

November 2008

WILLIAMSBURG'S

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VOL.2, ISSUE 11

Discovering the people who call Williamsburg home

PRICELESS

A Look Back

*A nostalgic glimpse
at Williamsburg's past*

**Shirley Robertson
and his son, Bruce**

Bert Geddy

Lena Tyree

Osborne Taylor

Ethel Sternberg

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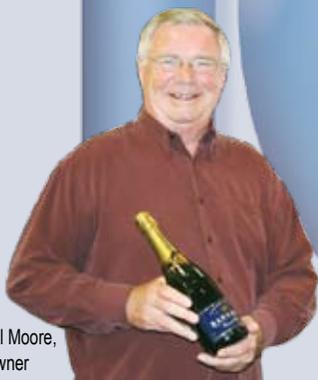
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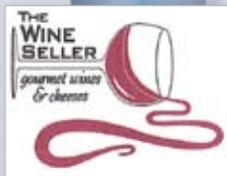
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Meredith Collins, Publisher

As youngsters, many of us were fortunate to spend time with a grandparent, an older uncle or maybe even a mentor that was on up in age. Part of what we appreciate about those times was listening to stories about the way things used to be. When I was a young girl, I was fascinated by the stories my grandmother would tell about life before there were all of the modern conveniences that we took for granted in the 70s. She lived to be 88 years old and when she spoke about her past she took me into a world I could never experience - except through her memories.

In this issue, we have invited a few of the long-time locals to take us back in time. We've asked folks to tell us what it was like when they were growing up here. For those of us who are recent newcomers to Williamsburg, these stories can help paint a picture of how life used to be in our community when things were a little less hectic. For old timers, we hope the stories conjure up good memories of your own. Perhaps they will be a catalyst for some of your own fond recollections of the way your life was when Williamsburg was a much smaller town.

They say that our past has everything to do with how our future unfolds. If that's the case, no matter what the future brings, I'm confident Williamsburg will continue to be a great community and a wonderful place to live. NDN

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Hey Neighbor!

A Special Thanks to David Sisk, also a long-time area resident, for his editing assistance with this issue.



Cover Photo by Lisa Cumming

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SHIRLEY & BRUCE ROBERTSON ON

The Good 'Ole Days

By Linda Landreth Phelps

Life is a banquet, and in some of the best dishes served the sweetness is all the more appreciated when balanced with a little tartness. Shirley Campbell Robertson, master craftsman and founder of Shirley Pewter Shops, savors his memories accumulated during 88 years of a full life. He recollects many stories and loves to share them, painting a picture of how Williamsburg life used to be.

Shirley was born on December 6, 1920. He was delivered by Dr. B. I. Bell, Sr. at Dunbar Farm, 400 fertile acres where Eastern State Hospital now stands. For 45 years, Shirley's father,

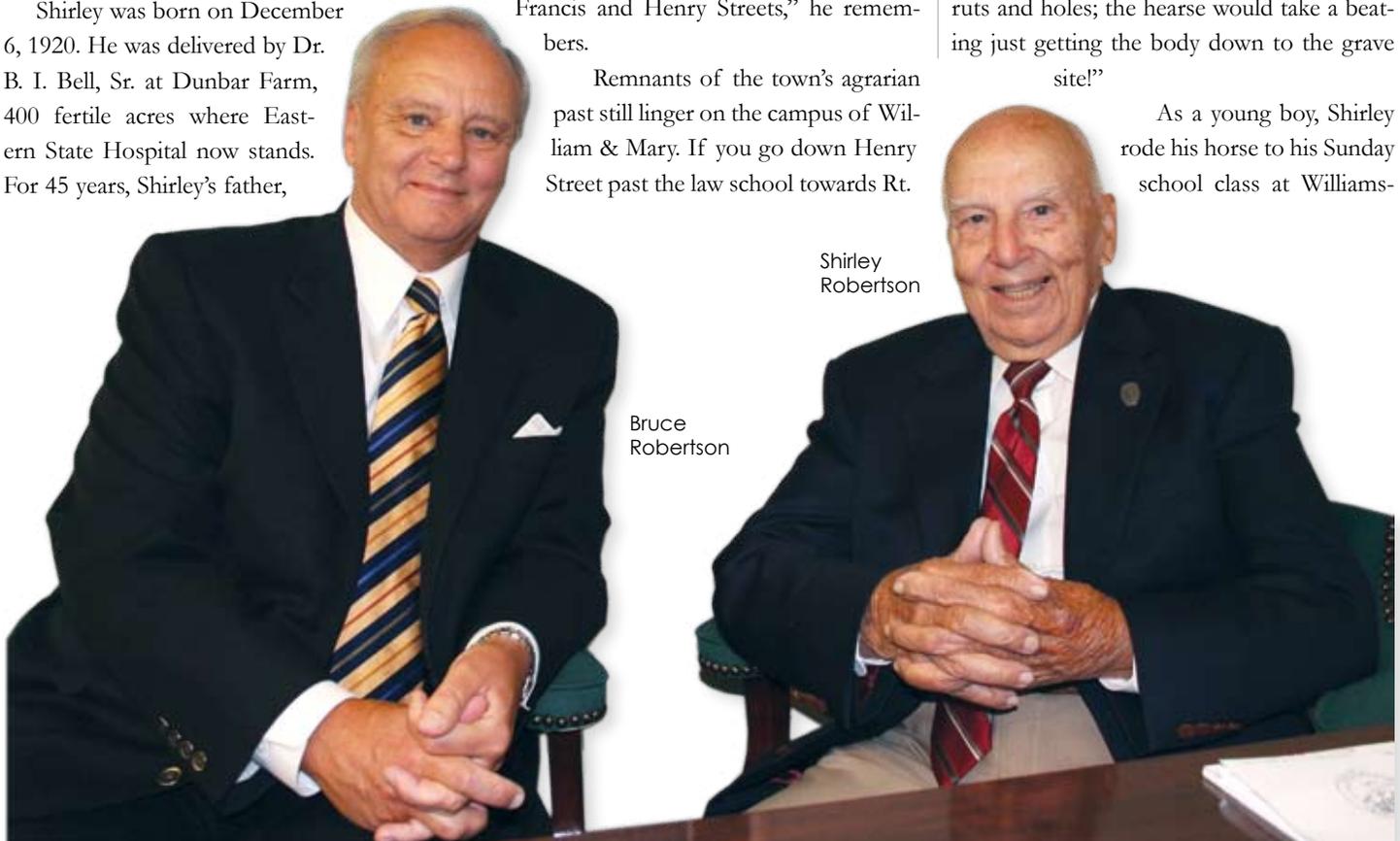
Boone Robertson, worked that land for the state of Virginia, employing those patients at Eastern State who were able bodied. He provided them with jobs while also supplying food for the hospital. "We also raised sweet potatoes, corn, and grain to feed the cattle and hogs on the grounds of the hospital itself, which was located where the DeWitt Wallace Museum now sits at the corner of Francis and Henry Streets," he remembers.

Remnants of the town's agrarian past still linger on the campus of William & Mary. If you go down Henry Street past the law school towards Rt.

199, you can still see the original stock barn and the dairy barn where cows once lined up eager to be milked.

"Of course, back then Francis Street was the only road that led to Newport News," Shirley says. "South Henry ended at the cemetery, and from there it was just a crooked, muddy path down to College Creek. It was one of the roughest roads in town, full of ruts and holes; the hearse would take a beating just getting the body down to the grave site!"

As a young boy, Shirley rode his horse to his Sunday school class at Williams-



Shirley
Robertson

Bruce
Robertson



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burg Presbyterian Church, tying the reins to a tree on Palace Green. "That was where the church was originally located before Colonial Williamsburg bought the land as part of the restoration and paid for a new sanctuary to be built on Richmond Road. As far as I can tell, I'm now the oldest living continual member of my church," he claims.

