The surname Harwood is a familiar one to local historians and genealogists for they number among the first colonists to settle on the Lower Virginia Peninsula. Sir Edward Harwood, a knight and Virginia Company stockholder came to the colony c. 1619. William Harwood arrived that same year and was captain of the ill-fated Martin’s Hundred settlement.

The patriarch of the Warwick County Harwoods was 22-year-old Thomas, gentleman, (brother of William), who immigrated in 1623. His family first lived at Jamestown, but soon moved to Mulberry Island. By 1632, he had acquired a patent to 140 acres on Skiffes Creek; he regularly added to his holdings. In 1643 Thomas constructed his homestead Queens Hith, a waterfront plantation that was situated within the present day Oakland Dairy Industrial Park. Throughout the colonial period, Thomas and his descendants continued to amass thousands of acres of land in Warwick and York Counties, a practice which assured them prominence in the political and economic life of the community as burgesses, magistrates, church officials, militia leaders and county officers.

Circa 1769, William Harwood (1734-1795), sixth generation in the colony, elected to build a new house on the main road to Yorktown. The structure, called Endview, experienced military episodes during the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, and remained in family hands for over 200 years. The Harwoods of Endview have been well documented because the house still stands and is operated by the City of Newport News as a living history museum.
Celebrate the History Makers

We take time out of our busy modern day lives to celebrate and commemorate the Old Free State of Warwick and in doing so effect the history of the future. Every time the members of Warwick County Historical Society meet, we perpetuate the memories and events that have shaped our area while creating new accounts that one day will be celebrated as well.

Members gathered at the Matthew Jones House on October 29, 2013 for a picnic hosted by Joint Base Langley-Eustis Cultural Resources Management, aka: Chris, Courtney and Patrick. It was a fine blue sky autumn afternoon on the lawn with friends, abundant food and a couple of Warwickian witches.

Under overcast skies with an intermittent drizzle a valiant group ventured to Ft. Crafford on Saturday, October 12, 2013 touring the site and discussing its 17th and 18th century roots. Nancy and Ole Rodland made the trek from Charlottesville to attend and later toured the Army Transportation Museum, which they found in Nancy’s words, “an eye popping experience.”

Chris McDaid and John Seburn confer as they walk along the new path at Ft. Crafford. John and Jo Ellen Seburn are new Society members along with Kevin Caulley and Susie Echols who also attended the outing.

Mary Kayaselcuk and Nancy Setty plant a live oak tree to pay tribute to the last acre of Warwick County at the October 16, 2013 season denouement.

August 21, 2013 WCHS rededicated the Women of the Southland monument at its new location in the 1884 Warwick Court-house. Membership Chair of UDC, Virginia Division, Fran Towberman, spoke eloquently about the sacrifices the Confederate women made in order to honor their fallen heroes.

Mark and Miriam Waggoner donated an 1891 lithograph of downtown Newport News to WCHS. The caption reads: “Newport News, Va., county seat of Warwick Co; population 8000.” Mark purchased the print from the Mariners’ Museum. As the Waggoner’s have no children, they wanted to leave the lithograph to posterity. Mark is a City of Warwick, VA. native and Miriam is from Niles, IL.

Finally we should honor ourselves by remembering to care for the monuments we erect and the prescient vision of those before us.

The 2013 season was a highly productive one for the Society; so let us join together in 2014, as a historical family, to once again delve into the history of the Old Free State of Warwick.

O public road, I say back I am not afraid to leave you, yet I love you, you express me better than I can express myself. ~ Walt Whitman

We welcome member participation; send your news, events and comments to pattigibbs@cox.net
In times of war, families are often displaced, none more so than those African-American families who lived on Mulberry Island in 1917. When the U.S. government acquired the island for Camp Eustis, residents, parents and grandparents had lived on Mulberry Island for many years after Emancipation and Reconstruction in the nineteenth century, following the Civil War.

The federal government re-located these families to the Newport District of Warwick County in an area in the southeastern end of the county. It was comprised of five tracts of land which began at thirty-sixth street in Newport News (the city limits) and extended to forty-fourth street in Warwick and included Orcutt, Roanoke and Chestnut Avenues.

The move proved to be a hardship for many. In Newport News, a Centennial History, Marian Ashe Williams relates her parent’s experiences at the Warwick County Reunion. Her father was drafted and sent to Camp Stuart; “Fortunately, my mother came to Newport News, where she lived in a two-room flat on sixteenth street. She made ends meet by taking care of the children of a white family on West Avenue.”

