chewning, Irwin Sherman, and Polly Duffer.[7]

Orange American Legion Post #156, in addition to providing the unrestricted use of their large lot on Belleview Avenue for the playground site, also performed considerable site work and had the lot graded and leveled, which was a prerequisite for any construction that would be undertaken. This parcel, once a part of the Frank B. Perry estate, was acquired by the Legion post in 1934 and was soon proposed for the location of a Legion meeting hall and community center. According to

[1] This essay summarizes the wealth of information (e.g., letters, photographs, newspaper clippings, and committee reports) documenting the development of a community playground contained in an Orange Woman's Club scrapbook currently housed at the Orange County Historical Society. The scrapbook is the property of the Orange Woman's Club and this essay is produced with their permission.

[2] Woman's Club of Orange, "Playground Scrapbook" (n.d.), n.p. Orange County Historical Society.

[3] "Woman's Club Donates $100 to County Public Library." *The Orange Review*, March 17, 1949.

[4] "Playground Will Be Dedicated." *The Orange Review*, January 19, 1950.

[5] Woman's Club of Orange, "Playground Scrapbook" (n.d.), n.p. Orange County Historical Society.

[6] "Mrs. F. B. Hastings Elected President of Woman's Club." The Orange Review, May 19, 1949.

[7] "Community Play Ground Endorsed." *The Orange Review*, June 9, 1949.

See **Playground** *on page 2.*

Playground *(continued)*

a letter documenting the site's history by James W. Green (editor of *The Orange Review*), this attempt at initial development failed before the United States' entrance into World War II. In late 1945 under the leadership of Post Commander Col. Leith Speiden (a veteran of both World Wars), plans were adopted to construct a War Memorial building on this tract, including a library, 900-seat auditorium, armory for the Virginia State Guard, veterans meeting room, and offices for town officials.[8, 9, 10] The Orange County War Memorial Association was then established (with Cmdr. Speiden as its chair) to take charge of the fundraising for the project,[11] and a total of $75,000 was reportedly raised for this effort. After the death of Cmdr. Speiden in June 1946, the War Memorial building project languished and was terminated by the Legion and the donations collected were returned to the contributors.[12]

After the War Memorial project was terminated, the members of the Legion post then voted to construct their meeting hall in its present location at the end of Newton Street. According to an article in the March 13, 1949, edition of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, the post initiated the construction of their meeting hall in early March on this tract acquired from the Shackelford estate.[13] Although the Legion failed to develop their parcel on Belleview, they retained the lot with an expressed interest in developing it for children's recreation. They then found a willing partner for the lot's development in the Woman's Club.

By the late summer of 1949, planning for the newly proposed playground project was well underway and the completion of the sewer line was nearly finished. The Woman's Club secured the participation of Albert Beecher, a landscape architect with experience in playgrounds from the Virginia Polytechnic Institute (VPI), a.k.a. Virginia Tech. Beecher travelled to Orange and met with the project sponsors in July, and the Woman's Club planned to use $1,200 in previous fundraising to equip the finished playground.[14, 15]

According to an *Orange Review* article from September 8, 1949, design plans for the site, produced by the Extension Office at Virginia Tech, were delivered to the Woman's Club and were deemed sufficient to begin site development.[16] The site plan was characterized by the construction of perimeter fencing, a wading pool, plantings, swings, water fountain, rest rooms, picnic area, sandbox, and softball diamond. The playground measured 222 x 225-ft and was designed to be mostly used by smaller children under adult supervision. The article also mentioned that the Orange Boy Scout hut, located on the town's adjacent lot to the south, would be adapted to be compatible with the new facilities. The Boy Scout hut is reported by local informants to be a relict Sunday school classroom building previously associated with the Trinity Methodist Church on Main Street, and is visible on the Methodist Church property in a 1937 aerial image of Orange. Apparently in conjunction with the renovation of the Methodist church building (ca. 1949), the building was repurposed and relocated for the Boy Scouts' use (Figure 2). Close examination of archival photographs from the fall of 1949 and early winter 1950 indicate that the Boy Scout hut arrived on its location on the town lot during the construction of the playground.



Figure 2. Boy Scouts Painting a Newly Installed Fence at the Memorial Playground in Late 1949-50, with Recently Installed Scout Hut in the Background (Woman's Club Scrapbook, n.d.).

On September 9th, Post #156 voted to accept the design plans for the playground with little substantive change. In the post's letter to the Woman's Club, they confirmed their donation of the use of the tract for this purpose; however, they reserved the privilege to use the property for one week out of the year for their carnival. The letter also noted that if the town prevented the carnival from being conducted, the Legion would likely sell the tract.[17]

In September 1949, the town completed the drainage improvements and catch basin on the lot. Simultaneously, the Woman's Club actively sought active partners in their project from local civic and community organizations. A letter to Grace McCutcheon, president of the Woman's Club, from J.

[8] "Community Play Ground Endorsed." *The Orange Review*, June 9, 1949.

[9] "Playground Scrapbook" (n.d.).

[10] "Drive Opens for Memorial at Orange." *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, December 16, 1945.

[11] Speiden, William H. *Letters to Tyler*. (Virginia: Laurel Hill Press, 2019), 443.

[12] "Playground Scrapbook" (n.d.).

[13] "Legion at Orange Starts Club House." *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, March 13, 1949.

[14] "Playground Site Inspected Thursday." *The Orange Review*, July 21, 1949.

[15] "Playground Scrapbook" (n.d.).

[16] "Playground Plans Received Here." *The Orange Review*, September 8, 1949.

[17] "Playground Scrapbook" (n.d.).

See **Playground** *on page 3.*

Playground *(continued)*

H. Gillum, Town Mayor, congratulated her and the playground committee on the leadership provided for this effort, and he pledged the town's support. The town had acquired their lot to the rear of the courthouse in 1937 from the estate of Frank Perry in the hopes of converting the area into a recreational greenspace. A zoning ordinance passed in 1946 also reflected this desire and labeled the lot as a "Public Grounds," requiring special authorization for its development from the town's planning commission.[18] Photographs of this lot at the outset of the Woman's Club project confirm that no progress had been made by the town and it was actually more of a dumping ground for refuse than a recreation area or greenspace.