Shirley was not meant to follow in his father's footsteps behind a plow. "As I grew up I knew I wasn't going to be a farmer," he explains. "I had hay fever so bad I couldn't work outside. Thankfully, I liked industrial arts and I was good with my hands. I was still at Matthew Whaley High School in 1937 when Max Rieg, a German master silversmith who was employed by Colonial Williamsburg, came looking for somebody who wasn't going on to college who would be interested in becoming his apprentice. I jumped on the chance, graduated in '38 and over the course of 14 years I learned my craft with him."

Like many young men of his generation, Shirley's job with Max Rieg and Colonial Williamsburg was interrupted by World War II; he left the area to serve in the United States Army. After the war, he resumed his career with Max, only to be sent off to Korea to fight with the National Guard a few years later. When he returned home the second time, he discovered his mentor had retired. Shirley was offered a good job in Baltimore, but he turned it down because after all of his travels in the military he wanted to stay home.

Shirley's eldest son, Bruce, now heads the family business and is justifiably proud of his father. "Dad began his business on a shoestring and built it from the ground up," he says. "With \$800 muster-ing-out pay and the blessing and support of my mother, Doris, he started Shirley Pewter Company in the detached garage of our little two bedroom brick home in Magruder Heights."

Shirley's first order for metal was rejected by the supplier as too small to bother with. "I wrote them a polite letter and told them that every large business started out small and that I didn't plan to stay that way. They had a change of heart and honored the order. I made sure their bill was always paid first. I didn't want them to ever regret taking a chance on me," Shirley remembers.

While his business was still growing, Shirley needed enough money to meet the needs of his family, by then expanded with the birth of Bruce and eventually by their second son, Scott. With a solid work ethic forged during the Great Depression, in the 1950s the busy man found himself with two jobs in addition to his membership in the National Guard. On weekends when Shirley wasn't drilling with the Guard, he was on the road as he traveled to promote his pewter creations. Shirley's second job was serving as a police officer driving the dark streets of his home town to protect its citizens.

"My sister, Pauline, was the telephone operator and did double duty as the police dispatcher," he remembers. "This was before the days when there were radios in the cars, you know. We were always supposed to stay within sight of the light at the top of the water tower in the middle of town by the City Manager's office, and when there was an emergency Pauline would turn the light on. When I saw that light, I stopped at somebody's house where I knew they had a

- continued on page 6

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Typically, it was an uneventful patrol for Shirley in the sleepy little town whose sidewalks rolled up with a snap at sunset. "Sometimes there'd only be two cars on the street between midnight and 8a.m.," Shirley recalls. However, if a young man knew where to look and was determined to kick up his heels, he could usually find some form of mischief.

"Most nights there was a poker game going on at the Esso station where Berret's Seafood Restaurant is now," Shirley remembers. "The rich folks from up north would stop off in Williamsburg on their way to and from Florida and a lot of them had fancy cars and drivers. There was really no place in town for the chauffeurs to stay - there weren't any guest houses at that time, and the Inn and Lodge were just for the rich folks - so they'd bring their cars in to be serviced. Then they would join the game and sometimes play all night, or catch a nap in the car if they

"Most nights there was a poker game going on at the Esso station where Berret's Seafood Restaurant is now."

- Shirley Robertson

didn't want to drive to Richmond or Newport News. One time a driver was winning in the poker game and didn't want to quit and it got to be almost time to pick his people up. Well, the car was real dirty but he was late, so he just washed one side and made sure that was the side they got in and out of!"

Shirley also remembers humorous stories of mischief involving strong drink. One story he tells involves a woman who sold illegal whiskey out of her home. "She sold it by the glass or by the gallon, and anything else you wanted," Shirley says. "She claimed she was only going to be in business long enough to buy a television, but nobody believed that story, including the judge who heard her case when she was arrested. He asked her, 'How much you gettin' for a pint these days?' and she replied, 'You know exactly how much, Judge - you bought my last one!'"

"Yes, I remember her," Bruce says. "She was still in business when I was in high school. I guess she wanted a bigger television!"

There were bootleggers around in several places, some of them famous for the superior quality of their product. One man practiced his craft in a place with the unlikely name of Puddin' Bottom, which was located off Longhill Road. It was wild, swampy land then but today the area echoes with the innocent sound of youngsters playing ball on the fields of the Warhill Sports Complex. One day Shirley was on duty and was approached by this alcohol entrepreneur holding a crisp \$50 bill in his hand. "He told me, 'There'll be another one just like this in your mailbox every month. All you got to do is tell me when the Revenuers is plannin' to raid my still,'" he recalls with a smile. "I told him I couldn't do that because it was against the law. 'Well,' he

says to me, ‘then you better keep out of Puddin’ Bottom!’ We raided his still that very weekend, destroyed his equipment and all his liquor except for a five-gallon jug of ‘evidence’ and put him in jail!” Shirley laughed with remembered satisfaction.

After years of hard work, Shirley Pewter Company prospered enough that Shirley was able to switch from wholesale to retail sales and devote his attention solely to his business. His success soon warranted a workshop and storefront on Jamestown Road. That site currently houses the corporate offices. The public can watch a staff of metal crafters there as they create cups, trays, tankards, coffee pots, and other items in the same tradition of excellence that Shirley Robertson began more than half a century ago.

Their Merchants Square branch began in 1962 in a small room off a corridor within the old post office building where The Christmas Shop does business today, then moved to a larger space which had been occupied by a bakery and is now home to The Fat Canary. It carries an expanded line of items from other manufacturers as well as their own and has settled happily into their present location between Precious Gem and The Toymaker of Williamsburg.

Bruce, who graduated from high school in 1963, has many of his own fond memories of growing up in Williamsburg. Magruder Heights was a great place for a boy to play sandlot baseball. “There was a lot in the neighborhood that had been deliberately left vacant for the kids,” he says. “The guys fixed it up and there was a rule that you couldn’t play any more once you could hit hard enough to break a window.”

Bruce worked for his spending money, cutting grass until he got to be old enough for a job as a lifeguard. “I worked at The Naval Weapons Station pools,” he remembers. “There were two, one for the officers and one for the enlisted men, and I’d switch back and forth. The officers’ pool was always quiet, but the enlisted guys would often show up after a few beers and there I’d be - 16 years old, trying to keep sailors from jumping off the bath house roof into the pool!”

That early experience of being in charge would come in handy later in life. Bruce has been at the helm of Shirley Pewter Company since his father retired a few years ago. A third generation of the Robertson clan is now showing interest in their Granddaddy Shirley’s business. Bruce’s son, Derek, and daughter, Caitlin, will be the ones to steer the company in the 21st century, creating more history themselves. Some day they’ll probably share with their grandchildren stories of what it was like to grow up in Williamsburg in the ‘80’s, before there was a New Town, High Street, or Trader Joe’s, and stories about when a multiscreen theater meant a choice between just two movies. They’ll tell them of a time when the town was so small that on a hot summer night the chance that you’d run into somebody you’d known all your life while in line at Sno-to-Go or Busch Gardens was pretty good. With each generation down the road, memories will be added to Williamsburg’s history and bathed in the rosy afterglow of the ‘Good Old Days’. NDN

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This is Home.

BERT GEDDY

By Brandy Centolanza



Life-long local Bert Geddy fondly recalls his childhood in Toano in the 1940s and 1950s as an innocent time. “When someone asks me what it was like for me growing up, I tell them it was like a tale spun from Mark Twain,” Bert shares. “There was no TV. There was no air conditioning. Everyone left their doors unlocked. In the summer time, we never even closed our door.”

Bert’s family has been in the area for centuries. Both his great-grandfathers fought in the Civil War. He is a descendent of William Geddy, a silversmith who built one of the oldest local farmhouses dating back to 1805 (*shown above*), which still stands at the intersection of Routes 60 and 30. Bert now owns the property, and is working to have it restored and historically preserved.

