

August 2010

WILLIAMSBURG'S

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VOL. 4, ISSUE 8

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Another Look Back

Larry McCardle and Bobby Hornsby

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In November 2008, *Next Door Neighbors* published "A Look Back" featuring some of the fond memories of long-time residents like Shirley and Bruce Robertson, Bert Geddy, Osborne Taylor and others. I received quite a few positive comments about that issue.



Meredith Collins, Publisher

Readers who have made Williamsburg their home for many years said they enjoyed reading about the individual recollections of their neighbors who were interviewed and they could not help but remember their own experiences during those days gone by. Newcomers to the area were intrigued by the vivid descriptions in the stories of a time when Williamsburg was a small town.

"Another Look Back" is a second trip down memory lane. We have brought you new stories from locals who have lived here many years or who remember visits to Williamsburg during their childhood that led them to eventually move here to make this their home.

Whether you have been here a long time or you came to Williamsburg recently, there is something in each of these stories to make you smile. NDN

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Lisa W Cumming
Photography

www.lwcpphoto.com
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“Uptown”

WILLIAMSBURG

By Ryan Jones

In the 1953 Walt Disney classic, *Peter Pan*, Wendy Darling spends a few moments before bedtime each evening entertaining her two younger brothers with tales of swashbuckling adventures that are played out in an idyllic world known as ‘Never Land’. As the son of two lifelong Williamsburg residents, I am often reminded of this movie as I reflect on the many

times my own parents have captivated me with narratives of childhood nostalgia from a place that, like the fictional ‘Never Land’, seems almost too good to be true.

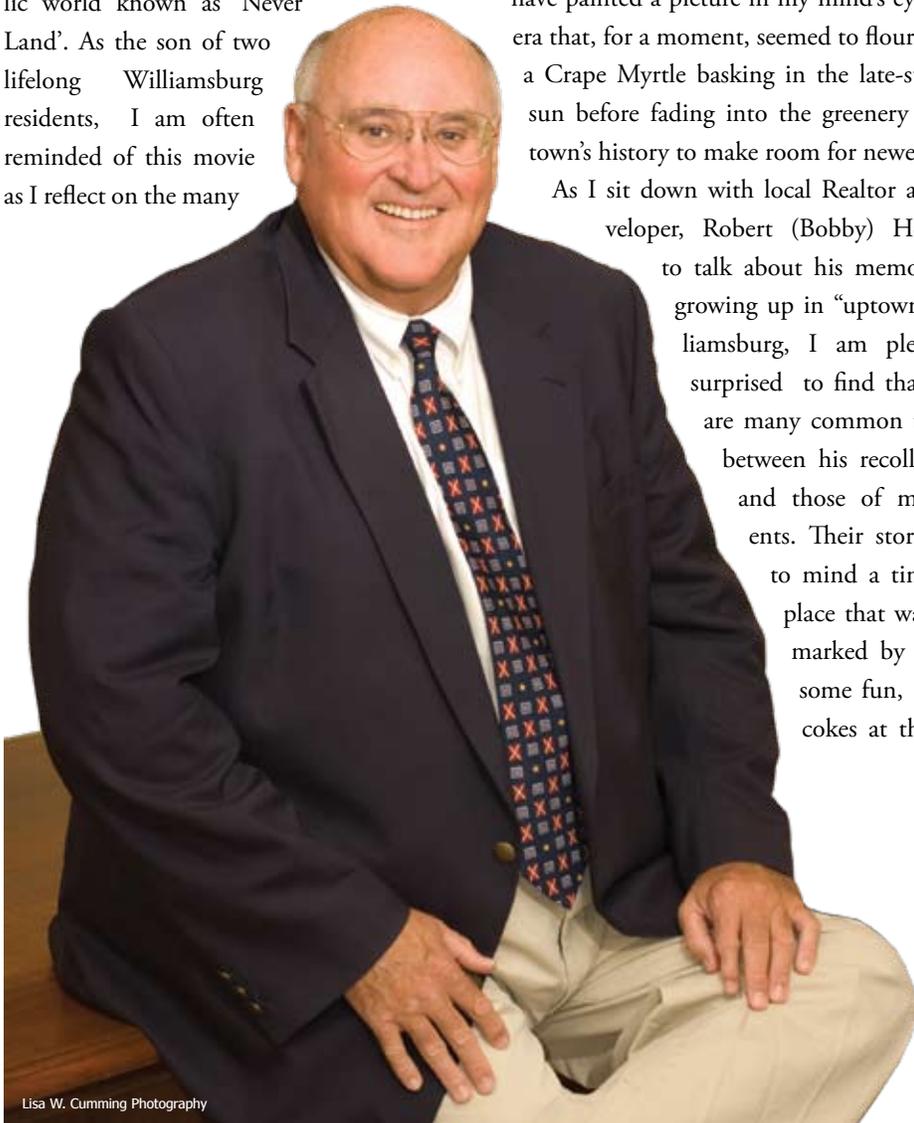
Over the years, these oft-repeated stories have painted a picture in my mind’s eye of an era that, for a moment, seemed to flourish like a Crape Myrtle basking in the late-summer sun before fading into the greenery of our town’s history to make room for newer buds.

As I sit down with local Realtor and developer, Robert (Bobby) Hornsby, to talk about his memories of growing up in “uptown” Williamsburg, I am pleasantly surprised to find that there are many common threads between his recollections and those of my parents. Their stories call to mind a time and place that was hall-marked by wholesome fun, cherry cokes at the five-

and-dime, and gatherings at sock-hops on Friday nights.

Perched on the end table in the lobby in Bobby’s office building is a pictorial book that sets an appropriate tone for such a conversation, *Williamsburg: Then and Now*. Bobby smiles wistfully as he reminisces about the freedom he enjoyed during his childhood in Williamsburg.