Similar pledges of support came from the Orange County Chamber of Commerce; Dolly Madison Garden Club (planting trees and shrubbery); Junior Woman's Club of Orange ($500 donation); Merchants Grocery, Scott-Pendleton Feed Co., and T.O Gillum & Co. (seeding, fertilizer, & lime); P. D. Waugh & Sons (heavy equipment); C. C. Gill & Sons (paint); W. T. Goodwin and H. E. Grasty & Brothers (fencing supplies); Town of Orange (labor for waterline for restrooms, wading pool, and drinking fountain); Lion's Club (outdoor fireplace); Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Gipson (U.S. flag); Dorothy Williams (flagpole); Orange Rotary Club (drinking fountain); American Silk Mills ($500); Orange PTA (playground supervision); University of Virginia (leadership training); Circle of King's Daughters ($200 for leadership training courses); Orange Volunteer Fire Department ($52); Ladies Auxiliary Orange Volunteer Fire Department ($50); Virginia Metal Products Corporation ($100); Woodberry Forest student body ($28); Biddie Sanford ($10); and Orange Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution ($9).

Construction of the project began in earnest in the fall of 1949, at a total cost of $1,696, which was far below the amount donated for the construction, improvements, and equipment. In total, the project generated $4,186 in direct donation support from the Orange community.[19]

By the end of January 1950, the Memorial Playground on Belleview Avenue was completed (in time for the January 15th contest deadline). Maple, sycamore, and tulip poplar trees had been planted, as well as screening shrubbery along the perimeter.[20] A white picket fence had been erected and play equipment had been put into place. A sketch of the completed playground was drawn by local architect J. R. Bailey on February 6, 1950, showing its features, as well as a number of the surrounding buildings that are no longer extant (Figure 3).

On January 13, 1950, a meeting was held to establish the "Community Playground Committee," which would help to administer the operation and maintenance of the playground, consisting of the following organizations: Woman's Club, Junior Woman's Club, King's Daughters, Girl and Boy Scouts, Orange Homemakers, Orange Homemakers-Night Club, Rotary Club, Lions Club, Dolly Madison Garden Club, 4-H Club, Orange PTA, Orange Music Club, American Legion Post #156, Orange Ministerial Association, American Silk Mills, Gordonsville Baptist Church, and Woodberry Forest School. Leadership classes conducted by the University of Virginia began for playground volunteers at the end of January.

After a delay of several months, the new Memorial Playground was finally dedicated on May 14, 1950. Mrs. Faye Kilpatrick was named supervisor for its inaugural season (three months during the summer). Giles H. Miller of the Culpeper Chapter of the Virginia Society for Crippled Children and Adults (and mayor of Culpeper) delivered the keynote address, and Virginius R. Shackelford was master of ceremonies. R. H. Brockman, Commander of Post #156, made the formal presentation of the playground jointly to the presidents of the Women's Club and Junior Women's Club, Mrs. F. B. Hastings and Mrs. Dorothy Brockman. The dedication ceremony contained all the pomp and circumstance of a major civic event. A Legion honor guard raised the American flag and the Orange High School band played the national anthem to inaugurate the facility. The Orange Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops also participated. Disappointingly however, the Memorial Playground project did not win the Virginia division of the Build a Better Community contest, but it did receive an honorable mention among Class B entries at the state convention of the General Federation of Women's Clubs held in Roanoke earlier that month. The overall winner was the Elkton chapter and its project that developed a youth center, renovated the town hall, and improved entrances to the town. The projects from Middlesex and Newport News received honorable mentions in this class as well.



Figure 3. 1950 Sketch of the Completed Memorial Playground (Woman's Club Scrapbook, n.d.).

[18] "Playground Scrapbook" (n.d.).
[19] "Playground Scrapbook" (n.d.).
[20] "Playground Scrapbook" (n.d.).

See **Playground** *on page 4.*

Playground *(continued)*

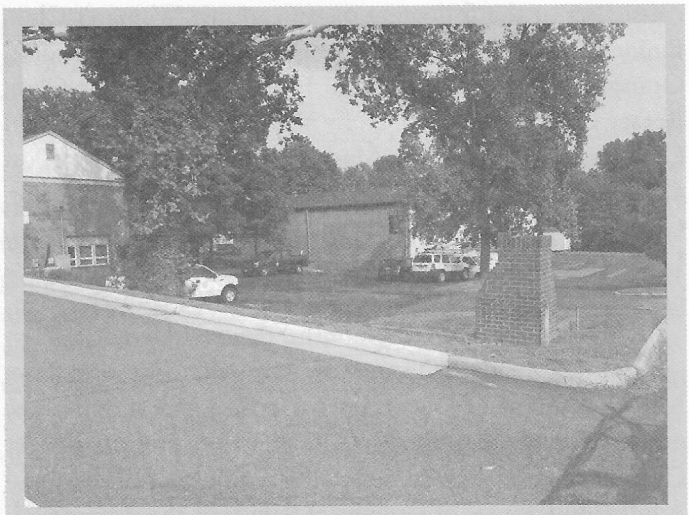


Figure 4. Northwest View of the Former Memorial Playground Site (Fireplace in Foreground)-now the Location of the Verizon Telephone Office and the Orange Public Works Department (July 2021, Photograph courtesy of Ray Ezell).

The Memorial Playground operated until sometime in the early 1960s when it was dismantled and the property was sold. In 1963 the current department of public works and Verizon offices were constructed on the lot. Some folks in Orange still have fond memories of the playground and the friends and good times that they made there. Today the only reminder of the disappeared playground is the brick fireplace with stone seats standing in a small patch of grass amongst the asphalt parking lots behind the Orange Courthouse complex, a miniscule reminder of a proud community improvement project that brought Orange together for a singular purpose (Figure 4).

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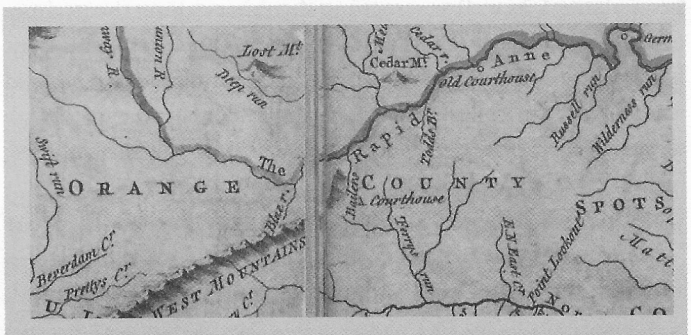
Linda Carlton

The Orange County Historical Society is honored to partner with Orange County Public Schools to make local history more easily accessible to history teachers in grades 4 - 12. We believe that Orange County's history is uniquely rich as we are the home of two Presidents, five governors, a speaker of the House of Representatives and Associate Justice of the Supreme Court as well as ordinary citizens. We are the home of Civil and Revolutionary War history and courageous citizens who gave their lives in multiple foreign wars.

