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APPOMATTOX COUNTY 1845-1945

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*Centennial*

A COUNTY HISTORY

BY

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# *Forward*

The following Historical Sketch of Appomattox County was read at the County's Centennial Celebration, May 1, 1945, by C. W. Smith, County Clerk. United States Senator Harry Flood Byrd addressed some 1,500 citizens and friends of the County who gathered at the Court House for the celebration.

The author of this sketch wishes to thank all those who aided in gathering the data herein presented.

(Note: The name of Richard McDearmon should be included among the attorneys on Page 10).

- County Board of Supervisors -

G. F. Abbitt, Jr., Chairman  
F. A. O'Brien  
F. T. Smith

Published May, 1945  
Appomattox, Va.

## **APPOMATTOX COUNTY**

### **Historical Sketch**

The County took its name from the Appomattox River, the headwaters of which are in this county. This in turn was named after a tribe of Indians who inhabited its lower banks.

Created by the 1844-1845 Session of the State Legislature, by Act passed Feb. 8, 1845, which took effect May 1, 1845, it embraced parts of Buckingham, Prince Edward, Charlotte and Campbell Counties, the general boundaries being set forth in the Act, and subsequently was surveyed in the months of May, June and July of that year by John Patteson, S. B. Co., Alexander Austin, Sur. Campbell Co., and Z. E. Cheatham, who had been appointed Surveyor of Appomattox County. It is bounded on the northwest by James River, and situated in the south central part of Virginia, and covers an area of 217,792 acres, or approximately 340 square miles.

The Act provided that the Governor should commission as Justices of the Peace, for the County of Appomattox, the Justices then commissioned and residing in those sections of the four counties that would be in Appomattox County, after the commencement of said Act.

The Court for the County was composed of the Justices aforesaid, who were to meet on Thursday after the first Monday in each month, after the same was organized, at the place known as Clover Hill, the residence of Capt. John Raine, which was in the upper end of what was then Prince Edward County. The County Court was authorized and directed by said Act to erect a Court House and such other necessary buildings as the convenience of the County required.

Said Justices were directed to meet at the residence of Capt. John Raine, on Thursday after the 1st Monday in May, 1845, to organize the County Government, by the appointment of a Clerk of the County Court, a Surveyor for the County, the School Commissioners and such other officers as the law required and were directed to nominate to the Governor, suitable persons to be commissioned Sheriff and Coroner of said County.

From the best information available, the following Justices were commissioned for the new County: Joel Watkins, William Matthews, Major Thos. Rudd, John W. Marshall, Dr. Reubin D. Palmer, Col. Benj. P. Walker, Col. Thomas H. Flood, Nathan H. Hancock, Bryant Nowlin, Col. Z. E. Cheatham, Washington Hunter, Sterling C. Anderson, John H. Plunkett and James McDearmon.

These men nominated to the Governor Joel Watkins for Sheriff, and he was commissioned the first Sheriff of Appomattox County, and Samuel D. McDearmon, Wm. J. McDearmon and Wm. J. Watkins were named as his Deputies. The Sheriff's office was the most potential in the county at that time. He was not only the law-enforcement officer, but he collected all taxes and disbursed the same on the order of the Justice; there were no juries summoned in those days, and the Sheriff had to go out and find jurors when needed at each term of the Court.

John T. Bocock, was named the first County Clerk, and Thomas S. Bocock, the first Commonwealth Attorney, and Andrew B. Baker, the first Coroner.

The organization being perfected, and its affairs entrusted to men of outstanding character and ability, the County began a steady and peaceful growth.

John T. Bocock, the first Clerk, died soon after his appointment, and he was succeeded by his son, Henry F. Bocock, who served until July 1860, when he was succeeded by the late Geo. T. Peers.

The County Court was composed of the Justices of the County, and they selected and appointed their own membership, being thus self-perpetuating. It had jurisdiction over all roads, police matters, probate & fiduciary matters, the trial of misdemeanors and slaves, etc. It fixed the County levy and apportioned the same among the white males over 21 years of age. There was also a Court of Sessions which met four times per year, and a Superior Court which met twice a year, about which we have no information.

At that time there were eight postoffices in the County, and three towns, viz: Bent Creek, formerly called Diuguidsville, Pamplin and Spout Spring.