“I grew up on Indian Springs Road just across from the college,” he says. “Back then, a lot of us walked to our classes over at Matthew Whaley School. At the end of the day, we would often walk home through Merchant’s Square, which, at the time, was referred to as “uptown”. Duke of Gloucester Street was completely open, so you could drive down it and parallel park to get to the drug store or travel agency or wherever you were going. For awhile, the A&P grocery store was where the Craft House now sits. We would stop at the Williamsburg Drug (which was where the Trelis Restaurant is now) and get a cherry Coke and maybe split an order of fries if someone had some money. We’d look at the magazines in the rack, and then walk on down Jamestown Road towards home. If it was cold, there was a big steam exhaust vent outside of the girls dorms at the college, so we’d go stand there and get warm. Then we’d stop by the Phi Beta Kappa field and maybe play a game of football. If the marching band was rehearsing there, we’d go run in between the band members and get the guy in charge to chase us off. It was a real sense of freedom to travel all over town back



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then. We'd ride bikes or cruise cars or whatever else we could think of."

Bobby chuckles as he recalls some of the harmless mischief he and friends sometimes stirred up as they walked home from school.

"I remember when the first elevator came to town," he says. "It was at Binn's. We would go there on our way home sometimes and ride the elevator until the ladies would kick us out. Back then, everybody knew everybody, so they weren't mean about it because all of our mothers shopped there. They would let us have a ride or two, then they would say, 'Ok boys...shoo!' It's funny to think that we were so excited about an elevator, but at the time it was something new."

Bobby recalls that the town florist was a popular stop for youngsters meandering through the shops uptown - but not for the reasons you might think.

"I remember when the first elevator came to town. It was at Binn's. We would go there on our way home sometimes and ride the elevator until the ladies would kick us out."

- Bobby Hornsby

"I remember when Schmidt's Florist opened up a branch in Merchant's Square," he says. "It was where Rusty Bryant's clothing store is now. Williamsburg wasn't big enough to have its own record store, so they turned it into Schmidt's Florist and Music. At the front of the store was a counter with 45's and LP's. Around the back and side were refrigerators filled with flowers. That's where we bought all of our *Beatles* albums. I remember when their second album came out, they had this motorized poster in the window with the *Beatles*' heads turning side-to-side, and beside it was an advertisement for roses."

Bobby remarks that much of life in 1960's Williamsburg was centered around the local music scene. Playing in bands, attending dances, and listening to music was a way of life for most of the youth in town. Well-known among those who helped to create Williamsburg's melting pot of music was Bobby's brother, Bruce, who is widely recognized for his success in the music industry with hit singles that include *The Way It Is*, *Mandolin Rain* and *The Valley Road*. In those days no one was trying to make it big. Everyone was just trying to make it to the next gig.

"Robert Jones was the singer of one of the first rock bands in the early 60's era in Williamsburg," Bobby remarks, laughing at my surprise as he names my dad. "Jay Bateman was the drummer and Bill Rathbun was the bass player. I can remember being mad for music back then. We wanted to be in a band, so when we saw these local guys playing in bands, it was an inspiration for us. I can remember them playing Ray Charles' *What I Say* and thinking to myself, 'Well, if these guys can do this, we should be able to as well.' The band members were always really nice to us. They weren't like 'Get out of here kid!' when we asked them questions. They were more along the lines of 'Oh...you're interested in this? Well cool, man!' So we talked our dads into getting us instruments

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and we put together our own rock band.”

According to Bobby, most people in town enjoyed listening to the same music, so it was easy to play songs that were universally accepted among large audiences.

“That was one incredible thing about Williamsburg at the time,” he says. “There was one high school for the whole town. We all listened to WGH AM radio, which played everything across the board from soul music to the *Beach Boys* to the *Beatles* and British Invasion music. There wasn’t a large separation in music taste among the different groups at school. Everyone loved to hear a good band. The first band I was in was called *The Gentlemen*. Then we put together a group called *The Soul Solution* to play [at] frat parties over at the college. Local bands also played every weekend at the Williamsburg Youth Center, which was over by the community swimming pool. We played in the Battle of the Bands there. At the time, I had helped start a band called *Love Minus Zero*, which was named after a Bob Dylan tune. At the end of the set, they gauged the band’s popularity level by an applause meter, so you didn’t necessarily need to have the best band to win - you just needed to have the most fans.”

Bobby remembers that many of the youth in town traditionally gathered in Merchant’s Square on weekends before going to dances at places like the Youth Center, Bruton Parish Hall, or Blair High School.

“With no cell phones to keep us connected, we had to have a place where everyone could meet and figure out what was going on,” Bobby remembers. “Everyone would go uptown on Saturdays because that’s where the record store was, as well as Mr. Douglas’ Bakery, Roses’ Five and Dime, and the Williamsburg Theater (now called the Kimball Theater), which was the only movie theater in town. I saw *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Spartacus* and all the great movies of my childhood there. You’d take a date to the movies and when the lights came on after the show, you’d see thirty people you knew.”

These days, technology has not only changed the movie going experience with THX sound systems, 3-D viewing experiences and advanced special effects, but also the way young people connect to plan those outings. Texting on cell phones has replaced the need for young people to gather in Merchant’s Square to decide what they want to do for fun. For Bobby and many others of his generation, however, those afternoons gathering in old-town Williamsburg, the brick sidewalks lining the streets of Merchants Square, created a social connection in a place that, after forty years, still holds a treasure trove of memories.

As one who didn’t get to experience first-hand this special time in our town’s rich history, I look forward to using my imagination the next time I take a walk uptown and try to picture the world through Bobby Hornsby’s eyes. Maybe I’ll pick out the spot where the old record store used to be, or pause for a moment as I pass what used to be the Roses’ Five & Dime or the A&P. I might even find time to catch a show over at the Kimball Theater. If I happen to overhear a young lady telling her little brothers about a magical place where time stands still and the young-at-heart can linger for awhile in childhood adventure, I’ll likely walk over and ask them a question that’s been lingering in my mind since my visit with Bobby Hornsby : Is there a place in ‘Never Land’ that still sells five-cent cherry colas? NDN

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LARRY McCARDLE

A Look Back at Real Estate

By Alison Johnson



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

Anyone who has purchased a home lately knows all about the seemingly endless stack of documents that need signing at the closing of a sale. When Larry McCardle began working in the Williamsburg area real estate market in 1969, the purchase contract was a one-page document.