Further, we believe that attaching local history to national events creates meaning for students and helps them understand the world first found in their own neighborhoods. The struggles and triumphs of our citizens help connect, and provide a context for, the national and world history they study in class. Having local stories incorporated into patterns of historical change should increase understanding of American history and the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) required for graduation.

To support the teaching of local history, the Society has created an *Educators Resource* page on our website (https://www.orangecovahist.org/educator-resources.html) with maps, primary sources, videos, stories, and snippets of information arranged chronologically by generic units that correspond to those that may be taught. For example, when a teacher is teaching the Colonial Period, there are items that range from a brief history of the home, Bloomsbury, to early roads and maps, courthouses, Paul Jennings, the Madisons and Taylors, James Waddell, and Nathaniel Gordon. Currently over 90 articles are posted.

By making local history readily available, parts of it can be more easily incorporated into lesson plans. Preparing for teaching is time-consuming, and we want to support teachers' efforts to assimilate parts of our local history into current units wherever it is of interest and appropriate. It is a win-win for everyone, but especially for the students of Orange County. In addition, we welcome everyone to learn more about Orange County history by using this new resource . . . it's not just for teachers but for life-long learners too!



Detail of the mid-18th-century Fry-Jefferson Map of Virginia that includes the area of modern Orange County. The entire map can be seen at https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3880.ct000370/

Pandemic!

Ann Miller

Part 2: The 18th-Century Smallpox Pandemic in Orange County

A number of references to the 18th-century smallpox pandemic can be seen in the Orange County records and various family papers. Although fewer and smaller in size than the northern cities such as Boston, Philadelphia and New York, Virginia towns and small cities such as Winchester, Williamsburg, and Fredericksburg saw significant outbreaks of smallpox. In addition, the disease moved through the countryside with people traveling between towns, markets, churches, farms, and larger plantations.

The spate of deaths recorded for the interrelated Taylor, Chew, Conway and Madison families during 1760-1762 has been noted by a number of historians as likely related to the smallpox outbreak that had spread southward from Canada, the northern colonies, and the Indians of the Ohio valley in the last half of the 1750s. The spread of the disease was fostered by the troop movements of the French and Indian War. In Virginia, the disease worked its way down through Frederick County in the northern Shenandoah Valley, and then eastward and southward, eventually moving into Orange County and the surrounding Virginia Piedmont. Probable victims in the Madison family group included the mother, mother-in-law, and grandmother of James Madison, Sr., along with at least one uncle and several cousins, although the young James Madison, Jr. (the future president), and his siblings, apparently escaped the disease.[1]

Contagion from smallpox victims was known and feared. It was common to "cleanse" the houses where a smallpox victim had been, often by whitewashing the walls or treating them with sulfur, and by burning the victims' clothes, and, often, their bedding. This treatment could be extended to other items that the victim had touched. An example of such "cleansing" can be seen in the case of another recorded local victim, John Pannill, who lived in eastern Orange County. In December 1762, he made his will, noting that he was "in a low state of health." He was apparently unmarried, since he left his property to his mother, his three brothers, and his sister. When William Pannill, apparently one of John's brothers, presented his will for probate the following October, he made oath that what he was presenting was "a true copy" of the original will. William noted that he had destroyed the original will as John "had the small pox when he made it."[2]

Following on the legislation enacted by the General Assembly in 1777, two requests for Court-sanctioned inoculation were presented to the gentlemen justices of the county court on January 22, 1778. William Cave and several others requested permission to undertake inoculation at Cave's house, and a separate request was made by Joseph Spencer.[3] The justices, James Madison, Sr., Zachariah Burnley, Thomas Bell, Thomas Barbour, and Johnny Scott, duly gave their permission, with Madison, as presiding justice, signing the minutes that noted:

> *On the Petition of Wm. Cave &c to have Leave to Inoculate for the Small Pox at his house in this County it is Granted them.*
>
> *On the Petition of Joseph Spencer to have Leave to Inoculate for the Small Pox at his house in this County it is Granted him.*

Renewed outbreaks in the first part of the 1790s resulted in restrictions on people trying to travel into Virginia from the north, as well as other precautions. On November 13, 1793, guards were ordered posted in Loudoun County at crossings and ferries on the Potomac River, "for the preventing the Introduction of the pestilential disease into this State." In an apparently related entry, on November 30, the Loudoun County justices discussed allowing people to apply for permission to inoculate against smallpox.[4]

A severe outbreak in Richmond in early 1794 resulted in the town of Manchester, just south of the James River from Richmond, calling out its militia to post guards at Mayo's bridge and the nearby Coutt's ferry to prevent people passing across the river between the two localities.[5]

In diary entries for the 1790s, Francis Taylor, cousin of James Madison, Sr., noted several cases of smallpox in the region and among his kin. In his entry for May 17, 1791, he noted "after dinner I went to J Taylors, he had got a letter from his son that he & Majr Hites family were getting well of the Small pox" (this is an apparent reference to Major Isaac Hite, a kinsman of the Taylors and Madisons, who lived in Frederick County). Not quite a week later, on May 22, 1791, Francis Taylor recorded that "J. Taylor jr. returned from Majr Hites where he had the Small pox".[6]

The disease was still active in Orange County in 1797. In late April 1797, a request for permission to inoculate was submitted by, and approved for, John Stevens and his family, who lived in southeastern Orange County and feared that they were in "Immediate Danger" of catching smallpox. From the wording

[1] Ralph Ketcham, *James Madison: A Biography* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1990), p. 16.

[2] Orange County, Virginia, Will Book 2, p. 346.

[3] Orange County, Virginia, Minute Book 2, p. 75 (January 22, 1778).

[4] Loudoun County, Virginia, Order Book P, pp. 302-303, Nov. 13, 1793; Loudoun County Order Book P, p. 315, November 20, 1793.