Mrs. Williams went on to say that; "When she learned of the impending government buyout of Mulberry Island, she advised her parents about some property for sale on the city’s outskirts which had been set aside for blacks.”

Deacon and Mrs. Williams Wooten were the first neighbors in 1917.

"Their example encouraged others to make the pilgrimage to establish new homes," says Williams.

As lots were sold, "Brooksville" came into being. The community was named for Walter Brooks as was the school built on the corner of Orcutt Avenue and forty-First Street for black children. ~

Marian Ashe Williams

(1) Newport News, a Centennial History, 1996, p. 94
(2) Ibid
(3) Ibid
(4) Ibid
he held until 1924. He and his family lived “on the Boulevard” at 1001 Chesapeake Avenue in a well-built brick house. His 1942 obituary wryly commented on his business economy, noting “virtually to the day of his death he drove an automobile he had purchased 21 years ago.”

Even more in the public spotlight was his brother Washington William, who began his career as a merchant on 28th Street, east of Washington Avenue. By 1896 he had associated with James M. Curtis (future city treasurer); under the name of Harwood & Curtis (see receipt below) they conducted a profitable wholesale grocery and feed business. An invoice dated 1900 depicted their two-story brick office and warehouse at 30th Street next to the C&O Railway. W.W. eventually acquired Mr. Curtis’s share of the holdings and continued as head of the firm until his 1918 retirement. In addition, he was variously a director and board chairman of the Citizens and Marine Bank, and a city councilman for several terms. Such was his esteem that at his 1942 funeral service, the list of active and honorary pallbearers (numbering 36) read like a Who’s Who of city luminaries.

W.W.’s wife, Montague Weisiger Harwood (1857-1943), hailed from Amelia County and was the daughter of Judge Thomas Weisiger. She amply contributed to the city’s educational, civic, religious and social life in her own right. From 1890-1894, she served as the principal of the 28th Street School, located between Warwick and Lafayette Avenues;
this was the city’s first white public school. In 1894, she established the Newport News Female Seminary in a substantial brick structure in the 200 block of 29th Street. It continued in existence until 1902. The academy included among its students older girls, many of whom came from outside of Virginia. Of significance is the fact that Mrs. Harwood built and owned the school. She, her husband and their only child Julia resided there for a number of years before constructing a home in North End. They attended Trinity Methodist Church, conveniently located across from the school. Julia Harwood served as the school’s librarian. For a decade, the family’s scope of operations was contained within the narrow four square mile area that comprised the city’s original limits. Even more precisely, it focused on the blocks of 29th and 30th Streets framed by the river and Lafayette Avenue.

However, W.W. and Montague’s business success afforded them the opportunity to build a commodious Colonial Revival/Queen Anne style residence in the countryside of Warwick. Even before the turn of the century, the new city’s well to do was relocating from cramped lodgings downtown beyond the outskirts of Newport News. North End was the city’s first suburb, connected by trolley service and paved roads to downtown. The neighborhood was a mix of impressive homes commanding a view of the James River and smaller houses on the side streets for middle class families. City mayor and Shipyard president Walter Post built a grand manse at 5600 Huntington; a subsequent Shipyard president Homer L. Ferguson resided with his family at 5700 in a solid brick dwelling.

As beffitted their economic and social status, the Harwoods also choose to live in style. Consequently, in 1900 Edmund sold his brother five Old Dominion Land Company lots at the corner of Huntington and 54th Street. There, W.W. and his wife erected an expensive three-story brick abode with a full basement. It featured a two-tier wraparound porch, widow’s walk, two smaller porches and a two-story carriage house. All was enclosed with wrought iron fencing and brick sidewalks. The interior included an oak paneled receiving foyer, two large parlors, formal dining room, ballroom, seven bedrooms each equipped with a marble sink, generous closets,
May Day Festival 1920...

It was a big day on the Warwick Courthouse grounds... the date: May 1, 1920. When it was May Day, all the folks, for miles around would gather at the old Courthouse. And, when this photograph was taken, Mrs. E. C. Madison, who taught the sixth and seventh grades at Morrison High School, was in charge of the annual festivities. The car at right center served as a float for the day’s parade, and the bus and cars next to the fence (extreme right) belonged to the Snidow family, which resided where the Stoneybrook Estates is now located. In the rear of the photo is Smith’s Hotel, now the residence of Mr. and Mrs. R. W. Morton. The Smith’s Store can be seen to the rear of the monument, which was dedicated in 1909.