That's just one of the differences between real estate then and now. Local houses in demand often were half the size of today's prime offerings and, not surprisingly, much cheaper. Most of the approximately twelve real estate businesses in town operated out of small houses, not the big office buildings that have replaced

the mom-and-pop businesses once lining major corridors such as Richmond Road.

The First Colony neighborhood, near the now-busy intersection of Route 5 and Centerville Road, was considered "far out of town," Larry remembers with a laugh. Prominent, high-end subdivisions such as Kingsmill and

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Governors Land at Two Rivers were just underway or didn't exist at all; Walnut Hills, Kingswood, Kings Point and Queens Lake were among the pricier neighborhoods.

Potential homebuyers picked up flyers for available properties in person from individual agencies rather than surfing computerized listings from the Internet. Home inspections were much less extensive; only roof and septic examinations were commonplace. Not many buyers coveted

“It was a simpler, gentler type of business. Now there are so many listings and choices and, at closing, so many disclaimers and inspections and multiple pages and copies of papers. The process can just go on and on. It's just all on a different scale today.”

- Larry McCardle

mega-mansions or luxury features such as marble floors and fancy tile in their bathrooms and kitchens.

“It was a simpler, gentler type of business,” says Larry, now 67. “Now there are so many listings and choices and, at closing, so many disclaimers and inspections and multiple pages and copies of papers. The process can just go on-and-on. It's just all on a different scale today.”

Larry opened his first office, Murphy and McCardle Realty, in 1970 with a partner he later bought out. Back then, you could purchase a two-bedroom, one-bathroom house for as little as \$12,000. A three-bedroom, 1,200-square-foot property might go for \$25,000. The most sought after properties tended to be three or four-bedroom Colonials; today's more mass-produced models with greater square footage and luxury features hadn't become popular.

As much bigger houses sprang up, those 1,200-square-footers became first, or “starter,” homes for many families but still can cost far more than \$200,000. In 2009, the average price for a single-family home in the greater Williamsburg area was \$328,781, according to the Williamsburg Area Association of Realtors, which provides data on home sales for Williamsburg, James City County, Yorktown and portions of New Kent and Charles City counties.

Larry has been out of the home-selling business since 1994, when he sold McCardle Realty to two principal managers in the company. (They later affiliated with Prudential, now known as Prudential Towne Realty.)

Larry has remained on the rental side of the market as owner of a business called Williamsburg Property Management, and his older brother still sells local properties for Coldwell Banker.

Despite all the new subdivisions, luxury options and computerized listings, Larry doesn't envy today's Realtors and buyers. “It's simpler from

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the standpoint that people have hundreds of listings at their fingertips,” he says. “Still, I think it’s like any kind of shopping: the more you look at, the more confusing the decision becomes.”

Larry is a small-town boy at heart. He grew up in New Albany, MS, birthplace of William Faulkner, with a father who worked as a state highway patrol officer and a mother who did mainly clerical work. There was virtually no crime, neighbors knew each other well, children went to church each week and faced spankings for disobedience, sports reigned supreme and drive-in theaters and restaurants were popular gathering spots.

“It was a wonderful, carefree life for a kid growing up,” he recalls.

Life got more complicated when Larry went off to college at the University of Mississippi. He happened to enroll at the same time as James Meredith, the first African-American student at the school and a major figure in desegregation and the Civil Rights movement. After Meredith enrolled in 1962, the campus erupted into violent protest riots and was occupied by U.S. Marshals and military troops.

“There wasn’t a lot of educational activity taking place,” Larry remembers. “It was very strange to try to be a student. Automobiles were inspected and people were physically shaken down as they entered and left the campus. The school has come a long way since then, but it was a crazy and sad period in the South’s history.”

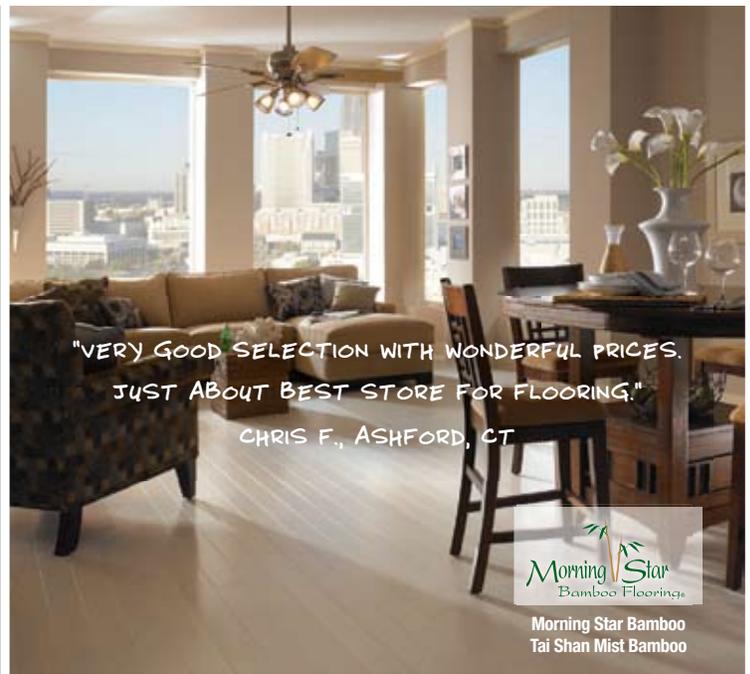
Larry eventually transferred to Mississippi State University, where he earned a Degree in Business and also met his wife of 44 years, Emily, at a party. The Army Officer Candidate School brought him to Fort Eustis, VA; Emily, meanwhile, got a job in the computer department at the College of William and Mary. One of her co-workers was married to a local Realtor, who became a family friend who encouraged Larry to get into the business. He immediately liked the challenge of trying to match buyers with the right homes.

“A lot of Realtors think the best part of closing a sale is getting that closing check, but I got a great deal of satisfaction in seeing the excitement in people’s eyes,” he says. “I enjoyed being part of their lives and a part of one of the biggest financial decisions they would make in their lives.”