[5] Wyndham B. Blanton, M.D.'s *Medicine in Virginia in the Eighteenth Century* (Richmond: Garrett & Massie, Inc., 1931), p. 65.

[6] Diary of Francis Taylor, 1786-1799, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va., entries for May 17, 1791 and May 22, 1791.

See **Pandemic** *on page 6.*

Pandemic *(continued)*

of the request, it appears probable that the disease was already in the vicinity or someone in the family feared that they had been exposed themselves, or likely soon would be. The court specified that the inoculation was to take place within two weeks of the approval, at a site located at least a half mile from any road.[7] After inoculation, of course, the family would be required to quarantine until they had recovered from the effects.

> *On the Motion of John Stevens for leave to Inoculate for the Small Pox It is granted him it appearing to the court that he and his Family are [in] Immediate Danger of taking the sd. Disorder Such Inocculation to take place on or before the 10th day of May Ensuing and not less [than] half a mile from the Road.*

The 74-year-old James Madison, Sr., who was in his final year as a county justice, was not in attendance that day, but the roster of justices who approved Stevens's request included Thomas Barbour and Johnny Scott, who were veterans of the 1778 inoculation requests, along with Benjamin Johnson, Reuben Burnley, William Alcock, John Scott, Jr., John Daniel, and Thomas Row.[8]

On June 23, Francis Taylor recorded an additional smallpox case in his diary, noting: " . . . A Negro of Col. Barbours has the Small pox . . ." (this is a reference to Col. Thomas Barbour, the justice who had approved John Stevens's request two months prior, and who lived north of the present town of Gordonsville).[9] In the two months since Stevens's application, the disease had appeared some 20 miles westward of the Stevens property.

Afterwards:

The pandemic eventually faded from Orange County, although there were periodic new cases of smallpox, including an outbreak in 1848.[10] The examples cited in this article are the references and probable references that have survived from an era that did not keep medical and vital records as we know them today. The final number of Orange County smallpox cases and the death toll from the 18th-century pandemic cannot be known with certainty.

However, medical advances would shortly add a potent weapon to the arsenal against smallpox. In 1796, the English physician Dr. Edward Jenner, building on his own scientific investigation and on the research of fellow physicians, developed his process (vaccination using cowpox as opposed to variolation or inoculation using matter from a smallpox lesion). He subsequently published and publicized his findings and was a devoted promoter of vaccination. He corresponded widely with other medical practitioners, both in England and elsewhere, and also distributed the vaccine to anyone who requested it. The new, effective, and much less risky process of vaccination was eventually widely accepted and superseded the use of variolation.[11]

Vaccination had reached central Virginia by the first years of the 19th century. In 1800, one of Dr. Jenner's correspondents sent some vaccine to Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse, professor of medicine at Harvard University. Dr. Waterhouse, the first doctor to administer the vaccine in the U.S., not only was instrumental in introducing vaccination to New England but also was instrumental in persuading then-Vice President (and soon to be President) Thomas Jefferson to become a major supporter of vaccination in the United States. Jefferson not only organized vaccination events for his own enslaved population but offered vaccinations to his family and neighbors as well. In the summer of 1801, he directed, by his estimate, the vaccination of some 200 people (the Monticello slaves, his sons-in-law and a number of his neighbors).[12]

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[7] Orange County, Virginia, Minute Book 4, p. 15, April 25, 1797.

[8] James Madison, Sr. had served on the Orange County court since 1752. He officially stepped down on January 22, 1798 when the court minutes for that day noted that he "declines acting as a Magistrate." (Orange County Minute Book 4, p. 56).

[9] Diary of Francis Taylor, 1786-1799, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va., entry for June 23, 1797.

[10] In contrast to the individual initiatives of the 18th century, during the 1848 Orange County outbreak, the governmental response had a centralized, public-health component unknown in the 18th century. As noted in W. W. Scott's 1907 history, "the Court directed Dr. David Pannill to take charge of the malady, erect a hospital or hospitals, employ servants, agents, etc., and clothed him with plenary power to do what he thought best, promising $500 to pay expenses." See W. W. Scott, *A History of Orange County Virginia* (Richmond: E. Waddey Co., 1907), p. 177. From comparison with values in the Orange County Land Tax Books of the era, $500 would be equivalent to the value of a mid-size frame house of the time. By the time of the Civil War, smallpox cases accounted for a comparatively small percentage of soldiers' illnesses and death; measles, typhoid, and dysentery were far greater killers.

[11] From recent research, it appears likely that English doctors, including Dr. Benjamin Jesty and some others, were undertaking limited vaccination using cowpox prior to Jenner's work. The fact that cowpox conferred immunity to smallpox apparently was well known to the local doctors of England's dairying regions—and was also well understood by the local dairymaids, some of whom boasted of their immunity to smallpox because they had previously contracted cowpox. Jenner, however, conducted the extensive scientific research and publication, and the tireless promotion of the process, that were influential in its eventual acceptance. Variolation was finally prohibited in England in 1840. For an concise overview of the early vaccination use and experiments, see Stefan Riedel, "Edward Jenner and the history of smallpox and vaccination" www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1200696/

[12] For Jefferson and vaccination, see the pertinent sections of the Monticello website, www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/inoculation and www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/benjamin-waterhouse. Dr. Waterhouse and Jefferson began corresponding in December 1800 and, as noted, by the next summer Jefferson had organized the large vaccination event in Albemarle County. In June 1803 Jefferson also provided Meriwether Lewis with a supply of the vaccine, preparatory to the planned Lewis and Clark Expedition, and made provision for them to share it with the Native Americans that they met during their expedition. He directed the explorers to "Carry with you some matter of the kine-pox; inform those of them with whom you may be of its efficacy as a preservative from the smallpox and encourage

See **Pandemic** *on page 9.*

Pandemic *(continued)*

The date of the first vaccination within Orange County is uncertain. However, it is worth noting that the first major national vaccine policy has an Orange County connection. In February 1813, in the midst of the War of 1812, the question of vaccine purity and availability was thought important enough that legislation entitled "An Act to Encourage Vaccination" was authorized by the Twelfth Congress. The legislation was concerned with ensuring the distribution of "genuine" vaccine (to counter some unscrupulous individuals who were selling fraudulent vaccines) to whoever wanted it. The Act established a National Vaccine Agency "to preserve the genuine vaccine matter, and to furnish the same to any citizen of the United States." The act required the U.S. Post Office to carry mail weighing up to 0.5 oz. for free if it contained vaccine. The legislation was signed by Jefferson's successor, a slight, scholarly man who, as was noted at the beginning of this article, likely had personal knowledge of the depredations that smallpox could wreak on a family. His name was James Madison.[13]

them in the use of it." And in another letter written at the time, he noted of the vaccine: "Every friend of humanity must look with pleasure on this discovery, by which one evil more is withdrawn from the condition of man . . . I know of no one discovery in medicine equally valuable."