In 1850 a Constitutional Convention was held to revise and re-write the State Constitution. This became effective in July 1852, and provided for a number of changes in the form of County Government, and the new officers elected under it took office.

During these years, all mail and passengers were carried through the County by stage coaches, usually drawn by four horses, making regular stops to change horses or for refreshments. One of these stops was at the Court House. During the year 1851 or 1852, the Atlantic, Mississippi & Ohio Railroad was constructed through the County. The first passenger train going through to Roanoke was in November, 1852. This, of course, was a great boon to the transportation and development of the County. At that time the engines were fired with wood cut, hauled and stacked along the track.

The New Constitution above referred to, provided for the election of officers by a vote of the people, rather than by appointment, and in May of that year the first election was held.

In 1860 Geo. T. Peers became the County Clerk, Wilson Hix, Sheriff, Samuel J. Walker Commissioner of the Revenue, and L. D. Isbell, Commonwealth Attorney.

It was a time marked by great national issues and fateful decisions. Two conceptions of Government were clashing, one, the South adhered to States Rights, and followed the political philosophy of Thomas Jefferson; the other the North, favored Centralized Government, and adopted the principles of Government of Alexander Hamilton. Questions of Slavery and States Rights were major topics. Excitement reached a climax in the Presidential election of 1860, when Abraham Lincoln was elected President.

Appomattox County sent Lewis D. Isbell, an announced "Secessionist" to a State Convention, to consider whether or not Virginia would leave the Union. Virginia cast her lot with her sister Southern States, which had already seceded. The call went out for volunteers to defend the firesides of the Old Dominion. Appomattox County responded nobly.

A Cavalry Company was formed under the command of

Capt. Joel W. Flood, becoming Co. H of the 2nd Va. Cavalry. A Company of Heavy Artillery was formed under Capt. James Robertson. A Company of Infantry under Capt. Thos. P. Matthews, and another Company was formed under Capt. Wm. H. Abbitt, and quite a number of Appomattox citizens living near the rim of the county joined companies from adjoining counties. With hearts aflame and bodies dedicated to the Cause they held dear, they went to the front and shared the destiny of the heroes in Gray. Weakened by casualties, new calls came for volunteers, and long after the war, there was a scarcity of able bodied men in the County.

Then came April 9, 1865, and the hand of destiny wrote "finis" across the scroll of four mighty years of struggle. Destiny selected Appomattox for one of the major events of history. Today there is hardly a town or village in America, that has not heard of "Appomattox." Thus ended in this County, one of the greatest Civil Wars ever chronicled in the files of Time, and at Appomattox began a new page in the history of America.

Military rule was established shortly after April 9, 1865. All county officers were replaced by military appointees. These were men who were selected upon the recommendation of the incumbents, and were willing to take the Iron Clad Oath.

In the fall of 1866, an election was held under the Underwood Constitution, which put into effect the 13th and 14th Amendments to the Constitution of the United States, and a new slate of officers were named.

Geo. T. Peers became Clerk; Wm. T. Johnson Sheriff; W. J. Collins, Commissioner of the Revenue; the Office of County Treasurer was created; Supervisors were provided for, and the County Government, practically as we have it now was established.

The ravages of four years of war were apparent, and Appomattox along with her sister counties, began to repair the wounds. The following years called forth the character and ability of her people, and the present institutions of our County are but a tribute to their untiring labor and foresight.

From 1870 to the present has been a period of rebuilding and achievement.

From its creation the County has been served until now by the following officers:

CIRCUIT JUDGES - Judges G. A. Wingfield, J. D. Horsley, Sam Coleman, George J. Hundley, Robt. F. Hutcheson and Joel W. Flood.

COUNTY JUDGES - Lewis Daniel Isbell, Henry T. Parish and David A. Christian.

TRIAL JUDGES - T. R. Horseley and L. F. Ferguson.

COUNTY CLERKS - John T. Boccock, Henry F. Boccock, Geo. T. Peers, Geo. W. Abbitt, John Rolfe Horsley and Claude W. Smith.