As the economy has weakened, demand for rentals has increased (even though interest rates for buyers are lower than when Larry started out). Many Realtors now have entered in the rental business as well as handling sales, which Larry reports was rare in the 1960s and 70s.

A major selling point for Williamsburg continues to be its unique setting and atmosphere, which Larry believes have survived despite tremendous growth. In addition, many families like having easy access to oceans, mountains, historic attractions and a college environment. Williamsburg is nicely situated offering these amenities within its borders or nearby. That is something that isn’t going to change.

When Larry’s two now-grown sons, Lance and Hunter, were young, the family spent many days waterskiing and otherwise enjoying local waterways. Now grandparents of four, Larry and his wife plan to stay put during their retirement years, except for spending summers at a second home in Colorado. Larry is likely to be spending time with family or relaxing with hobbies like fishing, but he hasn’t lost his appreciation for Williamsburg no matter where he may be. NDN



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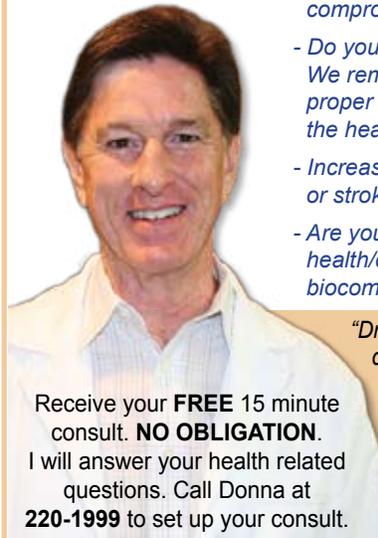
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RUTH TSCHAN

A little town with a lot of history.

By Erin Zagursky

Ruth Tschan currently spends six nights a week telling ghost stories to visitors in Colonial Williamsburg. While she was born not far from here in Middlesex County, VA she has spent many years in Williamsburg. She remembers when Williamsburg was so small you might even use the word “ghost” to describe it - as in *ghost town*.

“In the span of my life, I went to church in a buggy and now there’s a man walking on that



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moon up there? It's a little hard to process," she said.

Ruth was the only child of two educators and a descendant of Robert "King" Carter, a one-time acting Governor and one of Virginia's wealthiest colonists.

"I'm one of old King Carter's thousands of poor relatives," she said, adding that their home was part of the Carter Plantation. "I was coming here to Williamsburg before Mr. Rockefeller did when I was a little girl. I was very little, but I remember how the town looked."

Ruth said she remembers electric lights that ran down Duke of Gloucester Street and a Texaco station where a restored colonial store now stands. She came to Williamsburg with her family to visit a relative who was in Eastern State Hospital, on the site of the old Public Hospital. This was the first public building in North America devoted to treatment of the mentally ill.

"I never remember being taken inside the place," she said. "I remember these big fences, and these people would come running to the fences and wave to you. They were mostly happy people, and they didn't frighten me."

Ruth also remembers Williamsburg as a small and quiet town having to deal with the hardships of the depression.

"Thomas Jefferson moved the capital to Richmond, but the people that remained here, they were very fiercely proud and protective of their history and their ancestry so this stayed a viable city," she said. "In the 18th century, it was a very affluent, upscale community. When the depression hit, things kind of went south."

Although the Great Depression took its toll on the town, Ruth found herself falling in love with it and its history as she visited it again and again on school trips led by her parents.

Ruth moved to different cities in Virginia several times during her childhood, and by the time she graduated from high school in Culpeper, VA, she had attended seven different schools. Both of her parents were educators. Ruth's father also worked for the government, directing a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp in Rustburg, VA. The CCC was part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal legislation, designed to provide work opportunities during the Great Depression.

Though Ruth grew up during those hard times, she admits she 'knew no want'.

"[The] only thing I remember is that my mother would have to put cardboard in my shoes because every once in a while I'd get holes in my shoes," she said. "Teachers didn't make a lot of money. But we were very, very happy."

Besides her parents, another teacher made quite an impact on Ruth as she was growing up. Her fourth-grade teacher, Ida Robinson, came to class dressed in colonial costume to teach them about history. She also brought pokeberries and goose feathers to school so that the children could make ink and quill pens.

"That's where this germ of interest about Virginia's history and the people in the past originated," said Ruth. "She sort of laid the groundwork."

Following high school, Ruth married and moved to Philadelphia, PA where she and her husband had three children.

When Ruth was about 40 years old, her husband died suddenly. She

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If your parents become unable to manage their own affairs, whether because of illness or accident, they may need you to become their legal guardian and conservator. This means you will have total control of their money and medical well-being.

Determining the pros and cons of a guardianship is difficult, but the main drawback to becoming a guardian and conservator is the expense. The costs to hire an attorney, have the attorney prepare and file court papers and attend hearings add up quickly. Things said in open court about your parents can be very upsetting and embarrassing to them. However, in some cases, it may be the only protection available to your parents. It can help to save them from financial ruin, injury, homelessness, and many forms of self-neglect.

As conservator, you're obligated to manage your parents' money for their needs, and as guardian, you assume responsibility for making decisions regarding their support, care, health, safety, and their residence.

Even if your parents admit they need your help, giving up legal control over their own lives requires a lot of trust. However, your parents may not be willing to admit they are unable to handle their own affairs, or if your parents are already incapacitated, it may be the only way you can obtain the legal power to help them. In these situations, you will have to petition the court for an involuntary guardianship. This process will not be easy.

The default presumption is that your parents are competent to take care of themselves, so if you seek an involuntary guardianship, the burden of proof and the initial cost will be yours. Even if your mother is blowing her retirement fund to purchase the latest "gizmo" advertised on

TV, imprudent spending is not grounds for the courts to give you control of her checkbook. If your parents are even minimally competent, the chance of securing guardianship is slim and the chance of alienating your parents by trying is very high.

