



LAUREL GROVE
Home of Geddes Winston.

LAUREL GROVE

The Home of Geddes Winston

By Arthur Gray

The tidewater counties of Hanover, Caroline, King William, King and Queen and New Kent, were included in the original New Kent County, as it was formed in 1654. Malcolm Harris, M. D., and the writer, for a number of years have been conducting researches regarding the colonial landmarks in this territory. This central portion of Tidewater Virginia is the richest in colonial remains, considering the area, of any portion of Virginia; and it is the least known, because from the Revolution to within the last few years it was in a pocket, almost without railroads or highways, with few main routes leading through it.

The editor has asked that a few of the places studied be described in the pages of the Virginia Magazine and the Winston home is the first to be presented from this section.

The Laurel Grove house overlooks Totopotomoy creek, named for the famous Virginia Indian that Samuel Butler mentions in his "Hudibras". The entrance to the place is on the new road to Bowling Green 5.6 miles from the point where Chamberlayne and Norwood Avenues intersect near the city limits of Richmond. There in Hanover County, on the west side of the highway, a large avenue of cedar trees, which from their age, seem to have been set out by Geddes Winston himself, leads to the old home. The illustration accompanying this article, is from a photograph taken before 1912, when the house was remodeled. The picture shows the home as it was when first built, except for the porch and the dependencies. The floor and the framework of the first story, with the chimneys (including a great interior chimney that is eight feet square), are now just as they were in 1761.

When the remodeling was undertaken, a piece of timber from the second story was found and preserved, with the date "1761" carved plainly upon it. Other records confirm this as the approximate time of the construction. This piece of timber is being carefully kept by the present owner, Mr. J. M. Long, Atlee, Va.

George Wythe Munford, in his book, "The Two Parsons", thus describes the place: "Mr. Winston and his wife then (about 1785 or '90—A. P. G.) lived in the old family mansion in the county of Hanover, in which their lovely daughters and lively sons were born. This old mansion was noted for the magnificent oaks around it, for the old well on the lawn, with its ever cool and refreshing water, overshadowed as it was by two magnificent weeping-willows, which kept off the rays of the sun and caused the old bucket, from the constant dampness which surrounded it, to become in truth 'the moss-covered bucket that hung in the well'. Through the avenues and approaches to the house, and all about it, there were hundreds of wild laurel trees, with their evergreen, glossy leaves and pure white flowers, constantly emitting delicious fragrance, and making the atmosphere which pervaded the cheerful rooms redolent with delicate perfume. From these, the old people had given to the homestead the appropriate name of 'Laurel Grove'."

Between the years 1840 and 1850, Mr. Thomas Rutherford, a son-in-law of Geddes Winston, purchased the place from the Winston heirs, for his son, Thomas, who had married Isabella Syme.

Geddes Winston, "gent", was one of the first citizens of Hanover. He was one of the Justices appointed by the royal representative, from among the chief men of the county. In the year 1770, Geddes and his father were Justices at the same time. When the first Federal Census was taken in St. Paul's Parish, Hanover, in 1782, "Geddes Wenston, gent", was made responsible for the tax lists in one of the districts, and in that district there was only one individual who possessed more slaves than he.

When a proposition was being made to have commissioners appointed, in 1774, to ascertain bounds of lands on Chickahominy swamps, a petition setting forth that there was no need of such commissioners was drawn up, bearing 60 names. The name of Geddes Winston "led all the rest."

In 1767, the vestry of St. Paul's Parish, Hanover, appointed fifty-six citizens as officials to take the responsibility of the determination of parish and precinct lines. Of these, four bore the distinction of having "gentl" written after their names. Two of the four were John and Geddes Winston.

On February 26th of the same year, 1767, Geddes Winston had been elected vestryman of the parish. By 1770 he was one of the church wardens.

His daughters and their families represented the inner circle of Richmond society in the period about 1800. He was the progenitor of a race that numbers many prominent people today, in Richmond and Virginia.