IT WAS THE BEST HOTEL IN DENBIGH

DAILY PRESS - Newport News – Hampton, Va.,
Sunday, September 25, 1966 – by ED LABORWIT

In the years from 1888 to 1898, the hotel was home to schoolchildren, two of whom were Nancy Garrow’s kin – a brother, John Toomer Gar- row, who later became a lawyer and was Commonwealth’s Attorney of Hopewell, and a sister, Georgia Garrow, for many years the Warwick County Commissioner of Revenue.

The teacher at the school was Molly MacKenzie, a stern Petersburg woman, hired by Levin Smith and James T. Gar- row.

“Miss Molly MacKenzie was a strict teacher,” recalls Nancy Garrow. “Many a day I saw my brother come home with welts on his back, the result of his misbe- havior.”

Molly MacKenzie, the school teacher, too, was a part of the area’s history. She was deeply in love with Dr. Young, the bachelor owner of Denbigh Planta- tion, the old Mathew’s Manor property.

Nancy Garrow also remembers Wilbur Smith as a boy:

“Wilbur Smith was a rascal of a boy,” Nancy says. “He got everything he wanted and he was a good, hard-working business- man, just like his father."

“When he was a boy, he used to take goods from the store and sell them down at the (Oriana) station at half price, and he never gave his father a cent.”

Wilbur Smith, as a youngster, used to build coffins for the residents of the poorhouse, located a half-mile from the hotel. It was into one of these coffins that Wil- bur once placed Nancy Garrow “just to get the right measure.”

Continued Page 10

MULBERRY ISLAND NOTES
Identifiable in the photo (above) are: Aubrey Curtis, Jake Dozier, Elizabeth Garrow, Marion Freeman, Francis and Lucille Williamson, Julia Bergh, Virginia and Lillian Snidow, Virginia Underwood, Julia Sawyer, Helen Harwood, Jack Curtis, Fauntleroy Bentien Smith, Alec Harwood, Jr., Margaret and Douglas Patrick, Harrison Walker, Mr. Pride, the Morrison High School principal; Mrs. E. C. Madison, Miss Tupper, Miss Clarice Wine, Miss Hostetter and Miss M. Howell, who taught music and the fourth grade at Morrison.

This is the house that Levin Smith built. Known simply as “Smith’s Hotel,” its 16 rooms held lawyers, judges, juries and witnesses in the heyday of the Warwick Courthouse.

It was, without question, one of the finest hotels of the day.
18-year-old Christina Hutchen had replaced them.

As arbiters of culture within the community, the Harwoods used their elegant home for many functions. In addition to accommodating family and friends, Mrs. Harwood hosted the Methodist churchwomen, the Newport News Woman’s Club (of which she was the first president), the ladies of the Comte de Grasse chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, Daughters of Colonial Wars and the local public library board (of which she was a charter member).

Daughter Julia, no doubt, invited the various beaux who courted for her hand during the brief period she resided there. She was in her late teens when the family moved to North End. Julia wed a man ten years her senior, Capt. Lawrence Priddy of Blacksburg, Virginia. He was a veteran of World War I and broker with the New York Life Insurance Company. Her adult life was spent in Manhattan raising their children, Lawrence, Jr. and Montague. At some point, her marriage faltered for in 1925 she went to Reno, Nevada to obtain a divorce.

The Harwoods of Warwick County, Virginia

To manage such a large household required servants, including those who lived on the premises as well as those who came on an as needed basis.

Warwick County census records of 1910 listed 19-year-old Scottish lass Hannah McCrae (maid) and 25-year-old Laura Dickens (cook) as occupants. The 1920 census indicated 39-year-old William Figg and 18-year-old Christina Hutchen had replaced them.

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Handsomely carved fireplace surrounds, indoor plumbing, ornate steam radiators, combination gas/electric light fixtures and a Bell telephone. The value of the home in 1930 was $18,000.

5400 Huntington Avenue was noted as being one of the most elegant homes in the neighborhood. ~ Lelia Peebles

The Harwoods of Warwick County, Virginia

The house on Huntington remained a place of activity, including the venue for several funerals. Montague’s younger sister, Lelia Weisiger Ferguson, came from Richmond to Newport News for a visit in 1929. She stayed next door at the Gayle home (315 54th Street) where her son-in-law, daughter and grandchildren lived. Unfortunately, she contracted pneumonia and died there. Lelia was laid out in her coffin in the parlor of 5400 because it was a larger house and able to handle more guests. Likewise, W.W. Harwood’s rites were conducted in the parlors when he suddenly expired at home in 1932 at age 79. The service engaged two ministers, the pastors from Trinity Methodist Episcopal and First Presbyterian Churches. The Harwoods’ daughter Julia was en route to Europe when she was notified of his demise by telegram. She had to transfer from her sailing vessel in the Atlantic in order to return in time.