To secure an involuntary guardianship requires a court hearing to determine competency. Your expenses will include an attorney and possibly psychiatrists, social workers and investigators to review the case and evaluate your parents. You will be awarded guardianship if the court finds your parents can not make informed decisions on personal or financial matters and that failure to appoint a guardian would create an unreasonable risk to your parents' health and safety. Even if the judge decides to appoint you as guardian and conservator, you must submit regular reports to the court to make sure you are not abusing your authority.

Your parents may avoid the necessity of a guardian and conservator through proper estate planning. A good estate plan will include a power of attorney to permit a trusted individual to manage your parents' personal affairs in the event of their incapacity. Your parents may also choose to place their assets into a living trust so the assets are automatically under the management of a designated trustee in the event they become disabled. In most cases, when these documents have been executed it will not be necessary for the appointment of a guardian and conservator should something happen to your parents. If you have questions on guardianships or conservatorships or would like to learn how to avoid them, please consider signing up for one of our no-cost educational workshops held in the boardroom of our law office. Go to www.ferrisandassociates.com for dates and times.

began to work for Exxon, first in their credit card center and then as an office manager. When Exxon's Philadelphia office closed, she moved to the Baltimore office. When that office closed, her boss encouraged her to move to their office in Houston, TX.

Ruth decided against it. Instead, she moved to Williamsburg - the little town she used to visit in her youth, the town that was now filled with people dressed in costumes like her favorite teacher.

On a Friday in 1987, Ruth applied for a job at Colonial Williamsburg, and she started work there the following Monday as a historical interpreter, giving tours of original and reconstructed buildings, many of which had not been around when she first visited the city as a child. Later, she took on two character roles in the town: Martha Goosely and Anne Geddy.

"My two characters have been fantastic women," said Ruth. Both characters - real, historical figures - were widowed and left with young families. "They were both very, very strong women who managed," said Ruth. The years that Ruth spent portraying those women were some of her happiest at Colonial Wil-

liamsburg, she said.

"There is so much history here. It was fun to just tell people the little things about people's

"There is so much history here. It was fun to just tell people the little things about people's lives - not just cut-and-dried history."

- Ruth Tschan

lives - not just cut-and-dried history."

As Ruth continued to learn about the city's colonial history, she found herself falling in love with one historical figure in particular: Governor Botetourt. She even wrote a novel centered on him, which she debuted one night

at a reading group.

One of the group's members remarked that it sounded like Ruth lived next door to the characters in her novel.

"I said, 'I have for the last 20 years,'" said Ruth. "Because you move about this town in costume telling people about these people and you can't help but relate."

About 12 years ago, Ruth retired from her interpreter work, but she just couldn't quite get away from the environment she had grown up with and came back to. She found herself again working for Colonial Williamsburg, this time as an evening storyteller.

Though Ruth - who is now a great grandmother - has seen a lot of changes in the town since her childhood and during her employment at Colonial Williamsburg, the one thing that never changes is the joy she gets from the visitors.

"There's an old saying, 'ghosts feed off of the energy of people,'" she said. "I can understand that, because I think I feed off the energy of people. I can wish I didn't have to get dressed and go out, but by the time I get home at night, I am just energized all over again." NDN

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MARY LIB GEIGER

GOOD 'OLE SCHOOL DAYS

By Brandy Centolanza

Both Colonial Williamsburg and the College of William and Mary have always been special places in the heart of Mary Lib Geiger, stemming as far back as her arrival in the Williamsburg area in 1937 at the age of 11.

Mary's memories of the two places generally revolve around athletics. She recalls taking weekly dance lessons of tap, toe, and ballet on the back porch of the Wythe House, then owned by Bruton Parish Church. Later, while a student at Matthew Whaley (at the time both a grammar and a high school), she played tennis and field hockey at the college.

"The gym teacher, Miss Barksdale, introduced us to Miss Applebee, who brought the game of field hockey to the United States," Mary says. "I thought

that was pretty neat."

As much as Mary loved organized sports, she was also on board with a favorite pastime for

most kids back then - bike riding.

"Williamsburg was so safe, and we could ride our bikes everywhere," Mary says. "My friends and I were so lucky to live in a place where we could ride our bikes on the wonderful paths around Lake Matoaka. That was our big recreation."

As a teen, Mary's weekend activities included hanging out with her friends at the movie theatre along Merchant's Square where the Kimball Theatre is today, and also at Schmidt's, a record and florist shop, near where Wythe Candy & Gourmet Shop now operates.

"We'd go in and there was a little room where we could just listen to the records there," Mary says. "It was great fun."

Mary hung out with many of her Matthew Whaley classmates, and would often gather with



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them at the home of her best friend, Helen Young.

"On our big Saturday evenings, we would go to Helen's house, roll up the rug, and the boys would arrive and we would dance," she remembers. "Helen's parents were so nice."

During World War II, Mary and Helen would climb the tower of an old Methodist church (where Talbot's is today) and do "airplane spotting". Junior and senior high school students volunteered to report any planes they saw, as the fear at that time was that Germany would send aircraft over.

"We were just doing our patriotic part during the war," Mary says. "We really took our duty seriously, and reported each plane we saw." She laughs as she remembers one time mistakenly reporting a trash truck on a foggy day.

Mary loved her time as a student at Matthew Whaley. She met her husband, William, at the school when they were both in the same class. However, they did not start dating until after he returned home from the war.

"We were [in] a very small class, and it was just very special," she says. "We were lucky because the college had a program where the students there who wanted to become teachers came over and helped out our teachers. We did plays, had dances in the gym, [and] did shop work. I still have a little table that I made there."

Mary graduated from high school in 1943, but didn't stray far. After a stint at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, VA, she returned to the area. A few years later, she helped found an organization called the Young Women's Club. The goal was to bring people from Colonial Williamsburg, the college, and other parts of town together, to get to know each other while performing civic work.

"Our big project was Eastern State Hospital," she says. "We'd help them [residents] with parties, and gave them presents and clothing. It was a great chance to make new friends, and to do something for the community."

The club eventually separated into two groups that still exist today: the Junior Women's Club, and the Women's Club. (Mary was the first president of the Junior Women's Club).

"I thought it was all very exciting," she says of her involvement in the Young Women's Club. "I met a lot of interesting people, and we all just got along great."