His mother, Trittie Ware, was a teacher, and his father, Bert Geddy Sr., co-owned a general store in Toano called Wilkerson and Geddy. The shop was just one of many local hangouts Bert remembers.

“He employed a lot of local teenagers growing up, and there were boxing matches on Saturday nights,” Bert says. His dad even delivered groceries to customers. “He was



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real popular with the families,” Bert says. In the summer, Bert and his friends typically gathered at Jones’s farm, where Chickahominy Haven exists today. Both his mother and father also hung out there when they were kids. “We used to go swimming there,” he says. “That was a big deal. We loved it.”

Bicycling and roller skating were also favorite past times. “We roamed at will as kids,” he says. “We rode our bikes everywhere.” There were very few cars on the roads during that time, so locals would bike or roller skate

down Richmond Road from Toano to Williamsburg. “When you came into Williamsburg, there was nothing,” Bert recalls.

Bert attended Toano School from first through fifth grades before it was shut down due to its deterioration.

“We used to have what they called a Rainy Day schedule,” he remarks. “The roof would leak so bad whenever it rained that classes were shut down and everyone went home. That was funny.”

Bert moved on to the Matthew Whaley

School in the sixth grade. The year was 1956, and he remembers it well. The town was making preparations for Jamestown’s 350th anniversary celebration, with the construction of new buildings at the College of William & Mary, and the completion of Colonial Parkway from Jamestown to Yorktown.

Back then, Merchants Square consisted of a bus station, a Howard Johnson hotel, a post office, an A&P store, two drug stores with lunch counters, and two local favorites: Douglas Pastry Shop, and the ‘Corner

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Greeks', a restaurant where all the teenagers would hang out. It's where Williams-Sonoma can be found today. "The pastry shop had the best doughnuts I've ever tasted," Bert states. "They were out of this world."

As a teenager, Bert's favorite hotspots were Taylor's Garage, located across the street from his dad's store, as well as Mrs. Moseley's Diner, the social center of Toano at the time, and Wedgewood Playhouse, a popular dinner theatre built in the 1960's. It was previously an old tomato cannery. Bert thrived on listening to stories from locals that were handed down for generations.

"Toano had some real characters, and I just loved listening to them spin their tales," he says. "Who knows if they were true or not, but the people were so funny."

On Sundays, residents traveled down Route 60 to the Williamsburg Motor Court (on the site of today's Yankee Candle Factory) for fried chicken at the 'Chicken in the

Rough' restaurant at the motel. "That was real popular when I was a kid," Bert says. "There were no fast food restaurants back then. Not like they have now."

Teens received their drivers' license at age 15, and "us townies would drive up one end of Duke of Gloucester Street and down the other," Bert shares. Date nights were held at the Stockade Drive-In theatre which was located near the intersection of Ironbound and Richmond Roads.

Bert preferred sticking closer to home. He lived near the James City-Bruton Volunteer Fire Department, and was fascinated by it. "I heard the sirens going off all the time," he recalls. Bert would dash off to the firehouse whenever the siren sounded, and at age 13, was invited to tag along on a call. "That was a really big thrill for me," he remembers.

After graduating from James Blair High School in 1962, Bert joined the Navy, and came home just before the start of the Viet-

nam War. He returned to the area to work for the Williamsburg fire department for two years before heading to Washington DC to try his luck as a firefighter there. Both his parents fell ill within a few years of his new job in northern Virginia, and Bert returned to his roots. He worked his way up the ladder within the Williamsburg fire department before retiring last year as deputy fire chief after more than forty years as a firefighter.

Now, Bert enjoys spending his days with his wife, Lynn, and their blended family of six children, nine grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

"I'm glad I grew up in Toano," Bert says. "I have nothing but pleasant memories. And I love Williamsburg. It's a beautiful area. I love the uniqueness of Williamsburg. I love the college, and I still get a thrill every time I am walking down Duke of Gloucester in the historic area." NDN

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“Been Here’s”

Llew and Janet Smith

By Alison Johnson



Much of Llew N. Smith Jr.’s life has taken place within a two-mile radius of Confusion Corner - his homes, his schools and his jobs - all in close proximity to where Jamestown Road ends at Colonial Williamsburg.

Born in a house on South Boundary Street, Llew, 74, has known Williamsburg since long before many of today’s major landmarks

arrived, such as Route 199 and Anheuser-Busch. His wife, Janet, isn’t far behind him when it comes to longevity: now 72, she moved to the area at age 14.

“All of my memories, and a whole bunch of hers, are right here,” Llew says.

The son of a longtime member of the Williamsburg police force, Llew was born

in May of 1934 in a house on South Boundary Street, just across from the back entrance to the College of William & Mary. His mother was a Williamsburg native who was born on Duke of Gloucester Street, while his father had moved in from Gloucester as a child.

When Llew was a boy, Williamsburg’s physical layout was simple and compact. People could walk or ride their bike to almost

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anywhere they needed to go, and most everyone knew everyone else when they passed on the street.

Businesses on Duke of Gloucester Street, the focal point of the community, included three restaurants, two grocery stores, a department store, barber and beauty shops, a post office, a bank, a pool hall, a bowling alley and a movie theater. On Saturday afternoons, there usually were two big lines: one to the movie theater and one to the liquor store. "That's what I do miss – Duke of Gloucester being such a community center," Llew says.

Schools were much smaller too. For white students, Matthew Whaley provided classes for grades kindergarten through 12th grade. Black students attended Bruton Heights. Llew and Janet, who were high school sweethearts, graduated together in a class of 38 students.

"Matthew Whaley was THE school," Llew remembers. "Not the elementary school, not the intermediate, not the high school, but THE school. When you entered the main entrance, the elementary classrooms were on the right and the high school on the left." The big transition for students, then, was to move from right to left.

"That's what I do miss – Duke of Gloucester being such a community center."

- Llew Smith

Matthew Whaley

fielded teams in four sports - football, basketball, baseball and track - until Llew's senior year, when a golf program started. (As for soccer, so popular today, he doesn't remember "a soccer ball in all of Williamsburg.") His school had a baseball field but no football field and a gym too tiny to hold spectators during basketball games. Students used William & Mary facilities for games which made them the envy of visiting teams.

While there wasn't a lot to do entertainment-wise as compared to today, kids had fun. They went to school and church activities, including basketball games, bowling, dancing and ping pong. The popular make-out spot was Jamestown Island, near where the ferry came in.

Teenagers often had to work to earn any spending money. Janet's first job was at the Roses store on Duke of Gloucester Street, located about where the Cheese Shop is now. She was 14, and the owner wouldn't allow female employees to wear the nylon blouses just coming into style because he thought the sleeves were too see-through to be proper. "Slacks weren't even known for women then," she says. In fact, as Llew points out, female athletes at William & Mary had to wear long coats to cover their legs when they walked in shorts to their athletic field.

Llew had a variety of jobs as a teenager, including delivering newspapers on his bicycle, cutting grass with a push mower, painting lines

on Duke of Gloucester Street – then a busy two-way road along its length – and caddying. In fact, he caddied the day the old nine-hole golf course at the Williamsburg Inn opened – to his knowledge, the only course in the area at that time.

Llew and Janet married after his freshman year at William & Mary (where day student tuition was \$292 a year). By the time he graduated in 1959, the couple had two children, Michael, now 53, and Kathleen, 51. To support his family while he finished college, Llew worked six nights a week as a dispatcher for the city police department, covering a midnight to 8a.m. shift. Dispatch then was responsible for law enforcement officers from Williamsburg, James City County, Colonial Williamsburg, the State Police and often the York County Sheriff's Office.

A few memorable incidents on Llew's watch included panty raids at William & Mary, the midnight blaring of 'Shake, Rattle and Roll' from the bell tower of the Methodist Church downtown and the introduction

of radar by the State Police.