A New Branch on an Old Family Tree

The Harwoods of Warwick County, Virginia

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The Harwoods of Warwick County, Virginia

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Mrs. Harwood continued to reside in the big house after the loss of her husband. Between 1933-1943, the city directory noted she was the “wid [widow of] Washington W.” In her last years, she apparently had a respiratory condition such as tuberculosis because Julia brought her mother to New York to oversee her care. Montague passed away in 1943 at the Clifton Springs Sanitorium [sic]. She was 86. Her body was brought back to Newport News for interment next to W.W.

After the death of her mother, Julia returned to Newport News to settle the estate. Her intent was to sell her parents’ home. She accomplished this in a relatively easy manner. When the house went on the market, James W. and Maude L. Courtney, neighbors who lived across the street at 5401 Huntington, purchased it. Mr. Courtney was a coal merchant and businessman of good standing. The Courtneys had long wanted a brick house and could afford the upkeep of a large residence. Julia completed the sale on August 4, 1943, returned to New York and died just three years later in 1946 at age 63 of a cerebral hemorrhage. Her children and grandson who remained in the North have vanished into the pages of history.

The families of Edmund and Washington William occupy a section of Greenlawn Cemetery near the central core of pioneer citizens, adjoining the Elk’s Rest. The area is marked with posts and an upright stone inscribed “Harwood.” Each family member has an identical tablet noting his or her name and dates of birth and death. Aligned on the left side is Edmund, his wife Eugenia W., infant son Clarence H. and daughter Mrs. Richard L. Cave. Facing them is Washington William, Montague W. and their daughter Julia H. Priddy. Thus ends the saga of this short-lived branch of Harwoods, which began at one end of the county and neatly tied up at the other.

Mary Kayaselcuk

Postscript:
The author, Mary Kayaselcuk, a native of Newport News, 36-year city employee and local historian, is the present owner of 5400 Huntington. She invests her spare time and resources restoring the house to its former 1900 grandeur.
THIS, for the most part, is the story of Smith’s Hotel, the centerpiece of much of the history of Newport News, Warwick, and Denbigh.

The names that became associated with this area are familiar today, either as descendants or street names – Underwood, Curtis, Harwood, Snidow, Walker, Patrick, Garrow, Dozier, Williamson and, of course, Smith.

Indeed, “things haven’t been the same since...well, since Levin Smith died.” That was back in 1909. Yes Sir, this place always had something going on. People sure knew how to have fun in those days...they had fun just doing nothing but enjoying themselves.”

Those are the words of an elderly woman as she reminisces, as she recalls and as she remembers “those days.” The woman is Nancy Garrow, an energetic lady, who talks about the poker games, the good meals in the dining room and, in general, “those days”.

Nancy Garrow never discusses her age, which isn’t an unusual thing for a woman. But her memory is a tattle-tale. And, the fact that she graduated from State Teacher’s College in Farmville (now Longwood College) in 1910 doesn’t do a thing to hide her years.

ASIDE from anything else, Nancy Garrow is two things: she is the honorary Mayor of Denbigh, a title she inherited at this year’s Denbigh Day celebration; and she is something of the central point of this story of people, a general store, a dining room, a courthouse, and one of the “grandest” hotels ever built on Peninsula soil.
It was 83 years ago [131 years in 2014], in 1883, that the Warwick Courthouse was built. It was an imposing structure, its height topped by an “in-session” bell that still rings today.

In the same year, Levin Smith built his hotel. There were 16 rooms in the Smith Hotel, and all the rooms had fireplaces for heat. The was no inside plumbing and no electricity.

Says James T. Garrow’s daughter, Nancy, “All the lawyers and judges would get off at Oriana Station and they stayed for two weeks; they would have the grandest time. It seems they looked forward to the long spells in court, just because Mr. Smith’s hotel was the home for some of the biggest poker games around, and the food in the hotel dining room was the best.”

At this point in the story of Mr. Smith’s hotel comes George S. DeShazor, Jr. the current Clerk of Courts in Newport News.

From January 24, 1924 to the consolidation of Newport News and Warwick on July 1, 1958, DeShazor worked in the Warwick Courthouse, surrounded by the saga of the Smiths and Garrows.

