

available for purchase at noon. Registration for the day costs \$7.⁰⁰ and members of the Society will be getting more information about registration procedures.

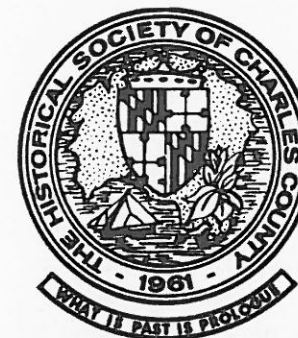
That evening there will be a dramatic presentation at 8:00 p.m. in the College Fine Arts Center entitled "Southern Voices: The Mitchells of Linden." Tickets are \$5.⁰⁰ and available at the Box Office (in the lobby of the Fine Arts Center).

The purpose of the day is to celebrate the 350th Birthday of Maryland and the 25th Anniversary of the Community College. Through the years, the Historical Society has supported the Southern Maryland Room and the reconstruction of Friendship House on the College campus. A portion of the monies obtained from the registration fees will be spent to purchase materials for the

Southern Maryland Room, so all Historical Society members are urged to attend. Also, members are needed to help with some of the day's activities. If you can spare an hour or two during the day, please call Mrs. Susan Shaffer, 645-2761 or Mrs. Kathryn Hickey at 743-7436. (Prepared by Susan Shaffer).

EDITOR'S NOTE

Articles of historic interest on Southern Maryland are requested for possible publication in future issues of **The Record**. Please send your typewritten manuscripts and other communications to: Editor, **The Record**, P.O. Box 261, Port Tobacco, Maryland 20677.



The RECORD

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WILLIAM WIRT STUDENT IN CHARLES COUNTY

Sometime during the year 1781, the nine old William Wirt, who in later life became a famous lawyer and Attorney-General under Presidents John Quincy Adams and James Monroe (1818-1829) transferred from the classical academy operated by Mr. Rogers in Georgetown, to the classical school of Hatch Dent at Newport, Charles County, Maryland.

In later years William Wirt wrote his memoirs for the benefit of his children. These were ultimately incorporated into a two volume biography.¹

Wirt was born in Bladensburg in 1772 and records in his memoirs many interesting stories about his early childhood in Bladensburg. His experiences at the several schools he attended are remarkable in their detail. These memoirs provide unique insights of life in Charles County toward the end of the Revolution. Wirt's recollections of the picnic celebrating the Peace, held at Cool Springs, and his thoughts on the meaning of war and peace to a young lad are most entertaining. Your editor enjoyed the excerpt and trust the members of the Historical Society will also enjoy it.

"From Georgetown I was transferred to a classical school in Charles county, Maryland, about forty miles from Bladensburg. This school was kept by one Hatch Dent, in the vestry house of Newport Church. I was boarded with a widow lady by the name of Love, and my residence in her family forms one of the few sunny spots in the retrospect of my childhood. Mrs. Love was a small, thin old lady, a good deal bent by age, yet brisk and active. The family was composed of her and three maiden daughters, of whom the eldest, I suppose, was verging on forty, and the youngest, perhaps twenty-eight. She had a son married and settled in the neighborhood. The eldest daughter was named Nancy, a round, plump and jolly old maid, who was the weaver of the family and used to take a great deal of snuff. The second was Sally. She presided over the dairy, which was always neat and sweet and abundantly supplied with the richest cream and butter. Sally was somewhere about thirty, short, rosy and brisk, with a countenance marked by health and good humor, and with one of the kindest hearts that beat in

the bosom of her kind sex. She was fond of me, banqueted me on milk and cream to my heart's content, admired my songs, and sang herself. From her, I first heard Roslin Castle. Her clear and loud voice could make the neighborhood vocal with its notes of touching plaint. From her, too, I first heard the name of Clarissa Harlowe, and she gave me, in her manner, a skeleton of the story. Peggy, the youngest was pale and delicate, with more softness of manners than the others. She was the knitter and seamstress of the household, of very sweet disposition, with a weak and slender but kindly voice. She did not sing herself, but was very fond of hearing us who did. There were two boys of us near the same age. John's son Carnes was rather older and larger than me. He was a good diffident, rather grave boy, with better common sense than I had. But he did not sing, was rather homely, and had no mirth and frolic in him. I, on the contrary, was pert, lively and saucy, and they used to say *pretty withal*—said smart things sometimes, and sang two or three songs of humor very well. One was Dick of Danting Dane, in which the verse about 'my father's black sow' was a jest that never grew stale, nor failed to raise a hearty laugh. Another was a description of a race at New Market between two horses called Sloven and Thunderbolt. Sloven belonged to some Duke—perhaps the Duke of Bolton. The verse ran, as I remember—

'When Sloven saw the Duke his master,
He laid back his ears and did run much faster.'