Years later, after her four children, Joseph Roy, Billy, Marietta, and Barbara, were attend-

ing Matthew Whaley, Mary became active in another local organization that helped rescue homeless animals. She worked with two local veterinarians and others in the community to help establish a SPCA for Williamsburg, located in a tiny building on Merrimac Trail. The group helped place animals left behind by people who moved or who could not take care of their pets anymore. They also educated pet owners in the proper care for the animals. Eventually, the group would become the Heritage Humane Society, which Mary, as part of the auxiliary, still has ties to today.

"I've just always loved animals, and I think it is simply wonderful that people today are still caring for the animals," she says.

In the 1960's, Mary and her family lived at the John Crump House along Duke of Gloucester while her husband was working for Colonial Williamsburg as the Director of Craft Shops.

"My children just loved it there," Mary says. "My two sons would hide behind a window, and one would play the fife and the other would sing when the tourists walked by. The tourists loved it."

Mary recalls, with fondness, another memory from Colonial Williamsburg during this time. "We were very privileged to be presented to the Queen Mother when she visited here," she says. "She truly looked like a fairy godmother with her heavenly blue dress and tiara. The evening was delightful with wonderful food and drinks."

The Geigers moved from Duke of Gloucester to Mary's current residence along Chandler Court, not far from Indian Springs Road, where she lived when she first arrived in Williamsburg. This area was purchased and developed in the 1920s by John Garland Pollard, who named part of it after the president of the College of William and Mary at the time, Julian Alvin Carroll Chandler. It is now on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Chandler Court and Pollard Park Historic District.

Mary still enjoys her time in Williamsburg and remains very involved with Colonial Williamsburg and the College of William and Mary. She makes frequent trips to attend basketball or football games at the college, or concerts in Merchant's Square.

"I think this is just such a beautiful town," Mary says. "I think the growth is great. I think you always need fresh thoughts and people to contribute to the community." NDN

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Photos by Lisa W. Cumming Photography

BILL AND SHIRLEY SCRUGGS

Merchant's Square

"Where All the Action Was"

By Linda Landreth Phelps



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

Billy and Sharon Scruggs know how fortunate they were to grow up in Williamsburg in the 1950's and '60's. Williamsburg was small, it was safe, and memories of their hometown are sweet. They remember Williamsburg as their idyllic playground.

"There were lots of kids in the historic area, and though neither of our families lived there, our friends did, so we just played there," Sha-

ron says.

"My best friends, Wendell Stewart and Butch Huff, and I rode our bikes everywhere," Billy recalls. "Even if we tried to get into some mischief it seldom worked out. Everybody watched the kids back then and they all knew us by name, so by the time we got home, our parents had gotten phone calls and knew exactly what we were up to," he laughs. "We had

a lot of perceived freedom but were actually monitored pretty closely. My dad's insurance office was upstairs over the shops in Merchant's Square, and so was Sharon's. Most of the time, all they had to do to check on us was look out the window."

In those days, the action was in Merchant's Square. "We had the Rexall with its lunch counter, Roses' Five and Dime, the bakery, the

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A&N store - it was all right here," Billy says. "Ice cream was three dips for fifteen cents, and for excitement, a guy who owned a pet lion used to load it into his car and park out in front of High's. It was the ultimate small town."

Sharon says, "In the summertime, my girlfriends, Stuart Jeffrey, Leigh Wallace, Kim DeSamper and I lived to go to The Motor House pool. It was a culture. Parents would drop their kids off expecting them to spend the day there and they'd be sunburned but safe at the end of the day. We never thought about anything bad happening, because virtually nothing bad ever did happen. I spent a lot of time in the water since I was on the swim team and we had a great coach, Wally Riley."

Billy remembers making their own fun in those days. "My buddies and I played Army and looked for relics on the Civil War redoubts at Fort Magruder and swam in Lake Matoaka," Billy explains. "But if we weren't swimming, there was one spot in Williamsburg we could always count on being much cooler than anywhere else in town on a hot day - the hollow near where the Public Gaol stands today. At the time there was a little rippling stream that ran

through it and big shade trees sheltered the area like an oasis. We'd ride our bikes down there to a little cabin-like souvenir shop, Annie Dennis' Kitchen, and buy Nabs and a cold nickel Coke in a green glass bottle from the cooler outside. It was probably built in the early 1900's and was the last non-Colonial Williamsburg commercial business left in the '60's. The Foundation would purchase property offering lifetime rights for people, but once Annie was gone, they tore it down."

Tidewater Virginia's brutally hot and muggy summer weather was always a challenge to endure before air conditioning was ubiquitous. When the heat got so bad that everyone was sweating like a glass of sweet tea in August, two other cool destinations for kids were the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor's Center and the matinees at the Williamsburg Theater on Merchant's Square.

"My friends and I would go down to the Visitor's Center to sit with the tourists, and watch *The Story of a Patriot* over and over until we knew the dialogue by heart. To this day all of us can quote long passages verbatim. The game was to spot mistakes in the film, like the tour

bus that was accidentally caught in the shot," Billy says.

The Williamsburg Theater was constructed by Mr. Rockefeller and was considered to be a state of the art facility in its day. Mr. and Mrs. Rockefeller loved going to the movies while in town, and he built the best. It opened in 1933, the same year as his Radio City Music Hall in New York.

"When I was a kid," Billy remembers, "of course we'd arrive as early as possible for the matinee, just to cool off and hang out. There was an enormous sunburst chandelier hanging from the ceiling, and traditionally you had to look up at the chandelier and count all 54 bulbs every time you came. We were pretty easily entertained!" Billy laughs.

Billy's family history in Williamsburg is relatively brief compared to Sharon's. Billy's father, a Tennessee native, was in the Army as a young man and was stationed at Fort Eustis when Billy was born in 1953. Billy's first year of life was spent in Yorktown in a house on a bluff overlooking the York River, but the family soon moved to the Williamsburg area.