Outside of work, parents of young children either found a babysitter or didn't go out. People rarely took kids to indoor theaters and restaurants. Many families flocked to the old drive-in movie theater on Richmond Road (roughly where the Aberdeen Barn restaurant sits today). The theater was segregated at the time, with a high fence dividing the white and black sections. White families sat near Richmond Road and black families near the railroad tracks. "We'd put our kids in the back of the station wagon, and they'd sleep while we watched a movie," Janet says.

Job opportunities in Williamsburg were much scarcer years ago, but both Llew and Janet were able to find work. Llew was a longtime banker; Janet worked for Colonial Williamsburg for 35 years, mostly as an executive secretary. Llew's civic work included service to the Kiwanis Club, United Way and Jaycees, while Janet helped found the local hospice program and was president of Wals-

ingham Academy's Parent Teacher Association and the Williamsburg Council of Garden Clubs.

While the couple has seen their hometown grow and change drastically over the years, they've never wanted to leave. They are both active community volunteers - the Hospital Auxiliary July 4th Ice Cream Social, This Century Art Gallery and Friends of the Library Book Sales. Llew plays golf two or three times a week at the Golden Horseshoe Club and Janet stays busy with Green Spring Garden Club. Today they live in the house that Llew's father built – and where his younger brother was born – in easy striking distance of a beach cottage in Kitty Hawk and favorite boating and fishing spots in Gloucester. Llew's two siblings have stayed nearby, too.

As Llew puts it: "I saw right away what it took many people 40, 50, 60 years to recognize – that there are few places in the world better to live than our Williamsburg community." NDN

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For Osborne Taylor, change is just a way of life here in Williamsburg. "Being exposed to old stuff has made me more nostalgic, but also more appreciative of how far we've come," this 68 year old former exhibit technician said.

"Who knows, maybe in a 100 years, people will look back and have a laugh about something like computers," he said with a smile.

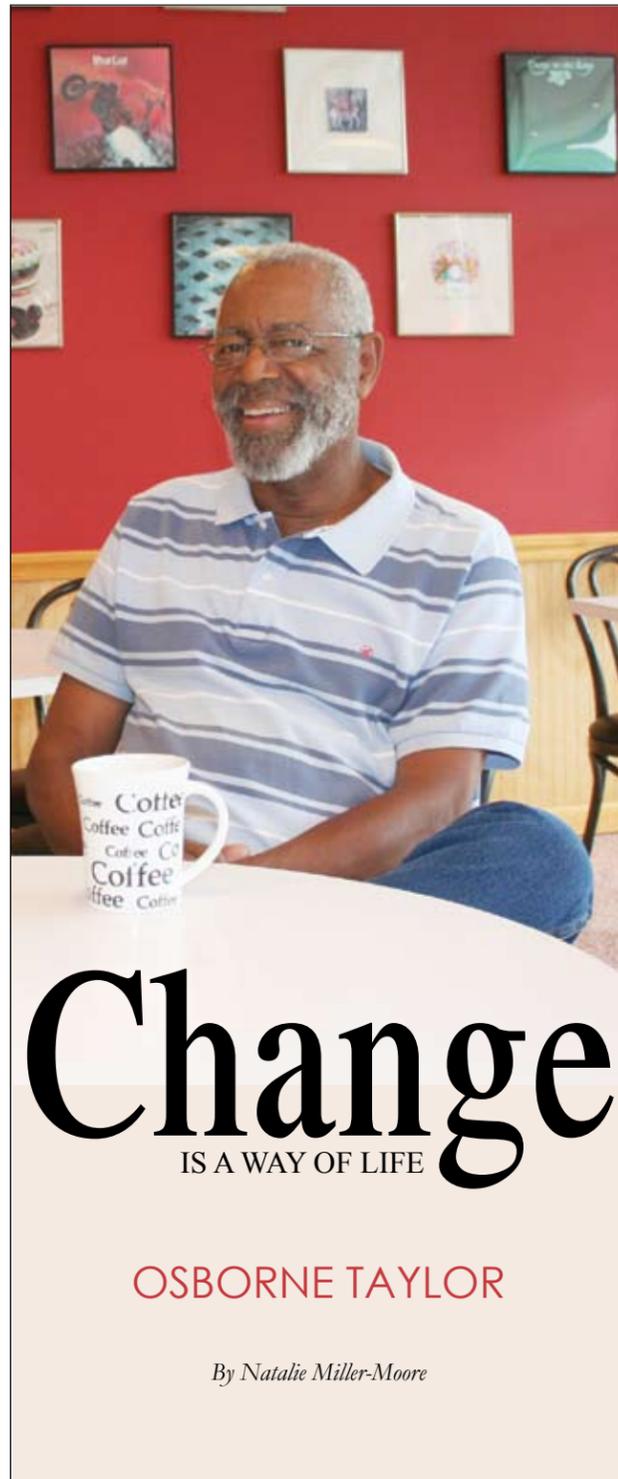
Osborne, who was born in his home on Chickahominy Road, is part of a long line of local folks to work at Colonial Williamsburg in the past 50 years, including his brother, wife, and son. His grandfather worked as a site excavator. Osborne was there for 40 years himself, working mainly in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum.

"I was there so long, I knew every piece. I could name every painting and note when we'd acquired a certain sculpture or dollhouse," Osborne said. Through his career, he spent time couriering pieces from the big museums in New York like The Whitney Museum of American Art and auction houses like Sotheby's. He spent time framing and hanging art, as well as picking up pieces for the museum from antique dealers. Osborne even got to visit the White House to decorate the tree during the Ford administration.

"I love folk art - you can see the struggle of people in it. It's practical, authentic and done by hand, by people who were untrained and untutored. Since they couldn't afford the good stuff, they had to make do the best they could. I've learned a lot from that concept," Osborne said.

Today, he does his own woodwork that's influenced by all he saw at the museums of Colonial Williamsburg. His favorite is making wooden whirligigs, like a jumping jack or a football player for a local school.

He's seen Williamsburg change, geographically and people-wise, too. "The first



Change

IS A WAY OF LIFE

OSBORNE TAYLOR

By Natalie Miller-Moore

time I worked at Grand Illumination, there were just a few hundred people and we lit the lights! But now it's so big you need to get there five hours early."

But some change he loves. He's been an umpire for Little League for 35 years. "I have coaches now that I had as players at the age

of nine. I love to see them grow!"

And Osborne knows Williamsburg intimately - he has only left for a few years when he was in the Army, and remembers the times when the places many people know as a store or a restaurant were just fields.

"I remember when driving from Toano to Williamsburg was on a two lane highway with no stoplights. When the first stoplight went in on York Street, it was a big deal, that had been what we called 'Confusion Corner.' But after that, it seemed like stoplights were growing right out of the ground overnight," he said.

"On Merchant's Square, you could park your car and go get a fresh doughnut. There was a department store where the college bookstore is now, and a drugstore with a soda fountain," Osborne said. Late nights in Williamsburg were a pretty calm affair as well. Osborne recalled that there weren't any movie theaters, only a bus to Newport News to see a film at theaters there. "You don't miss what you never had, and that's how it's different from city life," he said. Eventually, a drive-in movie theater opened in Williamsburg, but it was racially segregated.

Things have changed in Williamsburg and it looks like they will continue to. "You have to change with the times - you can't stay the same." In that spirit, Osborne gets text messages from his granddaughter...but he doesn't text back, not yet.

Now that he's retired from Colonial Williamsburg, you might think he would have a lot more time on his hands, but that is not the case. He stays busy with a variety of projects and is active at Chickahominy Baptist Church, which is right across from the home he grew up in. His church and his boyhood home are all close to where he and his wife, Doris, live now. Osborne says that no matter what changes, he's glad to live in a community like Williamsburg. "I love life and I've been blessed," he said. NDN

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Duke Diggs and Vickie Nase

A Walk Down Memory Lane

By Rachel Sapin

Memory is a strange phenomenon. The author John Barth, in his historical farce *The Sotweed Factor* explains of remembering the past, "...we all invent our pasts, more or less, as we go along, at the dictates of Whim and Interest; the happenings of former times are a clay in the present moment that will-we, nill-we, the lot of us must sculpt."