"Besides my singing, I danced to the astonishment of the natives, and altogether, had the reputation of a genius. Thus admired flattered and feasted with milk and cream, Roslin Castle and Clarissa Harlowe, &c., what more could a child of my age want to make him happy! The very negroes used to be pleased to contribute to my amusement. Old Moll carried me to the cowpen, where she permitted me with a clean, broad splinter, prepared for the purpose, to whip the rich froth from the milk pail; and her son George, after a hard day's work in the field, came home at night and played the horse for me, by going on all fours in the green yard, with me mounted upon his back,—he going through the feats of an imaginary fox hunt, sounding the horn and leaping over imaginary fences, gates, &c.—all of which was life and joy to me. To crown all, I had a sweetheart; one of

the prettiest cherubs that ever was born. The only thing I ever thanked Nancy Love for, was giving me the occasion of becoming acquainted with this beautiful girl. She took me with her once on a visit to her aunt Reeder. Mr. Thomas Reeder lived on the banks of the Potomac, just above Laidlowe's and opposite to Hooe's Ferry.² In those days there was a ferry from Reeder's to Hooe's. The house was of brick, situated on a high airy bank, giving a beautiful view of the Potomac, which is there four miles wide. Peggy Reeder was the only child of her parents,—about my own age, rather younger, and as beautiful as it is possible for a child to be. We fell most exceedingly in love with each other. She was accustomed to make long visits to her aunt Love, and no two lovers, however romantic, were ever more happy than we. On my part, it was a serious passion. No lover was ever more disconsolate in the absence of his mistress, nor more enraptured at meeting her. I do not know whether it is held that the affections keep pace with the intellect in their development; but I do know that there is nothing in the sentiment of happy love, which I did not experience for that girl, in the course of the two years when I resided at Mrs. Love's. When I left there we were firmly engaged to be married at the following Easter. I felt proud and happy, not in the least doubting the fulfilment of the engagement at the time appointed."

"As for school, Mr. Dent was a most excellent man, a sincere and pious christian, and, I presume, a good teacher—for I was too young to judge, and, in fact, much too young for a Latin school. In the two years Johnson Carnes and myself got as far advanced as Caesar's Commentaries—though we could not have been well grounded, for when I changed to another school, I was put back to Cornelius Nepos. Mr. Dent was very good tempered. I do not remember to have received from him a harsh word or any kind of punishment but once. His school was crowded. I can recall none of the scholars who attained much distinction, except one who was with us but a short time—Alexander Campbell, who afterwards became celebrated as an orator in Virginia."

"I lived there, at Mrs. Love's I think, until the year 1782, as perfectly happy as a child could be who was separated from his mother and the other natural objects of his affection. From the time I rose until I went to bed, the live-long day, it was all enjoyment, save only with two drawbacks—the going to school, and the getting tasks on holidays,—which last, by the by, is a practical cruelty that ought to be abolished. I never knew good to come of it, but much harm; for it starts across the child's path, like a goblin, throughout the holidays. The task is deferred until the last moment, then, either slubbered over any how or omitted altogether, and a thousand falsehoods invented to evade or excuse it. But these holiday tasks were the order of the day in my youth, and haunted me until the holidays no longer deserved the name. With the exception of these same tasks

and a slight repugnance to daily school, Mrs. Love's was an elysium to me. It was a very quiet life without the amusing incidents of Bladensburg and Georgetown. The only picturesque occurrence of which I have any recollection was the passage of a party of fox-hunters with their dogs and horses, one day, by our dwelling-house. The public road to Allen's Fresh ran close by the gate, where I was standing alone, when this animated and noisy party dashed along. It was such an obstreperous invasion of the stillness of the country, and so entirely novel a spectacle to me, that I drew back from the gate and walked towards the house to get out of the way of the mischief of which they seemed full. One of the riders, observing my movement, put spurs to his horse and leaped the fence by the side of the gate, as if to frighten and pursue me; but I was rather too proud to run, and he returned to his party the way he came."

"There was a barbacue at the Cool Springs, near Johnson Carnes' father's, to celebrate the return of peace. This was an idea, I well remember, which puzzled me exceedingly. Having known no other things but a state of war, I had no suspicion that there was any thing unnatural or uncommon in it. I must have heard continually of the battles that were fought, but I have not the slightest vestige on my memory of any such thing;—which can only proceed from the circumstance that battles, defeats and victories must have appeared to me as ordinary occurrences. I was exceedingly perplexed, therefore, to understand the event which this barbacue celebrated. I had no distinct idea of the meaning of war and peace; and, after the explanation that was given to me, had still but vague and confused impressions of the subject. I presume that the event in question was the signature of the preliminary articles in 1781, when I was only nine years old. If I had been at any time nearer to the immediate seat of the war, the terrors of those around me might have startled me into a clearer perception of its character, and have prepared me the better to understand and enjoy the return of peace. As it was, I had never heard of it but at a distance and with composure, and had seen nothing of war but its 'pride, pomp and circumstance,' to which a boy at my age had no objection."