Sharon Anthony Scruggs' roots reach deep

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in the red clay soil of Tidewater. Her parents met at William and Mary, and her father's people were Richmond folks with ties to Surry County dating back to the early 1700's. "My mother's father was military," Sharon says, "and when he died young, her mother, Mary, [my grandmother] married my grandfather, Webster Hitchens, and that branch has an even earlier history here. I was born in Williamsburg's old Bell Hospital and our family lived in James City County."

As a child, Sharon remembers seeing Billy for the first time when he came to collect money for delivering newspapers to her grandmother's large house on York Street. "I was just 9 or 10, so I was pretty much invisible to him," she says.

"The first time I was really aware of Sharon's existence was when she was about 12 years old, but we didn't start to date until she was 15 and I was 18," Billy says. "She was a Walsingham Academy girl and I was a wannabe hippie in blue jeans with long, frizzy hair and bare feet. I don't think her family was very impressed when I first came calling," he chuckles. "I graduated from James Blair as President of the Class of

1972, and took a great job, working as a salesman for Mr. Blanton at his used car business on the corner of Penniman Road and Page Street. He used to buy up leased cars, and then he'd send me to go get them. I'd fly up to New York in the morning, pick up the car, and drive home, getting back at around eight o'clock that night."

"Sharon and I wanted to get married," Billy recalls. "I needed more money to make that happen, and so at 22 I decided I was going into business for myself. Against my dad's advice, I bought a Texaco station on the east side of town, one of the first self-service gas stations in Williamsburg. Sharon and I got married about six months later and [we] ran it together for the next 25 years while we raised our four kids. Because I also did auto repairs, I put in all-consuming 80 or 90-hour weeks as a regular thing, so I was missing out on family life. I loved my job, but it was time for a change."

Fortunately, Sharon had a vision to bring a legacy back to life. She and Billy had daydreamed for years about opening an inn, and the time finally seemed right.

"In 1933 my grandfather, Webster Hitchens,

built a commercial space where we now have created The Fife & Drum Inn, in the area of Williamsburg known since Victorian days as Peacock Hill," Sharon says. "Prior to that, he'd had a general store near the Courthouse where Market Square is now, but when the Restoration came, he and the other shopkeepers moved down the road to a newly created business district, Merchant's Square. My grandfather bought a corner lot on Prince George Street and Boundary and built the Hitchens Building. It housed businesses such as the West End Market (where an 11 year old Billy would one day work as a bag boy), a photographer, and a shoe shop downstairs, with apartments above. He used to say he built those for his displaced friends' widows, the ones who had lived in boarding houses downtown, or who didn't want to be moved elsewhere." Webster Hitchens would be pleased to know that people are being sheltered under his roof once again.

In the spring of 1999, major renovations began in earnest on The Hitchens Building. Patchwork fixes had been done as needed for a series of commercial shops such as Peacock Hill Antiques, a shoe repair shop, and Webster's

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Gifts, but the old wiring wasn't sufficient to allow air conditioning for the whole building. This was a complete overhaul.

The Fife & Drum opened for business in 2000. Billy manages the Inn while Sharon's main territory is next door at Retro's, an old-fashioned hot dogs and frozen custard dining place.

Nostalgia for the past is a big business in Williamsburg. So much of the historical emphasis here is, by default, the 18th century. However, Sharon and Billy find more recent history is just as fascinating and worthy of preservation.

Sharon says, "We've incorporated displays of 20th century artifacts into the Fife & Drum Inn, and if you stop by Retro's you'll see the original tin ceiling we were determined to preserve and a gallery of pictures of our community the way it used to be. If you like, you could also get an authentic Williamsburg Drug Company Limeade while you're there. When the pharmacy and its lunch counter on the corner of Boundary and Duke of Gloucester closed and Williams-Sonoma moved in, we didn't want that small piece of history to vanish, so I asked for the recipe, which Deb Schocklin graciously passed

along to us."

Billy and Sharon Scruggs have demonstrated their shared love and concern for the well-being of Williamsburg through their extensive civic activities. Billy gives back as a member of the Kiwanis Club and formerly served as a City Councilman and Planning Commission member. Among many other things, Sharon has been very active in the leadership of the Williamsburg Housing Authority, recently retiring from 12 years of chairmanship.

Billy and Sharon are looking forward to taking part in an official mass wallow in nostalgia the second weekend of October. Anybody who lived in the Greater Williamsburg area 40 years ago or more is welcome to attend. Begun in the summer of 1968, these reunions have taken place at regular intervals and have gradually evolved into an event.

Many younger residents of Williamsburg find it difficult to imagine what life was like in the period sometimes referred to as "B.R.", or Before Restoration. However, there are still a dwindling few locals who can tell stories of riding a horse down a dusty Duke of Gloucester Street to the Baptist Church located on Court-

house Square. Historians will be at the reunion with their cameras and recorders to capture as many of these priceless stories as possible, thanks to William and Mary's Williamsburg Documentary Project, one of Sharon's special interests. Making these stories accessible to all, they preserve and archive the oral histories of many of the fast-disappearing senior generation, a group whose vintage memories help to paint a colorful and fully-realized portrait of Williamsburg.

Everyone recognizes that the simple way of life of those bygone times has now vanished. Progress always means change, but sometimes change can seem very unlike progress, as we all seem to long for the kind of security and sanctuary that a small town Williamsburg childhood once provided.

Billy and Sharon always look forward to reuniting with old and scattered friends and sharing their memories. Though it may be impossible to recreate those sweet days of their youth, it's still a lot of fun to re-live them with people who shared their idyll. NDN

To find out more about the Williamsburg reunion, go to www.williamsburgreunion.com

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RALPH SCHWARZ - Architect & Historian

Ralph Schwarz's architectural work exemplifies his passion for developing buildings with structure and design that have become landmarks for all to enjoy: Ford Foundation headquarters, New York City; the Athenaeum, New Harmony, Indiana; Getty Center,

Los Angeles; People's Bank, Bridgeport, Conn.; and A Living Memorial to the Holocaust and the Museum of Jewish Heritage, New York City. Now in his 80's, Ralph continues to serve as a consultant and a Senior Advisor to the new National Museum of Industrial History. Ralph could have stayed closer to his roots in Pennsylvania, but he chose to move to Williamsburg and immediately decided on making Chambrel his home. "Chambrel speaks for itself with simplicity, beauty, friendliness and it is still the best in town," he says. "I go up east to see family but I can't wait to get back."