Who are the sculptors of Williamsburg's 20th century past? Duke Diggs, General Manager of Duke Communications in Williamsburg, could be considered one sculptor of Williamsburg's history. Growing up in Williamsburg in the 1940s through 1960s, Duke remembers Williamsburg being a quiet, pleasant town where Merchant's Square looked little like it does today. It was a place where children bicycled down Richmond Road with little worry about traffic because there were so few cars on the road, a place where rolling farmlands complemented the city's hub at Duke of Gloucester Street. It was a place where at one time, three airports dotted the city's landscape, a little known fact that today is so removed from public mem-



Duke Diggs

ory, it has become an item of trivia mostly known to Williamsburg's old timers.

Duke considers himself one of Williamsburg's more recent old timers. Although his parents lived in Williamsburg, he was born in Newport News in 1941. At the time, Duke's

parents were concerned about the lack of medical options available to them in Williamsburg. Duke believes that he was born even before Williamsburg's first hospital, Bell Hospital, came to Cary Street.

As an infant, Duke moved with his family

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to Florida where his father was stationed as a military flight instructor during World War II. When the War officially ended, Duke's family returned to Williamsburg. In 1945, at four years old, Duke lived only one block from Duke of Gloucester Street, near where Aromas stands today. "It was just a quiet, pleasant town to live in," remembers Duke of growing up near Merchant's Square in 1945. "Children could go out and play with little to no supervision."

According to Duke, there wasn't too much trouble for kids to get into in Merchant's Square at that time either. For fun, kids would go to The Williamsburg Theatre for Saturday afternoon matinees. The Williamsburg Theatre, renamed today as the Kimball, is about the only building in Merchant's Square that Duke sees as having continuity with his childhood memories.

Although it did serve as a town center in the late 1940s, much like it does even today, Duke's childhood memories of Merchant's Square reveal an almost entirely different

kind of town center. Instead of being a place where people gathered to eat at fine dining restaurants and shop at boutiques, Duke remembers a square where the only places to eat were two Greek restaurants. "If you were going to eat in Merchant's Square, you were going to what the locals called 'Corner Greek's' or the 'Middle Greek's,'" explains Duke.

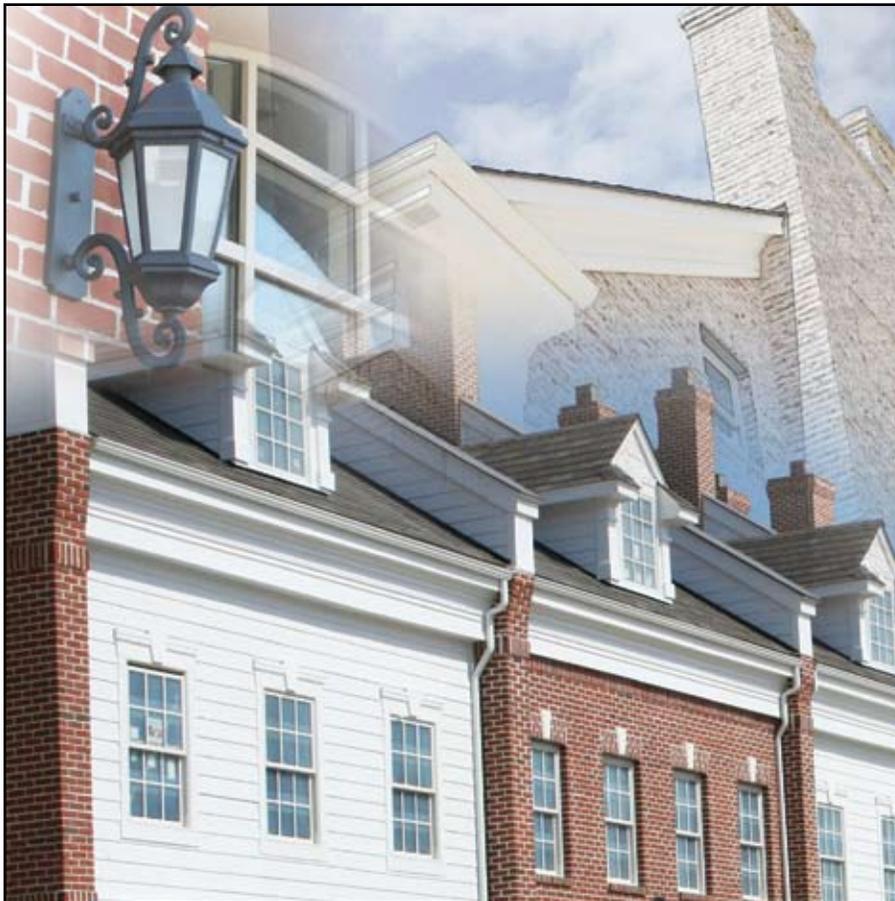
According to Duke, immigrant Greek families with far-reaching roots in Williamsburg owned both restaurants. "'Corner Greek's' was owned by the Sacalis family – Steve Sacalis and 'Mama Steve,'" says Duke. "Their daughter Betsy still lives here." Duke also remembers that the Thiemes House on Richmond Road, which today serves as a Human Resources building for William & Mary, was a popular place to dine while he was growing up.

In turn, Vickie Nase, a licensed residential real estate appraiser and real estate broker, who was born at Bell Hospital in Williamsburg in 1951, remembers growing

up near a Merchant's Square that housed not merely specialty shops, but a drug store, a bakery, and even at one time, a fire station that occupied the entire block where Seasons Restaurant is now located. "The bakery run by the Douglas family was so good," explains Vickie. "Fresh bread, donuts, cherry, apple turnovers: It was yummy."

Although Vickie's family is known today for operating Binns in Merchant's Square, after World War II, Vickie's father operated many businesses out of his "Piggy Hogg" Gulf service station on Bypass Road. Vickie's family was even neighbors to Duke's family in the 1940s, and Vickie's older sister played with Duke on North Boundary Street as a child.

With its conception dating back to 1927, Merchant's Square has quite a long history of merchants. Corresponding with Duke and Vickie's memories of the Square as being less tourist-oriented and more of a place where people went to purchase everyday necessities, during its early years, Merchant's



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Vickie Nase

Square also housed the A & P grocery store, Frazier-Callis men's store, Person Motor Co., and Sam Friedman's dry goods store.

As Duke grew older, his family moved from their home near Aromas and Merchant's Square to live on Richmond Road. Amazingly, Duke remembers there being no traffic lights on Richmond Road while he was growing up. "Maybe one or two came in the sixties," he says. "In the summertime, there was a fairly steady stream of cars, but you could easily ride a bicycle down Richmond Road. When I was a kid, all of the kids either walked to school or rode bikes to school."

In 1954, Duke lived across from a Quonset hut roller-skating rink located in the space we know today as being home to the Olive Garden on Richmond Road. "They make small Quonset huts, but this was a huge one with a distinctive oval roof," explains Duke of the roller-skating rink.

"I believe that the building may have even been military surplus," says Duke regarding the skating rink. "Williamsburg has always

had a large population of military families. The military bases here pre-date me by many years. Going down the York River, we've got Camp Peary, The Naval Weapons Station, and Langley Air Force Base. We've got the Coast Guard going down the York River in Yorktown. Even going down the James River we have Ft. Eustis."

Despite the fact that the skating rink was a somewhat sobering postwar reminder, it was also the place to be if you were a teenager looking for somewhere to go in Williamsburg. "It was open Tuesday nights, and Friday and Saturday nights as I recall," says Duke. "It was one of the few things to do, unless you had some kind of school activity." Duke lived close to the skating rink and he worked there during high school.