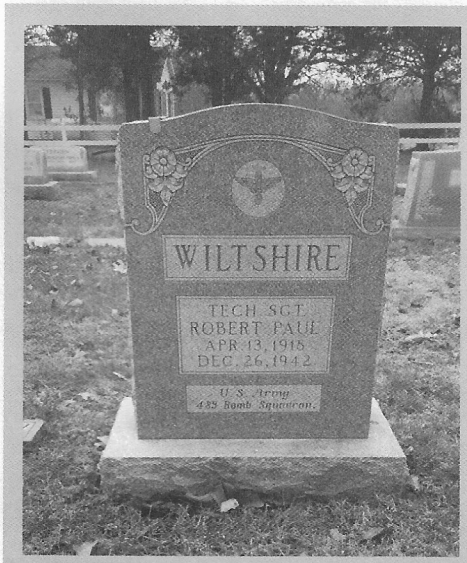
[13] The 1813 act was repealed in 1822 amid concerns over misidentified vaccines. The authority to regulate vaccines then was given to the states. However, the 1813 act remains a landmark piece of legislation—it was the first federal law addressing consumer protection and pharmaceuticals.

TSgt Robert Paul Mason Wiltshire

Paul Carter

Robert Paul Mason Wiltshire, son of Junius E. and Maud E. Mason Wiltshire, was born 13 April 1918 at home in Gold Dale, Orange County, Virginia. He had three years of high school education and worked as a salesman for the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. in the Fredericksburg area. Certainly ironic is that he never smoked; he also had a reputation as a "ladies man," and was never married.

Less than a month after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, he enlisted in the Army Air Corps at Richmond, Virginia, on 4 January 1942. From Camp Lee near Richmond he went to Sheppard Field, Texas, for basic training and then was sent to Chanute Field, Illinois, where he took a mechanic's course and graduated in July 1942. He then took a course in special power plant engines, after which he was sent to the Army Air Base, Columbia, South Carolina, where he was an aerial engineer instructor until 30 November 1942.



Headstone for TSgt Wiltshire, at the Good Hope Cemetery, Locust Grove, Virginia. Photograph courtesy of Chad Glasner.

He was finally assigned to the 489th Bomber Squadron (Medium), 340th Bomber Group (Medium) stationed at Army Air Base, Walterboro, South Carolina, in December 1942, flying on a twin engine B-25C Mitchell bomber. Much of the training for the Tuskegee airmen and General Doolittle's raiders took place at Walterboro.



TSgt Robert Wiltshire. Photo from https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/94479307/robert-paul-wiltshire

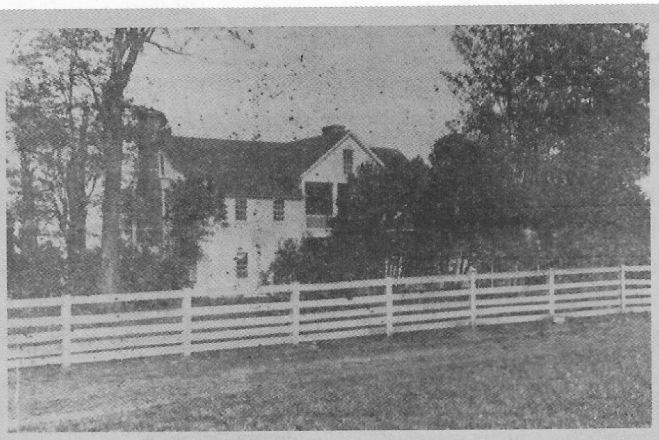
While many people were winding down their Christmas activities, Wiltshire was on a night training mission flying from Barksdale Field near Shreveport, LA, to Walterboro, SC, on 26 December 1942. His plane had a mid-air collision with another plane and crashed into Lafourche Swamp, near Monroe, LA, a distance of about 100 miles from Shreveport. An extensive search was conducted, but the plane wasn't found until 3 January 1943. Of the eight airmen on the mission, seven were found in the plane. One body was never recovered in the swamp. No information was ever given on the other plane.

Upon his death he was promoted to Technical Sergeant. His body was returned to Johnson Funeral Home in Locust Grove and buried at the New Hope Baptist Church Cemetery in Mine Run. He was only 24 years old and was survived by his parents and five brothers.

Big Towles & Little Towles

Jack Frazer

Most people familiar with the history of Orange County have read or heard of the 1908 fire that destroyed a substantial portion of the Town of Orange on November 9th of that year. Its origin has been attributed to Towles Terrill as it started in the bedroom of his rented apartment, above Ricketts Drug Store on Railroad Avenue. He was a diminutive local character whose eccentricities and misadventures have been documented in various county records and local publications.



Chestnut Hill Farm, Nasons. From an undated (but probably 1930s) real estate sales brochure. Chestnut Hill was the family home of "Little Towles." (From the Historical Society files.)

Less well known is his first cousin, Oliver Towles Terrill who used his middle name rather than Oliver. To avoid family confusion, and due to differences in physical stature, they were referred to as "Big Towles" and "Little Towles."

The two cousins served the Confederacy as privates in The Montpelier Guard, Co. A, 13th Virginia Infantry. Their surnames are spelled "Terrell, O. T." and "Terrell, Towles" in W. W. Scott's *History of Orange County*.[1] Patricia J. Hurst spelled both correctly (Terrill) in her Civil War history, *Soldiers, Stories, Sites and Fights*.[2] Military service in the same unit was a common bond, but that is where family similarities ended.