"I became sensible of the power of forming and pursuing at pleasure, a day-dream from which I derived great enjoyment, and to which I found myself often recurring. There was nothing in the scenery around me to awaken such vagaries. It was tame, gentle and peaceful. The house stood on a flat about half a mile wide and one mile long. On the east, the view was shut in by a hill of moderate height, which stretched along the whole length of the plain—gently undulating, verdant and adorned with a growth of noble walnut trees which were scattered over its sides and summit. This hill was the only handsome object in view. On every other side the plain was locked in by swamps or woods; so that there was neither incentive nor fuel for poetic dreams. Mine were the amusements of the

dull morning walks from Mrs. Love's to the schoolhouse. It was a walk of about two miles, and my companion rather disposed to silence. I remember very distinctly the subject of one of these vagaries, from the circumstance of my having recalled, renewed and varied it again and again from the pleasure it afforded me. I imagined myself the owner of a beautiful black horse, fleet as the winds. My pleasure consisted in imagining the admiration of the immense throngs on the race-field, brought there chiefly to witness the exploits of my prodigy of a horse. I could see them following and admiring him as he walked along the course, and could hear their bursts of applause as he shot by, first one competitor, and then another, in the race. The vision was vivid as life and I felt all the glow of triumph that a real victory could have given."

These imaginings were characteristic of the boy, and seem to have typified the peculiar nature of his aspirations in the more mature period of his manhood.

Here is a remembrance of a notable personage of the Revolution.—

"I must not forget a rencontre which I had with a very distinguished man at this period. It had happened that, on some former occasion, I had attracted the attention of Col. Lee, of the legion already mentioned, as he passed through Bladensburg. A volume of Blackstone chanced to be lying on the table, near which he was sitting; and, shewing me the title on the back of the volume, he asked me what I called it. I pronounced the word 'Commentaries' with the accent on the second syllable, and he corrected my *cachilology*, as Lord Duberly calls it. Upon the foundation of this slight acquaintance, I was recognized by this gentleman at Mr. Reeder's, where I had gone on a visit with one of the Miss Loves, and whither Col. Lee had come to cross the ferry, with his first wife, then, as I was told, newly married. He seemed quite pleased to meet me, took great notice of me, and, finally, insisted on my crossing the river with him to Hooe's, where he promised to give me some fine cherries. They who had the care of me seemed to consider me and themselves much honored by this notice of Col. Lee, and readily consented to his proposal. So, I was placed along side of him in the boat, while his young wife, for the greater part, if not the whole of the passage, stood upon one of the benches, facing the breeze, which wantoned freely with her robes. She had a fine figure, and her attitude, as the boat rose and sank on the waves, was so strikingly picturesque as to remain strongly on my memory. The river is at this place four miles wide, and the beach at the opposite side is, at some states of the tide, so shallow that a boat cannot get quite to the shore, in which case passengers have to be borne to dry land in the arms of the ferrymen. This was the case on the present occasion. Col. Lee and his wife were taken to the shore, where they, their servants, ferrymen and all moved off to the house at Hooe's, leaving me sitting alone in the boat to chew the cud of disappointment and

neglect as well as I could. I was entirely forgotten:—but I did not forget this slight, in the reflections which, even then and often afterwards, the incident provoked. After sitting alone in the boat for near an hour, unthought of by the person who had betrayed me into that situation, I was at last relieved by the ferrymen, who returning at their leisure, without either cherries or apology from Col. Lee, took me safe back to the more friendly bosoms I had left on other shore."³

1. John P. Kennedy, *Memoirs of the Life of William Wirt* (Philadelphia, PA: Lea and Blanchard, 1849).

2. The 1783 Tax Assessment, First District, Charles County located in the Hall of Records, Annapolis, lists Thomas Reeder as the owner of 3 tracts of land near Newburg totaling 650 acres. Only one of these, "Part of Battins Cliffs", some 365 acres was improved: "A large dwelling house, sundry other convenient houses." This tract, plus improvements, was valued at slightly over 638 pound sterling. Its location was described as "Beautifully situated on (the) Potomac." "I suspect the Thomas Reeder house stood just South of the Newburg intersection at Route 301." (Note provided by J. Richard Rivoire.)

3. *Op. cit.*, Vol. 1, pp 29-36.

REPORT FROM THE PROGRAM COMMITTEE

Following the Winter Meeting on February 18, 1984 the next important event you will not want to miss is the Society's celebration of Maryland's 350th Anniversary to be held jointly with the Charles County Community College on April 28, 1984. (See below for further details.)

Last year's tour to the Maryland Historical Society was so successful that the program committee is working on a tour for this year, tentatively scheduled for June. Destinations under consideration are Fredericksburg, St. Mary's County, or possibly Chestertown on the Eastern Shore.

Our Annual meeting is scheduled for October 13 and will feature, in addition to an old ham and roast beef dinner, a lively talk on "The Planter's Wife in early Charles County."

Be on the lookout for announcements of these programs of your Historical Society - and be sure to participate yourself. (Prepared by William Garvey.)

CELEBRATING SOUTHERN MARYLAND HISTORY

On April 28, 1984, the Historical Society of Charles County and the Community College will co-sponsor a day to celebrate the history of our area. There will be films, music, lectures, a dramatic presentation, panel displays, and audio-visual presentations. The history day begins at 9:00 a.m. and concludes at 3:30 p.m. with a box lunch