William Essex Winston was the father of Geddes. Mary, the daughter who was the genealogist of the family, is recorded as saying that her grandfather's middle name was given him because he was descended from the great Earl of Essex, but she does not seem to have left any records to show it.

William Essex married Rebecca Geddes, who was probably a daughter of John Geddes, burgess in 1706.* Their son, Geddes Winston, married Mary, one of the seven daughters of Col. Samuel Jordan, of Seven Islands, who was the principal citizen of Buckingham County. Mary Jordan Winston's portrait is now in possession of Miss Ellen Blair, of Richmond. The other six sisters were Mrs. William Cabell, of Union Hill, in Nelson; Mrs. John Cabell, of Buckingham; Mrs. Hugh Rose, of Amherst; Mrs. Irvine, of Buckingham; Mrs. Hunter, of New York; and Mrs. John Wiatt, of Lynchburg.

Geddes Winston and Mary Jordan had two sons and five "lovely daughters". One of the sons died a bachelor, and the other, Dr. William Winston, married a Miss Shelton, of Han-

* See "Legislative Journals of the Council, Vol. I, pp. 459 and 479.

over. The daughters all lived in Richmond as the wives of eminent men of the town.

Mary Winston married the Rev. John D. Blair, who, with Rev. John Buchanan, constituted the famous pair, "The Two Parsons", of the early days of Richmond. Miss Louisa Blair's recent book on the Blairs of Richmond, is a complete account of that line.

Rebecca Winston married William Radford, a young man who had had a most interesting experience during the Revolution. He was captured in arms by General Tarleton, in his raid on Charlottesville, and sent as a prisoner to England, where he was confined in the Tower of London. After a long imprisonment, he succeeded in escaping across the English Channel to France. By the aid of funds which were furnished to him personally by LaFayette, he was enabled to return to Virginia. Mr. Radford was an especial friend of the two Parsons, and of William Munford, who married his daughter, and became the father of George Wythe Munford.

Sarah, or "Sallie" Winston, in 1790, married Mr. Thomas Rutherford, a Scotchman, who made a fortune in tobacco in Richmond. The marriage was celebrated at "Laurel Grove", the minister being Parson Blair. Mr. Rutherford (together with Mr. Radford) owned the Albion Mills. He left a most interesting autobiography, which has never been published, but it tells a lot about the Richmond people of that day.

Two of the sisters married men who were mayors of Richmond in the early part of the nineteenth century. Margaret, or "Peggy", was the wife of Dr. John Adams, for whom Adams Street was named, and Martha, or "Patsy" was Mrs. Henry S. Shore. The marriage of the latter took place in 1795, at the residence of Mr. Rutherford, in Richmond. Mr. Shore was Captain of the Richmond Blues.

Dr. Adams was one of the most progressive men Richmond has ever seen. "He secured an extremely efficient police, and became the terror of evil-doers in the mayor's court. He undertook the thorough grading of the streets, leveling hills, filling up valleys, and giving it the appearance of a live city.

He gave an impetus to its docks and wharves, and commenced those wonderful improvements in its buildings in all the eastern portion of the city, which have shown their effects from that day to this. He was the proprietor and builder of the Union Hotel, and many of the largest warehouses and manufactories, and inaugurated lines of stages to every part of the State." He lived on Church Hill and was the builder of the handsome house sold to the Van Lews and wrongly designated as the "Van Lew Mansion".*

Three of Mr. Winston's sons-in-law and Parson Buchanan were concerned in an incident that affected Richmond vitally; and the matter seems to have worked out the wrong way. William Radford had purchased from Parson John Buchanan and his brother, Alexander Buchanan, the square bounded by Grace and Franklin and First and Second, on one corner of which the Medical Arts Building now stands, for the sum of \$800. The row of buildings on this block facing Franklin Street constitute the well known "Linden Row".