Imagine a time when there were no traffic lights in Williamsburg - not one in any direction. "Traffic moved just fine, even without traffic lights," says Duke. "There were two total policeman in Williamsburg while I was growing up. They were two brothers named

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Hamlet Smith and Lou Smith. We called Hamlet 'Ham' for short. Those guys were great. You rarely got tickets back in those days. At most, they would admonish you if you went over the speed limit."

Williamsburg was a tight-knit community back then and much of that closeness between the locals is still evident today. "Williamsburg was a small town where everyone knew everyone by name," Vickie remembers. "I still have

the small town in my heart. It was the soft spot in my youth and molded and shaped me into what I am today."

According to Duke, Williamsburg only needed two policemen in town because everyone already knew everyone else's business. "It was a great town to raise kids in," Duke says. "Your parents didn't have to worry about where you went. Everybody knew

everybody. If you misbehaved, somebody would tell your parents."

When Duke wasn't busy working at the roller-skating rink, he remembers eating at a motel restaurant located near the roller-skating

rink on Richmond Road that is long gone from public memory today. According to Duke, the restaurant served as a sort of precursor to the fast food industry. "It was one of the first chicken-to-go places," Duke

remembers. "It was fried chicken that was served with a roll and with honey." The restaurant's signature dish was given the strange and humorous name of 'chicken-in-the-rough'. The motel even had a sign outside of its restaurant advertising the dish. "They had a neon sign with a chicken holding a golf club, and the golf club was broken in half," remembers Duke. "I guess you surmised that

the chicken had hit a ball rough. Other than that, there was not much in the way of restaurants on Richmond Road."

Luckily for Duke, he didn't have to eat out much while living with his family on Richmond Road in the 1950s. Duke remembers eating most of his food at home, with most of the produce coming from the family garden. "We grew everything in our garden," he explains. "Corn, beets, tomatoes, cucumbers, green beans you name it. People who wanted fresh produce in those days grew their own in a garden. I mean, practically everybody had a garden."

With the vast assortment of hotels, supermarkets, fast food restaurants, and gift shops that now line Richmond Road, it's difficult to imagine anyone having the motivation to grow their own produce today. There was an abundance of farmland in those days. "There was cattle-raising, deer, and fields instead of most of the restaurants you see on Richmond Road today," Duke explains.

One of Duke's earliest vivid memories is of

"I still have the small town in my heart. It was the soft spot in my youth and molded and shaped me into what I am today."

- Vickie Nase

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Pete Childs,
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going to the airport with his father. Williamsburg has had several airports in years past. "Most people never understand why that road (off Richmond Rd.) is called Airport Road, but that road used to lead to where the College Airport was located," Duke says. "My father was the general manager and chief flight instructor there. He taught both of the local police officers (who happened to be brothers) to fly – 'Ham' Smith and Lou Smith. The Smith brothers' children and grandchildren still live here."

College Airport was a project that grew out of Williamsburg's first airport that was built in 1931 on the Scott-Davis farms. The Scott-Davis farms airport, located about a mile from the William & Mary campus, was operated in part by William & Mary's Department of Aeronautics. The Department featured the world's first college sponsored flight program, allowing William & Mary students in the early 1930s to obtain pilot's licenses at about one-fourth the cost of a commercial flight school.

Although William & Mary's flight-school program was revolutionary in its attempt to combine both academic and practical application, it was discontinued in less than five years due to a lack of funding, a lack of institutional interest, and the failing health of William & Mary President Julian Chandler, whose influence and enthusiasm had kept the program going despite a Depression-era economy. However, before Dr. Chandler's death, several acres of land had been purchased near Ewell Station, about five miles from campus, for use as what came to be called College Airport on Airport Road.

According to Duke, College Airport closed around 1967, and is mostly hidden from public view today. "It's in the woods now," he explains. "Trees have grown up around it and all that is left of it is a beautiful old administration building made of brick and masonry. I guess they built things well back then because it's still standing." The administration building hosts no plaque to inform interested passer-byers of its former pur-

pose. "Only people that have been around awhile can remember it," explains Duke.

The Williamsburg Jamestown Airport that was opened in 1970 by Larry and Jean Waltrip is the only airport operating out of Williamsburg today. Duke, who also served as a commercial pilot for 15 years during the 60s and 70s, has the distinction of having flown out of all three airports when they were at one time or another, functional in Williamsburg. "I took my first flying lesson from Floyd Clark, College Airport's lessee/operator in 1955 when I was 13 years old, and I soloed when I turned 16 in 1957," explains Duke.

"It's a little hard talking about the past," Duke concluded. "It's always a pleasure when you run into a local ole-timer - someone who has been around to remember some of that stuff, who can remember all the colloquial things." NDN

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A Social Setting

ETHEL STERNBERG TAKES A LOOK BACK

By Suzi Drake

It was 1950 and the recently married Dr. and Mrs. Paul and Ethel Sternberg had just moved from Richmond to Williamsburg. The couple made their home in an apartment on Prince George Street, and Paul opened the city's first ophthalmologist's office in the storefront downstairs.

"It was a lovely small town," remembers Ethel, now 82. "I just liked that everyone seemed to know everyone. And we had the *Gazette* so we al-



ways knew what was going on around town. You knew what everyone was doing, because it was in the paper," she said. "Whether they had a tea party or a baby...it was in the *Gazette*."

For a cup of coffee to enjoy while they read their *Gazette*, many Williamsburg residents would head straight to The Corner Greek, a diner just across the street from Paul's shop on Prince George Street. "All the local men would meet there for coffee," Ethel recalled. "And they had the most wonderful pecan pie."

Just a few doors down was Binns, a dress shop where the local women went if they were looking for something very chic. As Ethel re-

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NEXT DOOR NEIGHBORS NOVEMBER 2008

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members it, Binns, which has since changed hands several times and moved locations, was the most elegant shop in town.

Other than Binns, there were few shopping options for Ethel and her friends. Sometimes she joined a group of ladies who traveled once a month into Richmond to get their hair done and for a day of shopping in the 'big city'.

"If you went to Richmond, or even downtown, you would get dressed up," Ethel said. "I would never go out in shorts or in jeans. We wore hats and gloves. It was wonderful. Everyone always looked so nice downtown."

When they started school, Ethel's three children were also able to spend their days enjoying the close-knit, simple-natured beauty of downtown Williamsburg.

"There was a wonderful lady in town and all the children went to her house to start school. It was called Mrs. Smith's Kindergarten," Ethel said. "You would see her walking and singing as she marched down the street

with eight or ten children following close behind, like ducks in a row. She would take them to the fire station, police station, the library, the bank. The children loved it. She was what I would call a good, old-fashioned teacher."

When they were older, Ethel's two sons joined Colonial Williamsburg's Fife and Drum Corps. They also played basketball. Her daughter was involved in the Girl Scouts. They were a busy family and through her children, Ethel was able to make many friends.

"I knew everyone in town," Ethel said. "I think we lived in the best time."

Ethel also remembers wonderful parties she and her neighbors would have in James Terrace, where she and her family moved in

the late 1950s.

"We loved going to William & Mary basketball games and occasionally went into Richmond to see a play, but mostly we entertained at the house," she said. "We would

throw parties or just play bridge. It didn't have to be a big dinner party. Friends would just come over and play cards and eat dessert."

Sometimes friends would find excuses to stop by if you were one of the only families in town with a television set. "We had a very small set, and a couple

of our friends would invite themselves over every week to watch 'Caesar's Hour' with Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca," Ethel remembered. "So sometimes, we would just sit and watch. And that was fine, too."

"If you went to Richmond, or even downtown, you would get dressed up. I would never go out in shorts or in jeans. We wore hats and gloves. It was wonderful. Everyone always looked so nice downtown."