COMMONWEALTH'S ATTORNEYS - Thos. S. Boccock, L. D. Isbell, Crawford Jones, Edward Woodson, T. J. Thornhill, David A. Christian, W. C. Franklin, H. D. Flood, Samuel L. Ferguson, Joel W. Flood and W. M. Abbitt.

SHERIFFS - Joel Watkins, Geo. T. Peers, William Paris, Wilson Hix, W. T. Johnson, Wm. H. Gills, Cooch Plunkett, T. B. Bryant, S. P. Coleman, Frank W. McKinney and H. W. McKinney.

COMMISSIONERS OF THE REVENUE - Thos. W. Johns, Isaac Adams, Andrew B. Baker, John W. Gilliam, Geo. W. Abbitt, Van Gilliam, Wm. Statham, L. E. Smith, H. C. Babcock, E. R. Abbitt and J. H. O'Brien.

COUNTY TREASURERS - Wm. H. Gills, Cooch Plunkett, S. R. Franklin, D. Mott Robertson, R. F. Burke and R. L. Burke.

SUPERINTENDENTS OF SCHOOLS - C. H. Chilton, J. B. Bristow, J. K. Hannah, N. R. Featherston and J. A. Burke.

STATE SENATORS - The County has furnished the following State Senators - Col. Wyatt Elliott, Col. Samuel D. McDearmon, Col. Robt. B. Poore, H. D. Flood, Samuel L. Ferguson and Charles T. Moses.

HOUSE OF DELEGATES - The following citizens of the county have served in the House of Delegates: Col. Samuel D. McDearmon, Zachariah Cheatham, Crawford Jones, R. P. Poore, Joel W. Flood, Thos. S. Boccock, James Watkins, D. Mott Robertson, W. C. Franklin, H. D. Flood, J. W. Harwood, Sterling C. Stratton, Willis H. Ligon, J. R. Horsley, J. C. Jones, A. B. Thornhill, T. J. Stratton, J. W. Cawthorn and R. L. Burke.

The Constitution of 1902, abolished the County Court, the duties of which were transferred to the Circuit Court, the County Clerk and the Board of Supervisors.

### **Population**

We have no record of the population of the County at the time of its formation, but the last census gives us a population of 9020.

The earliest inhabitants were, of course, the Indians, the Appomatusks Tribe. White settlers started coming into this section as early as 1630, but only scanty records are to be found of the population before 1800. The racial strain is largely pure anglo-saxon, and therefore of English descent, with a few Huguenots, German and Irish. There has been little migration through the years.

### **Churches**

The Court House and Church were usually the first establishments of any community. Since the formation of the County, it has been well served by churches of the Episcopal, Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist faiths. Today we have 14 Baptist, 9 Methodist, 5 Presbyterian, 1 Episcopal and one Pentecostal churches serving the white people of the County, and in addition there are 17 colored churches in the County, well distributed over the County, all of which have done much to mark the County with sterling religious traditions.

### **Educational Facilities**

The only educational facilities in the early period of the county were home tutors, employed by the more prominent and well-to-do families, and privately operated academies, the best known of which were one for boys and one for girls at Spout Spring. The County at that time had no money for poor pupils. in 1847, Barbara G. Wright petitioned the Legislature for pay for educating poor pupils. She had conducted a School in that part of Prince Edward County which was cut off to Appomattox County.

Ten years later, in 1857, one William A. Swann petitioned



the Legislature to pay him for pupils taught by him. He conducted a School in Prince Edward County, but had some pupils from Appomattox. He asked for four cents per day per pupil, his bill amounting to \$17.36. Two to four cents per day per pupil was the regular rate in "free schools" of that day. Private schools were numerous, so good and so cheap, that only the poorest children attended free schools. A teacher in free schools in those days made from \$25.00 to \$50.00 a year, but needed to know nothing more than the "three R's" and not much of them. The first public school in the county was located near the site of the Old Court House. It opened in 1870, with J. H. Featherston as teacher, and our School System has gradually developed through the years, from the one room school until now we have three Senior High Schools, with Home Economics, Agricultural and Manual Training Departments, two for white and one for colored, and a number of graded elementary schools throughout the County, with a great majority of the students being transported to and from school by busses. In connection with our schools, we have a splendid public library, and two community canneries serving our people.