The Terrill (originally spelled Tyrell and later Terrell) family is of English descent. Immigrant Richmond Terrell (1627-1680), arrived in New Kent County, Virginia from Reading, England in 1667, and his descendants have been residents of Orange County since its founding. John Terrill (I), the immigrant's great-grandson was born in what is now Orange County in 1727. His parents were Robert and Ann Elizabeth Towles Terrill. The Towles family was prominent in Colonial Virginia, and it was from that union the Towles name was passed down.[3]

John (I) and his wife had five sons and five daughters. Their third son, Oliver (1757-1821), married Susannah Mallory in 1786. Their children included John Terrill (II), father of "Big Towles," and Dr. Uriel Terrill, father of "Little Towles."[4]

As described in Ann Miller's *Antebellum Orange*, Chestnut Hill, located near present day Nasons, was built by Oliver Terrill in the early 19th century. In 1819, Dr. Uriel Terrill purchased the house and approximately 700 acres from his father. He operated it as both a hotel and tavern. Among his guests was the Marquis de Lafayette, entertained there during his 1824 visit to Orange County.[5] The property was, as Scott wrote, "famous in the old days as a favorite hostelry for Henry Clay and other statesmen."[6]

Uriel Terrill (1792-1885), a distinguished son of Orange County, was a veteran of the War of 1812, and studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. In addition to working as a physician, tavern and inn owner, he was a politician serving as the Orange County Representative to the Virginia House of Delegates. He married Jane Lovell of Fredericksburg in 1814. They had 14 children, the 10th of whom was "Little Towles," born on March 30, 1831 at Chestnut Hill.[7]

Little Towles was a private throughout the Civil War; however, in the years that followed, he referred to himself as "Colonel" Terrill. He was superficially wounded at the Battle of the Wilderness, and military service was a defining event; his gravestone reads: "Member of the Montpelier Guard, Stonewall Brigade, C.S.A. 1861-65."[8] His political views were incompatible with those of his father as Patricia Hurst's research determined: "Dr. Uriel Terrill, Orange C.H., Formerly a Whig candidate for Congress was a staunch and consistent Union man during the war. None more honest and respectable."[9]

Little Towles has been described as one of the town's most eccentric citizens. He never married, had no children, and lived alone. The extent of his education is unknown; however he could quote long literary passages from memory. He was an early educator of African-American children at a school near Nasons, reportedly walking five miles to and from it each day. A fixture at St. Thomas Episcopal Church, he usually sat in the

[1] Scott, W. W., *A History of Orange County Virginia* (Richmond, VA: Everett Waddey Company, 1907), 266.

[2] Hurst, Patricia J., *Soldiers, Stories, Sites and Fights: Orange County, Virginia 1861-1865 and the Aftermath* (Rapidan, VA, Bookcrafters, Inc. 1998), 346.

[3] Doyle, James W. Jr., "The Terrells of Reading, London and Virginia" (as published in *Tidewater Virginia Families: A Magazine of History and Genealogy*, Volume 6 Number 3, November / December 1997), 144-151.

[4] Terrill, Dr. Uriel, *Terrill Genealogy*, (Letter to Granddaughter, Miss A. E. Terrill of Charlestown, West Virginia, dated August 22, 1877).

[5] Miller, Ann L., *Antebellum Orange: The Pre-Civil War Homes, Public Buildings and Historic Sites of Orange County, Virginia* (Orange, VA: Moss Publications, 1988), 124.

[6] Scott, 214-15.

[7] Dicken, Emma, *Terrell Genealogy* (The Naylor Company, Publishers, San Antonio, TX 1952), 48-50.

[8] Pakies, Susan, "Yesteryear: Celebrating the 125th Anniversary of Orange" (*Orange County Review*, May 15, 1997) A-3 & 11.

[9] Hurst, 221.

See **Towles** *on page 9.*

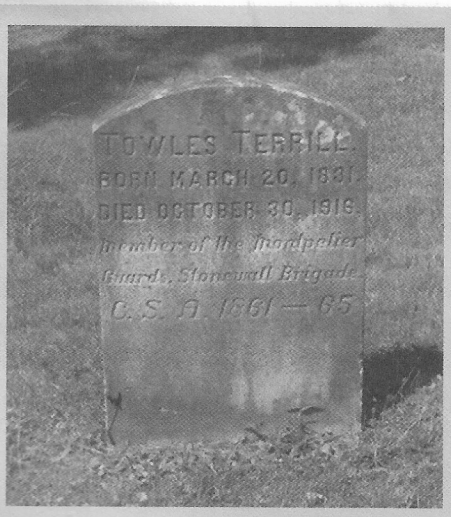
Towles *(continued)*

pew of his good friend, Judge George S. Shackelford, and often dined with that family after services.[10]

He had an active social life as a member of the Democratic Party, and with many of his friends frequented the George Gaines pool room and saloon on Railroad Avenue. According to Susan Pakies, he was the saloon's best customer. Many humorous accounts of his activities have been published, as exemplified by the following:

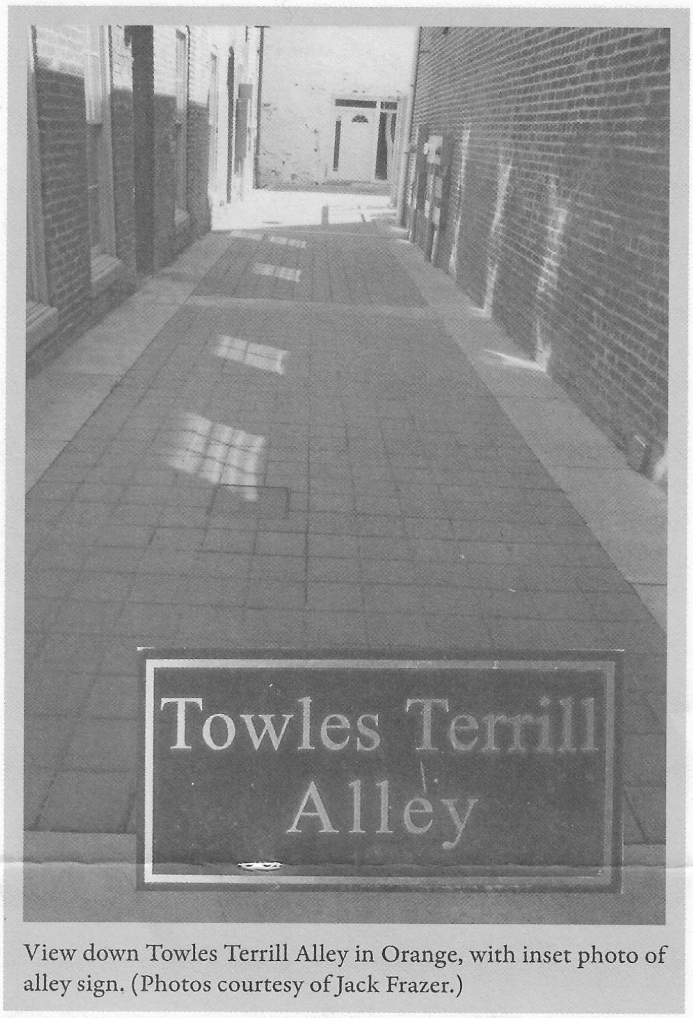
> *One year, Little Towles went to the Democratic Convention in Alexandria as a member of the Orange Delegation. While there, he caused so much trouble the entire Orange group was put in jail. He was not embarrassed. The next morning he applauded the Alexandria Police Force for their handling of the situation and was especially complimentary of his comfortable bed and the breakfast he had been served. His oratory was so lavish, the jailer was reportedly sorry to see the delegation leave.*[11]