- Ethel Sternberg



WHY

I ADVERTISE IN *Next Door Neighbors*

"Williamsburg's *Next Door Neighbors* magazine has been the source of at least thirty seven percent of our service requests for four months. We recently had three clients present us with the advertisement from April of this year when estimating the work. The new clients value our services as much as we value them. We even recommend advertising in WNDN to other select professionals that serve us. The new clients tell us how much they love the articles and trust the companies advertising in it. We owe a good measure of our success this year to this magazine."

Thanks,

Pete Childs

Owner of Carpet Pro

Still here 58 years later, it's clear Ethel found her niche in Williamsburg. But when she and her late husband first moved here, though she loved it, there was one thing that worried her.

"The first thing people asked me when I moved here was what church I was going to," Ethel said. "I'm Jewish and there was no temple here, so I didn't have an answer."

Ethel, a holocaust survivor, said she was shocked by how few Jews were in Williamsburg in the 1950s. But slowly, more and more Jews moved to town to teach at the college or open businesses. As it grew, Ethel and her husband saw a need for a place for the Jewish community to worship. To this end, in 1959, Paul and four other men founded Temple Beth-El. They had 18 members and met at various locations around town.

"When we first started the temple, we didn't have a building," Ethel said. "But everyone we asked helped us."

The college opened Wrens Chapel to them and eventually people at Colonial Williams-

burg helped the temple lay a solid foundation, offering them a building that was once a gift shop.

They just needed to get the building from where it stood on Francis Street to the piece of property the temple had acquired on Jamestown Road – where Temple Beth-El still stands.

"We had it lifted out of there and moved," Ethel said. "But on the way there, it got stuck in front of Bruton Parish Church, right in the middle of Duke of Gloucester Street." With a little maneuvering, the building was freed and delivered to its destination on Jamestown Road in one piece. The men of the temple fixed it up and its doors opened in 1959.

Needless to say, the escapades with that move was news of the day. According to Ethel, the building that became stuck for a brief time along its journey on Duke of Gloucester Street in 1959 made front page news in the *Gazette*. NDN

Next Door Neighbors

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Next Door Neighbors is a monthly, direct-mailed magazine serving the residents of the Williamsburg area. Circulation: 34,759

www.wburgndn.com



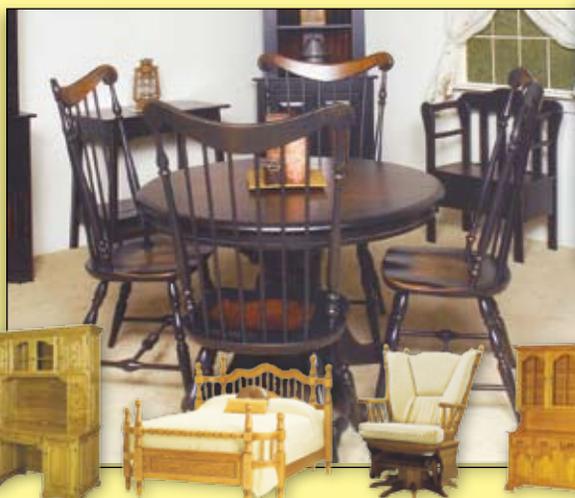
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Lena Tyree Remembers

The Simple Life

By Linda Landreth Phelps



Lena Kemp was a just sixteen at the time she and her future husband, Charles Tyree, met in Matthews County, VA. When she was just nine years old running the family home became her job after her mother's death. At the time there were four children, the youngest a two-week old baby, and a grieving husband. A common practice in those days when there were young motherless children was to have relatives absorb the children into their own families.

However, Lena's father was determined not to split the family. "Daddy promised we would always stay together and he kept that promise,"

Lena says gratefully. Her father worked in the lumber business and that was

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how she met Charles, who had come to town from the mountains of Virginia to work in the sawmill. When they married in 1942, Lena was 18 and Charles was 21 years old.

Soon World War II took Charles overseas for an extended period of 21 months. Lena spent those long months in Richmond with 'Miz Tyree', her ailing mother-in-law, working by day and spending the many lonely nights working jigsaw puzzles. "It was safer that way - no temptations," Lena says. "You might have no intentions of doing anything wrong, just having some fun, but you're young...no, it was better not to go out. Once Charles came home, I said I didn't care if I never saw a jigsaw puzzle again in my whole life!"

The couple made up for lost time and moved to Williamsburg in 1959, when Charles accepted a job at the sawmill on the land where Busch Gardens is now. They built a house off Lake Powell Road, then the main highway to Newport News.

"In 1959 there was nothing on Richmond Road except Howard Johnson's - not the Pottery, no hotels, - not a single thing! I shopped at the A&P - oh, I loved the A&P!"

- Lena Tyree

Their house on Dogwood Lane was on a little street isolated in the middle of cornfields belonging to Mallory Farm, whose main house was located on land that's now part of Rawls Byrd Elementary School. Completion of construction was neck and neck with the birth of their fourth child, a daughter after three boys, soon followed by another girl. She recalls her early life in Williamsburg with affection.

"In 1959 there was nothing on Richmond Road except Howard Johnson's - not the Pottery, no hotels - not a single thing! I shopped at the A&P - oh, I loved the A&P! - and where Blooms is now was the only shopping center in town. Casey's Department store on Duke of Gloucester, (currently the Barnes & Noble book store) was where I bought clothes because back in those days it was reasonable. The first stoplight was at what we called Confusion Corner - which is not the same as College Corner, by the way - at Scotland Street and Richmond Road, and it saved a lot of accidents from happening. People still fought it, they didn't want a stoplight in town, and then it was just one right after another. You can't stop growth and progress."

The 1960s seemed like an idyllic time in Williamsburg for a young mother. There was no such label as 'stay-at-home mom' since it was common for most moms to stay home to raise their children. When that just was not possible the women who worked outside of



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the home were known as 'working women'. Those mothers needed child care, and Lena, despite her hardworking husband's \$100 weekly paycheck, needed to supplement their budget. Lena had a large heart and a talent for nurturing so she began a day care business in her home. "I cared for those children like they were my own," she says. "I gave them a lot of love, attention, and a good, hot meal...all for \$5 a day. To this day, I still have some of those children I kept come back and see me."

In her later years after her own children were long grown and gone, Lena continued her interest in helping youngsters. "I worked for James City County for nine years working with the Bright Beginnings program for handicapped children. I was the aide on the school bus and somebody else was the driver. I loved those children and I reckon I would have stayed on that job until they run me off, but I fell and broke my hip."

"I cared for those children like they were my own. I gave them a lot of love, attention, and a good, hot meal...all for \$5 a day. To this day, I still have some of those children I kept come back and see me."

- Lena Tyree

Lena has known tragedy in her life, from the death of her mother when she was a child to losing a child of her own in an accident. "He was just 37 years old, a long haul trucker," Lena remembers. "He must have fallen

asleep at the wheel. There is not a day goes by that I don't remember him and miss him." She lost her life's companion, Charles, to a heart attack in 1994. "He died in his truck, an outdoor man to the very end. It was hard, but tragedy makes you a stronger person," she says.

Fifty years after it was built, Lena is still living in her neat little house on Dogwood Lane, largely thanks to the help of her two sons who live locally. There have been both joys and sorrows throughout her long life. She's blessed by nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren including her latest, a little girl adopted from China. She does lovely hand work, including a cross-stitched bedspread she did right after Charles died, working late into the night until her eyes ached. "I just couldn't face going to bed without him there," she sighs.

