

The Historian

Bulletin of the
Richmond County Museum



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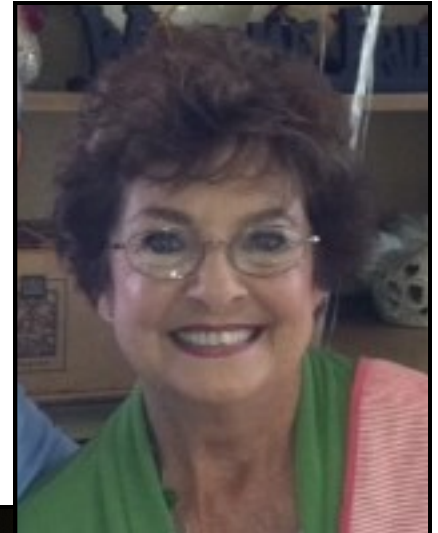
Sir Jonathan Beckwith Silver Dog Collar, A Rare Survivor From 18th Century Richmond County, Given to Museum

The generosity of Mrs. Sallie Baylor Grow of Mobile Alabama has made possible the return to the county of a unique artifact that vividly evokes the lifestyle of the colonial Virginia gentry. Mrs. Grow was born in Charles Town, West Virginia and is a descendant of Sir Jonathan Beckwith of Belvoir, Richmond County. She inherited from an aunt the silver plated brass dog collar with lock and inscription “Jonathan Beckwith.” Family tradition suggests there once were several more of these silver collars, possibly for a pack of esteemed fox-hunting hounds.

The rarity of this artifact was confirmed by curators at Colonial Williamsburg whose collection contains no collars with a Virginia provenance or of comparable quality. We were very excited and soon decided the silver collar deserved a courier. Friends of the museum, Jay and Anne Garner offered to travel by car to Mobile to retrieve this one of a kind artifact that will soon be on display at the museum. The collar will be in a secure, custom-made, wall-mounted case featuring a text panel about the Beckwiths. The museum is grateful to Preservation Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula for the award of a generous grant to procure the special case.

The Beckwith Family

The first member of this family in Richmond County was Sir Marmaduke Beckwith, Baronet (1687-1780) born in Yorkshire, England. He settled in Richmond County around 1700 at age 13 and became the county Clerk of the Court with the longest tenure, seventy-one years (1709-1780). An enthusiastic turfman, he imported horses to improve the Virginia strain. Sir Marmaduke’s plantation Belvoir was located near Farmers Fork in the northern end of the county. The house has disappeared. Here was born his son Jonathan who inherited the title. A signer of the Leedstown Resolves, he served in the Revolutionary War and as sheriff of the county



Above, the collar and at top, Mrs. Sallie Grow

from 1754 to 1756.

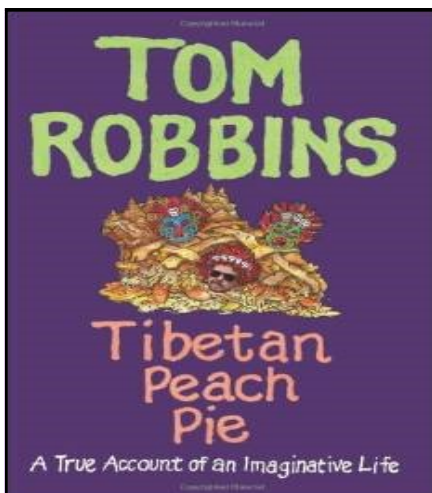
Jonathan’s son, Sir Jennings Beckwith, was called the “Leather Stockings” of the Northern Neck. Infected with wanderlust, he spent much of his later life in the Far West on hunting expeditions with the Indians and living among sportsmen who “would fish with him in summer and fox hunt in winter... he lived poor but respectable and (was) esteemed by many friends”.* He died in 1835, at age 72 in Richmond County, at Mount Airy, home of the Tayloe family. **Richmond Enquirer*

Celebrated Author Tom Robbins Recalls Growing up in Warsaw in the 1940s

New York Times Best Selling author Robbins produced his first published writing in Warsaw as a teenage sports writer for the *Northern Neck News*. Now in *Tibetan Peach Pie, A True Account of an Imaginative Life*, his latest of eleven books that have been described as warm, wise and wonderfully weird, he looks back on some vivid events of an unconventional life. Robbins studied journalism at VCU and worked for the *Richmond Times Dispatch* before moving to Seattle. Participating in the West Coast psychedelic revolution of the sixties helped inspire his novels. He lives in La Conner, Washington.