Little Towles died October 30, 1916 and is buried in Graham Cemetery. According to his death certificate, he died of suffocation, again from a fire in his apartment. This time the fire caused minimal damage. Given his circumstances and lifestyle, one would expect he would have left little in the way of an estate. Yet the old veteran and school teacher left $3,000 (a significant amount in those days) to be shared among relatives and a few good friends.[12] One can imagine there were drinks on the house at the Gaines Saloon after his funeral service.



Gravestone of Towles Terrill at Graham Cemetery. Photo from https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/11575318/towles-terrill

The Town of Orange still bears his mark. Its volunteer fire department was formed as a result of the two fires associated with him. The town's fire company celebrated its 100th anniversary in early 2021. Railroad Avenue has since undergone a number of changes, including serving as a focal point for African-American businesses in the mid-20th century. Towles Terrill Alley, a narrow walkway connecting Railroad Avenue and West Main Street, is within the Orange Commercial Historic District. Finally, efforts to further research the Avenue's history, and plans for a commemorative park are ongoing.[13]



View down Towles Terrill Alley in Orange, with inset photo of alley sign. (Photos courtesy of Jack Frazer.)

The Big Towles branch of the Terrill family took root on property later named Olivette in 1823. Ann Miller wrote that Olivette (ca.1800) was acquired by John Terrill (II), "a local planter and militia captain who made it the center of his extensive real estate holdings."[14] He first married Susan A. Grasty in 1820, through whom some of his property was obtained and, after her death, married Elizabeth Eustace Gibson in 1834. Her grandfather, Jonathan Gibson, was the second Clerk of Court for Orange County from 1740 until 1745. John and Elizabeth had five children; the second was Oliver "Big Towles" Terrill.[15]

[10] Pakies, A-3 & 11.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Slayton, Paul, "Yesteryear: The Great Fire of 1908" (*Orange County Review*, December 4, 1997), A-12, and Pakies, A-11.

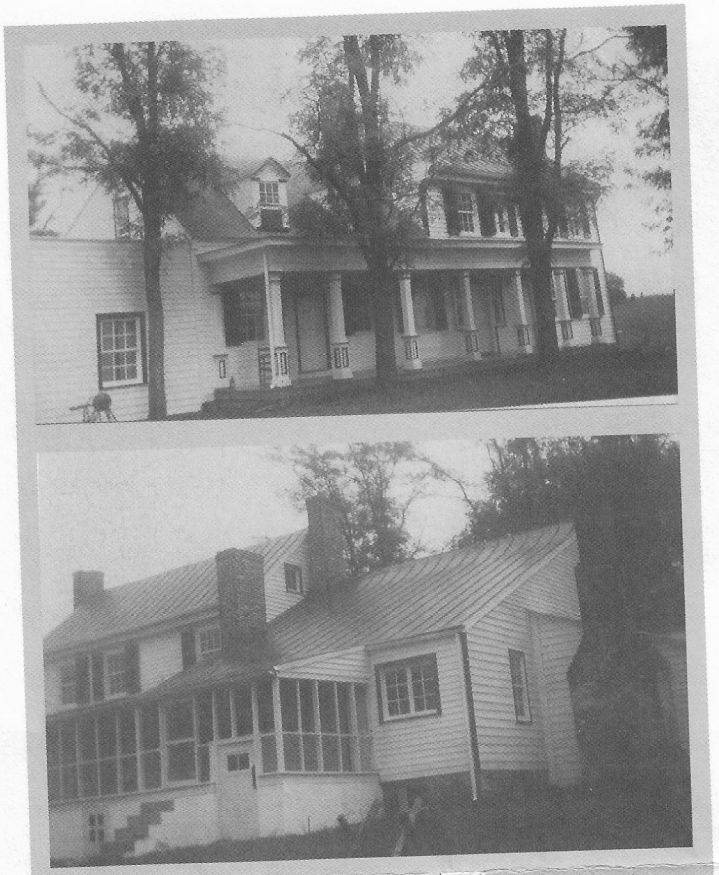
[13] Edwards, Morgan, "A Century of Service: Orange Volunteer Fire Company Celebrates 100th Anniversary" (*Orange County Review*, January 28, 2021) B-1, and Poole, Jeff, "A Rich History" (*Orange County Review*, February 4, 2021), B-1.

[14] Miller, 166.

[15] Frazer, John W. (Jack), Jr., *The Pamunkey Neighborhood: The Long History of a Small Place* (Richmond, VA: Brandylane Publishers, Inc., 2016), 113-114.

See **Towles** *on page 10.*

Towles *(continued)*



Olivette, the home of "Big Towles" in Lahore, Virginia. The top photo shows the front elevation, and the bottom photo shows the rear. (Photos courtesy of Jack Frazer.)

Olivette is located in the Pamunkey section of Orange County and fronts on what is now Grasty Lane (County 649). In 1869, Captain Terrill sold Olivette and 459 acres of land to his son, Big Towles, for $5,000. Unlike his cousin, Big Towles was content to remain a private when discussing his war-time experiences. However the war also impacted him, both physically and personally. He was wounded in the foot during the Chancellorsville Campaign, an injury requiring the use of a walking stick or cane for the rest of his adult life.[16]

Marriage became another challenge. Many marriages took place during Lee's Army encampment in Orange County. As Patricia Hurst pointed out, not all were happy events.