### **Agriculture**

Tradition claims that the word from which the County gets its name meant "Tobacco Plant Country." Tobacco, agricultural pursuits and timber have always furnished the chief source of livelihood to the people of the County. For a long time, tobacco was the chief money crop, but for the past decades, our people have not depended entirely upon tobacco, but are diversifying their crops, and raising more livestock and dairy products, largely due to the efforts of our County Farm and Home Demonstration Agents. There are also a few commercial orchards. The County is noted however, for its fine type of darkfired tobacco, especially black wrappers. A State lime grinding plant is located in the County.

### **Transportation and Communication**

Ease and speed of transportation and communication are tremendous factors in our modern life. From practically no

means of transportation or communication, other than the stage coach, and mail, we have developed until today Appomattox County is one of the most accessible places in the State. We have the main double track line of the N. & W. Railway passing east and west nearly through the center of the County, with primary hard surfaced highways traversing the County from east to west and north to south, and are served by through passenger and freight bus lines, and in addition, have a local telephone system, with the American Telephone & Telegraph Co., and Western Union Telegraph lines running through the County, with offices maintained therein. Our highway system being largely due to the efforts of the late Samuel L. Ferguson and J. R. Horsley, with the cooperation of our Board of Supervisors.

### **Financial Institutions**

For a long time there were no financial institutions in the County. In the early seventies, The Farmers & Merchants Saving Bank was organized at Pamplin, with J. R. Franklin as president, and W. D. Thornton as cashier, which served the people of that section until the early nineties, and then closed of its own accord. In 1901 The Bank of Appomattox was organized, with a capital of \$10,000, with R. F. Burke as cashier, who served as cashier and president until his death in 1924, when he was succeeded by his son, R. L. Burke. In December, 1905, the State Bank of Pamplin was organized with a minimum capital of \$5,000.00 and operated until September, 1931, serving the people of that section of the County. In September, 1918, The Farmers National Bank was organized and opened for business, with a minimum capital of \$50,000, with A. R. Harwood as cashier, who is still serving in that capacity. The Bank of Appomattox and The Farmers National Bank have operated since their organization, and now have combined assets of \$2,277,808.51, and have been great factors in the business and agricultural development of the County.

### **Industries**

For many years there were practically no industries in the County, except some saw-mills, grist and flour mills, and a

furnace operated in Stonewall District, near James River, which suspended operation in 1850.

In the year 1879, Merrill & Ford established a clay smoking pipe factory at Pamplin, and operated the same for a long time, manufacturing clay smoking pipes, giving employment to a small number of people in that section. This company is still being operated in a small way. Of late years, through the efforts of our people, there have been secured and established some small industries in our County, including two garment factories, three lumber yards and mills, a battery factory, a milk plant, and a box factory, the latter being a War Defense Plant, all of which give employment to quite a number of our people and are contributing materially to the development of our County.

Appomattox and Pamplin, with their motor companies and numerous stores, are trading centers, contributing materially to the progress and development of the County.

### **The Press**

Important in the life of the people of the County, and contributing materially to its progress, were the local weekly newspapers, which kept our people informed of local happenings, and State, National and world events. The first newspaper was established in February, 1892, by the late H. D. Flood and a few local citizens, known as the Appomattox & Buckingham Times. At first it was printed in Lynchburg, but later a printing press was acquired, and A. H. Clement was employed to publish the paper. A few years later, the paper was sold to Mr. Clement, who continued its publication.

In 1903, another paper was established and published under the name of Southside Virginian, both of which continued to be published until September, 1909, when they merged under the name of Times-Virginian, which was then published under the editorship and management of A. H. Clement until September, 1931, when the present owner and editor, Mr. C. H. Robinson, acquired the paper and is still publishing it, and it is quite an asset to the County.

## Professional Life

The achievements of well trained and efficient professional men and women, rightly belong in the permanent record of our County's history.