Robbins was born in Blowing Rock, North Carolina in 1932. When his father became an engineer with VEPCO, the family moved to Virginia. Robbins describes brief stays in Urbanna and Kilmarnock. A painful memory of Urbanna still lingers: he was ridiculed by locals for his “hillbilly” accent. Sent to the store to buy a pound of sliced ham, he requested “slyced hame” pronouncing ham as if it rhymed with “came.” Despite much time and effort devoted to altering his manner of speech, Robbins insists that even today his voice is “...that of a can of cheap dog food— if a can of cheap dog food could speak.”

Although he had two grandfathers who were Baptist preachers, the adolescent Robbins made vigorous attempts to hide from the Warsaw Baptist Church pastor, Dr. Peters, whom he found “more creepy than refrigerated possum slobber.”



More to young Tommy Robbins’s liking was the African American preacher, “Reverend Ever Ready” whom he encountered at the Warsaw Texaco station. Into his panel truck that displayed his name and ominous Bible verses in fiery red letters, the pastor herded his seven noisy children with “All aboard! If you can’t get a board get a plank. If you cant get a plank get your --- in the truck!”



On a hot Richmond County August Sunday, Robbins was duly baptized by emersion in the Rappahannock, but in a strange twist of fate, his heart was not opened nor did he feel truly saved until traveling to nearby Callao with his parents to see the emotionally charged performance of the eight-year-old Natalie Wood in the movie, *Tomorrow is Forever*. He actually cried on the way home, “my scruffy whippersnapper heart opened like a sardine can...”

Among Robbins’s Warsaw memories is picking tomatoes (Here he developed a life long love for tomato sandwiches.) with Lancelot “Gumboot” Delano, in low-lying fields hot enough to “melt the humps off a camel.” Relief came when Lancelot’s prayer for a “cooling off shower” miraculously was answered. After one of his smart alecky remarks, Robbins remembers being soundly slapped in class by history teacher, 24 year-old, blond “Choogie” Snowden, who kept him after school, escorted him to the door and dismissed him with an inexplicable kiss.

When a Halloween prank went terribly wrong, Robbins and buddies, Lester Scott and Bernard Packett hurled walnuts, shattering windows at the Warsaw home of Cap’n Andrew Garland and his sister Miss Claude, who taught office skills to girls at Warsaw High. Robbins confesses: “Now, an octogenarian writer looking back on his life, I find my list of regrets a short one... Near the top of the list ... is the part I played in the breaking of Miss Claude’s windows. If there is an afterlife, a dimension resembling Judeo-Christian fantasies of heaven, I take some solace that the good Miss Claude is busy there, occupied with helping God update his office skills in case He should finally get around to correcting all those obvious mistakes in the Bible.” * See *Note* on page 3.

Belle Ville Revisited

Many thanks to those who attended our fourth "Historic House Party," this year at Belle Ville in Warsaw on September 13th. Special thanks to all the museum members who helped with the event and to homeowners Pam, Pete and Josh Sullivan for all their hard work readying the house and grounds for the tour. We were happy to see so many members of the Lamb family and others who had connections with the family home and the finishing school, Warsaw Female Institute.

A special visitor to the museum and Belle Ville later in the month was Carole Cox Johnson of Baltimore who has roots in Richmond County and



Richmond County Museum Board member Roger Hale portrayed a soldier of the 40th Virginia Infantry Regiment and Jay Garner spoke about the regiment and its commander, Col. John Mercer Brockenbrough. Harpist Susan Anthony-Tolbert provided music.



Carole Cox Johnson of Baltimore stands beside the grave of her great-great aunt, Ella Cox at Belle Ville.

Photo courtesy of Becky Marks

used to spend summer vacations here as a youngster. Mrs. Johnson's ancestor, Ella Cox, (1850-1927) called "Mammy" by the Brockenbrough-Lamb Family, was born into slavery on the Fauntleroy plantation at Naylor's, became a cherished domestic worker at Belle Ville for many years and is buried in the garden there .

David Jett

Note: Richmond County Museum has the survey equipment that belonged to Andrew Garland. Thanks to museum member Rusty Brown for alerting us to Tom Robbins's Warsaw years and his book, *Tibetan Peach Pie*.

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The Mission of the Richmond County Museum is to Preserve, Protect, and Interpret the Artifacts and Heritage of the County through its Exhibits, Programs, and Research.

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David Jett

Lighting Our
Tree of Love
Has become
a Tradition.
Please Join Us.



Sunday, December 7th at 5 p. m.

In the Historic 1748 Courthouse
Reading of names in memory and honor of loved ones,
special choral music, refreshments. Get in the Spirit!

about the gift and