> *One young lady, Lucy Martha Frazer of Lahore, met her soldier beau through her brother. Lucy and her soldier planned to marry but her mother forbade the marriage and said 'she would rather see Lucy dead than hear the tap of a crutch forever.' The soldier had been seriously wounded and lost a leg. Lucy did not marry her soldier who became a very successful lawyer after the war and named his first daughter Lucy.*[17]

Lucy, the daughter of William Smith and Ann Burrus Frazer, had other admirers—all of whom her mother found unsuitable. Lucy eventually married Big Towles in 1865 and moved to Olivette with him. He was an amiable but uneducated farmer, a prosperous land owner from an old Virginia family. His prospects and lineage proved satisfactory to Lucy's mother. Lucy, however, was less than an enthusiastic wife, frequently chastising her husband for his perceived shortcomings. For example, in commenting on her husband's war wound, she would say that he received it "running away from the Yankees," a slight motivated by being forced to marry someone not her first choice.[18]

Big Towles and Lucy had three children. The couple remained at Olivette until their deaths, but also spent time at the Pine Top home of their daughter, Ann Eustace "Nannie" Terrill Woolfolk. Their granddaughters, Marjorie Woolfolk and Mary Benson Terrill, remembered Big Towles with affection, describing him as "grumpy, but in a funny way." He chewed tobacco and when he spit, often missed his spittoon. He cursed "a blue streak," and took more than an occasional drink. Those habits, acquired during his military service, were a constant source of amusement to his granddaughters, but irritated his wife. Their impressions of grandmother Lucy were less positive; both described her as "a mean old woman."[19]

The Terrill family attended North Pamunkey Baptist Church near Lahore where Big Towles served as a deacon. He died on September 14, 1932, and is buried with his wife in that church's cemetery. Olivette remained in the family until 1987. Their granddaughter, Marjorie Woolfolk Frazer, was its last family owner.

As with Little Towles, the legacy of Big Towles remains. His daughter, Lucy Oliver Terrill Coons was a prominent Town of Orange citizen, owning the property known as Poplar Hill for many years. It has since been repurposed as The Inn on Poplar Hill, a twenty-eight acre Bed & Breakfast destination at 278 Caroline Street.[20] Her son, Dallas Coons, and son-in-law, Ettora A. Brizzolara were also public servants as exemplified by their positions as members of the 1934 Orange County Bicentennial Executive Committee.[21]

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[16] Lightner, Mary Benson Terrill, *Family Records & Archives*. (The granddaughter of Oliver Towles Terrill, she was a respected genealogist and a life member of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Jamestowne Society.)

[17] Hurst, 247.

[18] Frazer, Marjorie Woolfolk, *Miscellaneous writings and oral history*. (She was Oliver Towles Terrill's granddaughter, and the Lahore neighborhood correspondent for the *Orange Review*. That paper also published many articles, poems, and essays under her by-line Scribblings.)

[19] Ibid.

[20] The author's mother lived with her aunt at Poplar Hill for two years while attending Orange High School during the period 1929 -1931.

[21] Davidson, D.N., *Orange County [Virginia] 1734-1934* (New River Notes, 1934), 1-2.

See **Towles** *on page 11.*

Towles *(continued)*

In the Pamunkey section of the county, Big Towles' son, Francis "Frank" Terrill, was a member of North Pamunkey Baptist Church. He was also a founder of Ellisville Methodist Church (ca. 1913) at Thornhill, an act undertaken on behalf of his new wife, Esther Dogan Terrill, a Methodist. As an additional accommodation, he frequently taught Sunday school classes there as well. That church no longer has an active congregation, though its building is extant. Finally, Big Towles' descendants continue to own and farm property on Grasty Lane adjacent to Olivette.[22]

In connecting the histories of these two men, Big Towles was my great-grandfather. Sunday dinners at our house were often social events. Not only was it the best meal of the week, we were usually joined by extended family or visitors. Topics of conversation focused on a critique of that day's sermon, neighborhood gossip, crops, weather, politics, and always discussions or arguments about who was related to whom.

As a child these discussions were exceedingly boring, and one way to end them was to ask my mother to tell us about Little Towles. Although happy to claim kin with any noteworthy family members including his father, Dr. Uriel Terrill, when this topic came up she would say disapprovingly: "We were never that close. He was from Orange rather than here." Introducing that subject always led to a welcome opportunity to be excused from the table and further conversation.

Genealogy has been described as the study of family history by those who confuse the dead and irritate the living. That may be true, but the story of the Terrill cousins demonstrates that family dynamics can also be a source of pride, amusement, and most importantly, can provide a sense of time and place.



Left: Mary Benson "Bennie" Terrill Lightner and Marjorie Woolfolk Frazer (the author's mother), c. 1920. These cousins and lifelong friends were the granddaughters of "Big Towles." (Photo courtesy of Jack Frazer.)

[22] Lightner, Mary Benson Terrill, *Oral History*, and Frazer, John W. (Jack) Jr., 53-54, 82, and 113-114.



This view down Main Street, probably from the first decade of the twentieth century, shows its appearance before the 1908 fire. That fire did not reach this far, and the third building on the left is the Methodist church that remains in use today. This postcard is part of the Orange County Historical Society Trainor Postcard Collection.

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January 28, 1870. CRAVEN & CO.

MESSRS. CRAVEN & Co., have moved into their new store, which is handsomer than a great many city stores, and tops anything in Charlottesville.—Messrs. C. & Co., are extensive dealers and show much taste in the display of their goods. Their establishment does so much credit to them and to Gordonsville that it will doubtless put the idea of improvement into the heads of other merchants.

Craven & Co. was apparently a general store in Gordonsville. The February 4, 1870 issue of the *Native Virginian* included this brushes ad and ads for drugs, smoking products, and lamps, as well as the notice of its new store.

Browsing through old newspapers can be great fun. You may already know about the phenomenal newspaper collection on the Chronicling America website (https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/). Another website, Virginia Chronicle (https://virginiachronicle.com/), includes some local material not available through Chronicling America. The Virginia Chronicle website is clunky but worth exploring for treasures such as these tidbits about Craven & Company,