The romance of the country doctor's life was one of struggle with life and death. With the automobile and the modernly equipped office, he has blazed a trail into modernization. The doctors who have served the people of the County and deserve a permanent place in their esteem are: Wm. Diuguid Christian, David P. Robertson, R. A. North, Charles Morton, Robert Patterson, Benjamin Vawter, William White, Thomas Hix, Richard Watkins, John Randolph, William N. Horsley, A. A. Rice, Joel W. Flood, N. Northington, Robert Whitehead, Reuben Palmer, William Albert Thornhill, D. Mott Robertson, Dr. Taliaferro, John R. McDearmon, C. W. Jones, W. A. Kearney, H. S. Hart, Thomas Matthews, Thomas Rucker, William H. Abbitt, Julian H. Abbitt, James B. Abbitt, E. E. Walker, F. H. Lukin, W. L. Ould, D. N. Twyman, R. H. Cross, D. A. Christian, A. G. Thorman and C. G. O'Brien.

Among the men who have served as lawyers in the County, are L. D. Isbell, Willis P. Bocock, Henry F. Bocock, Thomas S. Bocock, C. C. May, Edward Woodson, Judge H. T. Parrish, Chas. H. Sackett, Henry D. Flood, C. A. Thornhill, R. B. Poore, J. P. L. Fleshman, W. B. Tinsley, Judge D. A. Christian, B. F. Oden, W. C. Franklin, H. B. Hawes, Frank Saunders, Allen H. Clement, Samuel L. Ferguson, Luther Throckmorton, C. E. Hunter, Leslie F. Ferguson, Joel W. Flood, S. L. Ferguson, Jr., George Abbitt, Jr., W. M. Abbitt, Willard E. Brown, W. W. Burke, R. A. O'Brien and Chas. Crawley.

Among the outstanding teachers and educators who have gone from this County are Dr. John Bunyon Shearer, Minister and President of Davidson College, N. C.; Dr. James Franklin, for many years connected with the Foreign Mission Board of the Northern Baptist Church, and later president and now president-emeritus of Crozier Seminary; Dr. Meade Ferguson, Professor of Bacteriology, State Bacteriologist, Editor of Southern Planter and Master of State Grange; Dr. George D. David-

son, head of the Foreign Language Department of Wm. Jewel College, Liberty, Mo.; Dr. A. W. Drinkard, outstanding student and scientist, and director of the Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station; Dr. Edward Burge, head of the Department of Physiology at the University of Illinois; Dr. Havilah Babcock, Professor of English, University of South Carolina; Titus Beasley, Professor, Southwestern Baptist College, Bolivar, Mo.; Dr. Scott Sears, of the research laboratory of the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.

### **Outstanding Citizens**

Although Appomattox is a small county, it has given to the State and Nation, some outstanding citizens, worthy of emulation of present and future generations. I mention a few of them:

Peter Francisco, of Revolutionary days, who served under General Washington; of great physical strength, upon which rests his chief renown.

Thomas S. Bocoock, distinguished lawyer, State Legislator, Member of Congress, orator and Speaker of the Confederate Congress.

Willis P. Bocoock, lawyer and Attorney General of Virginia.

Joe Sweeney, famous musician and inventor of the banjo.

Henry D. Flood, attorney, State Senator, Member of Congress, and as Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the House, introduced the resolution declaring war on the Imperial German Government on April 2, 1917.

Samuel L. Ferguson, Commonwealth's Attorney, and State Senator for a long time, and prominent business man and farmer.

Joseph Button, Clerk of the State Senate, and State Commissioner of Insurance and Banking for a good many years.

Joel W. Flood, Commonwealth's Attorney, Member of Congress and now Judge of the 5th Judicial Circuit of Virginia.

Many others might be added to the list, but suffice it to say, the present generation is carrying on with the same spirit and tradition, and is setting a fine example to our youth in the quality of its leadership.

## **World Wars I and II**

Appomattox County acquitted herself splendidly in World War I, in all the war activities; in the various Liberty Loan and War Stamp Campaigns, Red Cross, Y.M.C.A., and other Wartime efforts, and was the first county in the State to fill its quota of men drafted into the service.

In the present World War, she has sent approximately 1,000 of her sons and daughters into the armed services, and has met and gone far beyond her quota in each call made for defense bonds, Red Cross funds, blood donor and other service, U.S.O. funds and other activities. In fact she stands at the top of all agricultural Counties in her group in the sale of bonds, and is second in the State in blood donors; she has two companies of Minute Men, and is exhibiting the same spirit and patriotism that distinguished her in the great Civil strife between the States, and all her citizens are working, fighting, giving, in order to make Democracy live.