Governor James Wood had been authorized by the Legislature to purchase land for the establishment of a penitentiary, so he entered into a contract with Mr. Radford to buy this square for that purpose. Now, while most of Richmond's elite were living on Main Street, below Ninth, Mr. Rutherford had built a suburban home at Adams Street, some distance beyond Mr. Radford's block. He discovered that if this deal were completed he would have to pass by a penitentiary every time he entered or left town. So he remonstrated, and Mr. Radford immediately acceded to his request. Modern problems that arise out of the presence of a State penitentiary were probably not known in Virginia at that time. The little "penitentiary", or colonial jail in Williamsburg, would hardly have suggested a very alarming situation, and Mr. Radford had certainly not intended a discourtesy to his brother-in-law.

The Governor consented to cancel the contract, provided another place were found for the purpose. Mr. Rutherford

* Pictures to be seen in "Historic Virginia Homes and Churches".

offered the land where the penitentiary now stands and the Governor accepted the arrangement. Then Mr. Rutherford purchased the square in question at the price the Governor had offered, and presented it to Parson Blair, another brother-in-law. The latter was to hold it in trust for his daughter and three sons, niece and nephews of Mrs. Rutherford. The lot contained two acres, and half an acre was allotted to each of the children.

Mr. Radford, in yielding gracefully in this situation, unconsciously wrought a great injury to the city of Richmond. As a result of the deal, the penitentiary, which might have been back among railroads and warehouses; and the cemeteries, which might have been out in the suburbs, now occupy Richmond's most beautiful riverfront territory. Property that is unexcelled for a residence section is dedicated forever to the prisoners and to the dead.

There is a puzzling story in connection with the tombstone of Geddes Winston. Out in the church yard of old St. John's, the oldest burying ground in Richmond, there are only three stones that antedate the close of the Revolution (see note). The next oldest, after these three, according to the inscribed date, recites that Geddes Winston died in 1784.

In contrast with this, Mr. Rutherford's autobiography states that after he had met Sallie Winston in 1787 and married her in 1790 (Parson Blair tying the knot), Mr. and Mrs. Winston came to live with him at his house in Richmond, and that Mr. Winston died there in 1794 or 1795.

The discrepancy is probably explained by an entry in the St. John's Vestry Book, June 2, 1896. Three gentlemen requested permission "to replace the present tombstone erected to their ancestor, Geddes Winston, who died June 9, 1784, which is about to fall to pieces from age." The date on the stone seems to have become illegible, and the mistake made in replacing it.

Mr. Winston had been a wealthy man, but "he was much involved in trouble by security-ships, etc., from which he was never able afterwards to extricate himself." He was more

or less dependent in his old age upon his son-in-law, Mr. Rutherford. The latter was born 1766. If the date on the Winston tombstone (1784) were correct, Mr. Rutherford would have met the daughter, courted her for several years, married her, and then supported the father-in-law for several years, all before he was 18 years of age. He tells us that he was a boy in Scotland in 1784.

Mrs. Winston died at the home of Dr. Adams about the time of the burning of the Richmond theatre in December, 1811. Mr. Rutherford says that it was only through her death that many of the family were prevented from being present at the theatre on that occasion, when so many were burned to death. By a merciful Providence, the family were "exempted from being participants in the melancholy tragedy."

NOTE

Of these three stones, two bear the dates 1751 and 1754. They are in memory of Rev. Robert Rose, of Albemarle Parish, and of Albert Rose, respectively. There is such a long time intervening between these two dates and the third date (1781) that one thinks the Rose tombstones must have been elsewhere originally. There probably were no stones at all placed in this cemetery before the Revolution.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Neill's "Virginia Carolorum".
- Munford's "The Two Parsons".
- Rutherford's Autobiography.
- Bulletin of Va. State Library, XIV, 2 and 3.
- Federal Census, 1790.
- Legislative Journal of Council, Vol. I.
- Vestry Book of St. Paul's Parish.
- Moore's "History of Henrico Parish".
- Alice M. Tyler in the *Times-Dispatch*, July 14, 1912.
- Family Records.
- Glover's "Blairs of Richmond".