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RACHEL TABB

Almost

60 Years

of Williamsburg Memories

By Lillian Stevens

Rachel (Raye) Tabb has called Williamsburg her home for nearly sixty years. Originally from Mathews County, she and her late husband, John, migrated here in 1952.

"My husband was just out of Pharmacy School, and there was a drug store in the middle of the block on Duke of Gloucester Street called College Pharmacy. The gentleman who owned the store, Bill Henley, tried for a long time to recruit my husband as a pharmacist there," says Raye.

"It was interesting because John had graduated from the Medical College of Virginia, but his good friend (and former classmate) was already working at another drug store across the street," she says. "So my husband was the pharmacist at College Pharmacy and his friend was the pharmacist across the street – the competition!"

The two were friendly competitors; if one



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

ran out of something, the other provided it.

"But that's just how it was on Duke of Gloucester Street," Raye remembers.

The landscape is dramatically different today as chain stores like CVS, Rite-Aid and Walgreens have in large part replaced the neighborhood drugstore. Gone are the soda fountains, the genuine malted milkshakes, perfectly grilled sandwiches, and the pharmacists who personally knew every customer.

Merchants Square has changed a lot too, no longer boasting an A&P, Howard Johnson's or the fire station which stood where Season's Restaurant is today.

"I guess the thing that made it special was that Williamsburg was small and everybody knew everybody else – and my husband was a friend to everyone. Kids from William and Mary came over for band-aids when they got a cut. John was a good friend to all of the stu-

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dents,” says Raye.

John worked at the drugstore for years until Colonial Williamsburg moved the College Pharmacy to the corner of Duke of Gloucester and Boundary Street. Ultimately, the store was sold to the Williamsburg Drug Company which stood where Williams-Sonoma stands now.

“John retired when the store was sold,” says Raye.

Reflecting on years past, Raye talks about how she met her husband.

“I was training to be a nurse at Buxton Hospital – which is now Mary Immaculate Hospital. It was during that time that I met my husband... on a blind date!”



John Tabb

A graduate of the University of Richmond John served in the Navy during World War II before attending pharmacy school. Upon graduation from the Medical College of Virginia, he and his young wife moved to Williamsburg where they nurtured their growing family, enjoyed their community and served their church.

“The original Methodist church stood on Duke of Gloucester Street where Talbots is today and Binns was a Howard Johnson’s restaurant,” says Raye.

“We were so close to the Howard Johnson’s that in the summer when the windows were open, we could always hear the dishes rattling during services,” she laughs.

Summers in Williamsburg have always been muggy so most churches offered hand-held paper fans in the pew racks for the comfort of their congregation.

“Very few people had air conditioning, but I suppose you don’t miss what you never had,” says Raye.

Today, of course, the Methodist church sits on Jamestown Road adjacent to the College. Raye has been a member long enough to know twelve different ministers.

“From the time we joined that church, we were active in all of the activities and we both held official positions in the church over the years.”

Outside of church, the Tabbs led busy lives as they raised and educated five children – including one set of triplets. In the early 1950’s they built a home in Queens Lake and lived there for some 35 years.

“Queens Lake was a wonderful place to raise a family. When we lived

Their favorite restaurant was Bills Barbeque in Newport News where you could drive up and order “the best cheese sandwich in the world”.

“Our lives kind of evolved from there. After our first date we just knew – there were sparks. So we married and from then on it was really 57 years of love and adoration and all that goes with it,” she smiles.

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there, there was no East Queens Drive; it was West Queens Drive and then eventually the other side was developed. We were at the end of the street on West Queens Drive right between the lake and the outlet of the York River.”

“It was a fun neighborhood. The children were all on swim teams and involved in so many activities. Still Raye always had time and patience for those who needed her according to her longtime friend, Helen Langton, with whom Raye served in the Women’s Society at the Methodist Church.

“It will embarrass her for me to say this, but as busy as she was she has been like a guardian angel to so many. I have watched her generously give of her time and talents to those who need them,” says Helen.

After their children were grown, the Tabbs decided to downsize.

“We bought a home in Seasons Trace and lived there for about 20 years. But in 1998, my husband died. It took me awhile, but I finally decided that I didn’t need a big house,” she says.

Today, her home is an elegantly appointed apartment at Chambrel, a small community

which is reminiscent in many ways of the larger community she moved into nearly six decades ago.

“After my husband died, I decided to look around at available places and I had church friends who had moved to Chambrel. I thought it was a lovely place and that it would be the right place for me.”

She was right. The community is a wonderfully tight-knit one and its residents can be as busy as they wish to be – whether taking classes, signing up for excursions or enjoying concerts on property.

Local musician Ann McGrath sometimes visits Chambrel to entertain residents by playing the piano. On one such occasion some six years ago Ann introduced herself to some of the residents, including Raye. Amazingly, as maiden names surfaced, Ann and Raye discovered that they are related by marriage. Raye’s sister is the widow of Ann’s uncle who was killed in World War II.

“See? Here at Chambrel, I’m either making new friends or reconnecting with old ones,” says Raye.

Just like Williamsburg back in the day. NDN

Next Door Neighbors

Publisher.....Meredith Collins
 Managing Editor.....Joe Collins
 Copy Editor.....Al White
 Lifestyle Editor.....Greg Lilly
greglilly@coc.net
 Photographer.....Lisa Cumming
 Graphic Designer.....Sue Etherton

Writers

Linda Landreth Phelps, Rachel Sapin, Brandy Centolanza, Muna Killingback, Natalie Miller-Moore, Alison Johnson, Ryan Jones, Lillian Stevens, Erin Zagursky, Erin Kelly, Rosemary Van Houten

Advertising Information

(757) 560-3235 or

www.WilliamsburgNeighbors.com

Please email your questions, comments and ideas to: meredith.collinsgroup@coc.net

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