One lesson life has taught her is that there are no guarantees. "You never know what life's going to bring to you. I turn 85 this month, and once you hit 80, everything starts to go, but I'm here until He calls me. People tell me, 'I'm going to do this or that' and I just say, 'You hope you will, Honey!'" NDN



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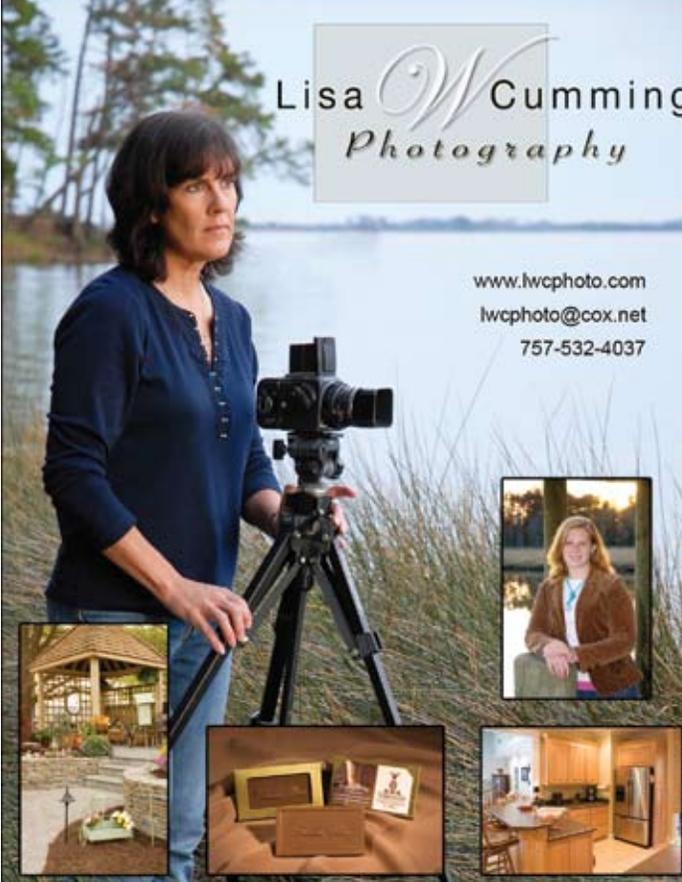
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Hey Neighbor!

There are more community announcements for November that did not fit on this page.

Please visit www.wburgndn.com and click on **Hey Neighbor!** for a complete list of current community announcements.

Hey Neighbor! 4TH ANNUAL ORPHAN RUN MOTORCYCLE RIDE

October 25th

Orphan Helpers is an international children's ministry that helps thousands of neglected children. This year's ride to benefit the many orphaned, abused and incarcerated children will stage from: Portsmouth's Bayside Harley-Davidson, Yorktown's Hampton Roads Harley-Davidson, and Glen Allen's Richmond Harley-Davidson and will end in Williamsburg at Colonial Hills Estate, home of event organizer, Steve Ward. Registration at each location will begin at 9:30 am with kickstands going up at 11:00 am. Each ride will follow a designated scenic route through Virginia's countryside. Once riders reach the destination, they will enjoy great food, live music, a bike show, trophy presentations, prizes, (raffle & silent auction) and a 50/50 drawing. Admission fee - \$15 for singles, \$20 for couples. Those wishing to ride directly to Colonial Hills Estate, located at 262 Thompson Lane, Williamsburg, VA 23188, should arrive by noon and can pay at the gate. For more information, visit www.orphanhelpers.org or contact Roma Frye at 757-722-6940 or 757-879-1262.

Hey Neighbor! OLIVE BRANCH CHRISTIAN CHURCH 175TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION **October 25 & 26, 2008**

Festivities will begin at 3 p.m. on the 25th with exhibits, prayers, music, a drama presentation, bonfire and hymn sing plus a Barbecue dinner. On Sunday the 26th festivities will continue with worship services conducted by Rev. David Hartman who once led Olive Branch and who is now Sr. Pastor at First Christian Church in Wichita Falls, Texas. Past pastors and members have been

invited and many will attend. A chicken lunch will be served at 12:30. (Members are asked to bring veggies, salads, or desserts.) Exhibits of OBCC history will be on display. Olive Branch has met for worship services and Sunday School EVERY Sunday since its inception. For information please call 757-566-8077.

Hey Neighbor! FREE VOCAL LESSONS **October 28, 2008**

Sweet Adelines International's Publick Times Chorus is offering free vocal lessons for women singers in the Hampton Roads area. Women of all ages who enjoy singing are invited to attend on Tues., October 28, 6:30 p.m. at The Scottish Rite Masonic Center, 65 Saunders Road, Newport News, VA. The Publick Times Chorus is one of the hundreds of Sweet Adelines International choruses that make up this worldwide organization of women who sing four-part barbershop harmony. To take advantage of the free vocal lessons, please contact Betty Zattiero at (757) 245-2807. For more information visit <http://publicktimeschorus.tni.net>.

Hey Neighbor! 2008 WELLSRING FALL FESTIVAL & BAZAAR **November 1, 2008**

From 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m., Wellspring's Music Ministry invites you to bring the whole family for an exciting day at Wellspring. You'll find children's games, crafts, and surprises; a fabulous bake sale; lots of goodies in our silent auction; a wide variety of handcrafted gift items, jewelry, and holiday decorations; yummy treats at our Autumn cafe; and much more! Our Fall Festival is a wonderful time to do all of your Christmas shopping, because proceeds benefit Missions & Outreach. Come help your community while enjoying some of the best baked goods, Brunswick Stew, and arts and crafts

around. FREE admission, FREE parking, and open to the public! Rain or shine. Questions? Call Gail Scullion, Music Director, at 258-5008.

Hey Neighbor! A MAGICAL EVENING OF FROLIC & FUN! **November 7, 2008**

6 pm until...at The William and Mary Alumni House, 500 Richmond Rd. Roving musicians, magicians, juggling marvels, exotic culinary creations and beverages. Silent auction at 6 pm; Live auction at 8 pm. Live music, dancing and more at 9:15 pm. Tickets \$50/person; dress with style - black tie optional. It is the mission of Virginia Premiere Theatre to enrich local communities, enhance economic prosperity, educate youth and bring national recognition to Virginia's arts through the presentation of new plays.

Hey Neighbor! NONPROFIT BUSINESS EDUCATION SERIES **November 7, 2008**

Continues once a month on Friday, November 7 from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. with "Successful Prospecting". Presented by Sandler Training, a premier marketing and sales training firm, and hosted by NetworkWilliamsburg, this series was developed to help nonprofits maximize their impact on the community. All workshops are FREE for registered nonprofits thanks to our sponsors Virginia Company Bank, Williamsburg Estate Planning, Dynamo Electric, and G 5 Promotions. To register, visit www.networkwilliamsburg.com

ATTENTION NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS!

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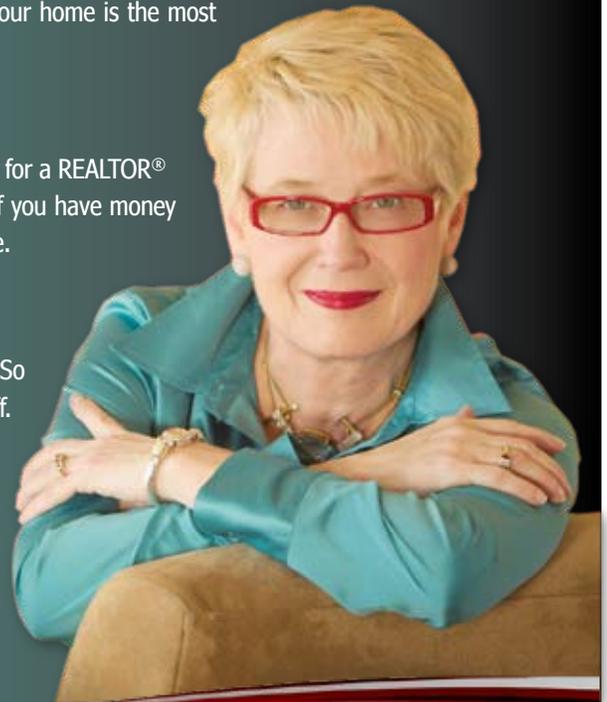
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