“The old hotel really didn’t have a name,” says DeShazor. “It was known for miles around as Smith’s Hotel or Capt. Smith’s Hotel.”

DESHAZOR recalls, “Travelling was pretty difficult in those days, and when court was held once every two months, it lasted for two weeks. The hotel housed the judge, the juries, the witnesses, and the lawyers, and it was a case of doubling up in the 16 rooms.”

“And, it was a nice place to stay. The food was the best available and it was like one big party. When court was in session, the people came to trade horses, stories and anything else. They had horse races, too. It was a general gathering place.”

Adjacent to the hotel was the general store owned by “Smith and Hudgins,” and this place was also one of the “gathering places” of the day.

But the focal points were the hotel and the courthouse, at least until May 29, 1909 when Levin Smith died. The date was two days after the Confederate Monument was dedicated. The hotel was soon closed as a hotel, and an era ended right there.

Today, the old hotel is home to Mr. and Mrs. R. W. Morton and their children. Mrs. (Cary) Morton is Levin Smith’s granddaughter, and it was her father, Wilbur Smith, who operated the general store.

Wilbur Smith, coincidentally, also died on May 29, 1946 while Cary was a freshman at the Boston Conservatory of Music. (Mrs. Morton in addition to being a past president of the Newport News Democratic Women’s Club, is a busy piano teacher.)

THE STORE was destroyed by fire in the mid-1950’s, leaving a gap between the hotel and the home of Cary’s brother Henry Curtis Smith. This house, still looking much the same way it did in the days of Smith’s Hotel, was built in 1734 and is believed to be the oldest standing house in Newport News.

James T. Garrow in front of his Denbigh store

And too, in that year of 1883, James T. Garrow opened his store on the front of his house.

IT IS presumed, and it is a fairly accurate presumption, that Messrs. Smith and Garrow were shrewd businessmen, eyeing the new Courthouse as a place that would bring many, many customers to their respective enterprises.

And they were so right.
History Buffs Wanted!
Yes, you!

WCHS is looking for a few good men and women with an interest in local history, genealogy, or archaeology to seize the day! No degrees needed, only enthusiasm.

Members...
Attend monthly Luncheon Meetings
Mulberry Island Notes Newsletter
Explore Mulberry Island w/group
Educational & Local Research
Visit Historic Fort Crafford
Visit Matthew Jones House
Historical Presentations
Research Library
Guest Speakers
Pot-Luck
and more...

Contact us by E-mail...

wchs-online@hotmail.com

Meetings are held from Feb-Oct
every 3rd Wednesday at 11:30 am
in the 1884 Warwick courthouse

To Join—Send a check for $30 per member to: (household spouse included)

Warwick County Historical Society (WCHS)
1810 Warwick Courthouse
14421 Old Courthouse Way
Newport News, VA 23608

- along with the following info:

NAME: ___________________________
ADDRESS:_________________________
__________________________________
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E-MAIL:___________________________
__________________________________
INTEREST:________________________

THE WARWICK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY was formed in November 2010 to broaden the scope of interest to all of old Warwick County, Virginia" "The Fort Eustis Historical and Archaeological Association was established in 1965 to uncover, preserve and protect the history, locations, artifacts, and family histories of Mulberry Island"

Mulberry Island Notes is a publication of the Warwick County Historical Society (WCHS) @2014

IT WAS THE BEST HOTEL IN DENBIGH
DAILY PRESS - Newport News – Hampton, Va.,
Sunday, September 25, 1966 – by ED LABORWIT

... There hasn’t been much change in the area since Levin Smith built his hotel in 1883. The store is gone, of course. The courthouse is now the Denbigh Community Center, and is ringed by a stone wall, which replaced an iron picket fence. In the early 1930s, Wilbur Smith built a stone wall around the hotel, and this wall replaced a wooden picket fence.

But, while the hotel register has been replaced by the address 14420 Warwick Blvd., history still seeps from its walls – letters dating from 1862 and bills of lading from Smith and Hudgins, dated from 1879 to 1882. ~

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

POSTSCRIPT — History no longer seeps from the walls of the Smith Hotel. Wilbur Smith’s deteriorating brick fence still partially stands to mark the outline of the forgotten and overgrown lot on Old Courthouse Way and an era in Denbigh.

The Smith Hotel’s demise was reported by the Daily Press in a short article dated November 15, 1985; the significance of the loss to local history is still being absorbed and mourned nearly 30-years hence.

To Mr. Smith’s Hotel - May its time come again!