

A Study of the Historical Papers, No. 1, No. 2, and No. 3 and Their Inaccuracies concerning
'The Ancient Dominion'

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In 1972, the Liberty Hall project began so that more information could be learned about the Augusta Academy's heritage and culture through a formalized archeological excavation. For at least a century, the written record seemed accurate enough, because it was supplemented by a fine oral tradition maintained at the University. Not surprisingly, quite an oral tradition was developed around the early history of Washington and Lee - a history that is partly based on inaccuracies, contradictions, and falsehoods.

This incorrect oral history is manifested in the early histories of the University therefore perpetrating the already partially distorted accounts of the inhabitants of Liberty Hall. It is evident that this attitude holding an oral heritage responsible as valid history has been carried up to the late 1960's and is reflected in General Lee's College which states: The continuity from the Latin School to the University cannot therefore be demonstrated by the official record. But it is evidenced in letters and other writings of the early 19th Century, by men who learned the story from older residents who were more familiar with local traditions. Such traditions are often well-preserved through oral transmission.¹

It is my belief that the oral tradition behind Liberty Hall

has created those historical inaccuracies that are evidenced in The Historical Papers, No. 1, No. 2, and No. 3. These histories portray the Scotch-Irish of the Shenandoah as the bravest of frontiersmen and the most sober, firm and consistent of Calvinist.² Rev. Henry Ruffner in the Historical Papers No. 1 observes that in this primitive society, there were few, if any, of the seed of the Cavaliers.³ The Scotch-Irish are described as if they were God's chosen few and, as the Hon. Hugh Blair Grigsby describes in the Volume No. 2 of the Historical Papers, as who during the succession of more than two centuries have held a sword in one hand, the Bible in the other.⁴ Grigsby in his Address To The Founders of Washington College portrays the Scotch-Irish as band of rugged pioneers who, against almost insurmountable odds, managed to settled in the savage wilderness. He stated that, "fearlessly they plunged into the depths of the forest, settled farms, built forts and school houses and churches, and presented a formidable barrier to the progress of the Indian invader".⁵ The Scotch-Irish were believed to be isolated on this frontier primarily because of descriptions of these types in the written record. Ruffner reports that they showed less desposition than the English Colonist to engage in traffic and speculative enterprise.⁶ This idea is carried in Col. Bolivar Christian's Alumni Address in 1859 in which he describes the Shenandoah: "The mountain boundaries of this isolated land stood as obstacles alike to visitors from abroad and wanderers

from their own fold".⁷ Christian's history abounds with incredible descriptions of the isolated Scotch-Irish. For example, he states, that like faithful Abraham, they built the altar wherever they pitched a tent.⁸

It is absurd to believe that these descriptions taken from each volume of the Historical Records are factual accounts of the Scotch-Irish. The stories of the settlers have been mythologized and the deeds of the people have been given larger than life proportions. It must be noted that this is typical of any oral tradition. Nevertheless, I have found that the settlers weren't as pious as they've been described. In Stauntown, for example, there were numerous vices within a day's travel. These included the store, the ordinary (a tavern) and the mill. Even Rockbridge County had a few taverns that were usually styled houses for private entertainment.⁹ In fact, in Rockbridge County instances of assault and battery were rather numerous.¹⁰ It is reported by Robert D. Mitchell that in the Shenandoah drinking habits seem to have been more excessive than in Pennsylvania or Connecticut.¹¹ And in a similar manner, on his return from Stauntown in 1751, the Reverend Robert Rose remarked that in the absence of Claret he had consumed more whiskey than ever before in his life.¹²

In light of these apparent contradictions one may ask, "who really were the Scotch-Irish"? and what were their living conditions like and just how culturally isolated were they?

The Scotch-Irish of the upper valley were probably the most religious of all the groups settled in the Shenandoah. But by the same token, they were probably the easiest group to be altered by religious change. The Scotch-Irish were isolated in the sense that their ties with the Presbyterian Church were hampered by the physical distances. The distance between the upper valley and Princeton was great, but not entirely prohibitive. Nevertheless, the Shenandoah suffered a sparceness of college - educated clergy which could reinforce the slipping values.

As far as the Scotch-Irish's cultural and economic isolation is concerned, it appears that they were less self-sufficient and more dependent than previously supposed. Robert D. Mitchell reinforces this by reporting that the inhabitants of the Shenandoah, while primarily subsistent during the first decade of settlement, were far from self-sufficient. Indeed, the most prominent characteristic of their early trading patterns was the evident desire to establish outside contacts.¹³ There was a fairly large packhorse trade which enabled goods to be distributed across the upper and lower valley. These local traders were often the middlemen between the eastern merchants and the valley residents. As the end of the 18th Century approached, the wagon trade increased so that heavier commodities such as iron, lead, and ^{SALT}~~slat~~ could now be available. The road conditions until around 1760 were very poor south of Lexington

due to a lack of settlement. As a result, most of the roads went north through the more gentler landscape, and then eastward towards Fredericksburg and Richmond. Augusta County's partial identity with isolation probably results from the lack of the major roads that would link the future Rockbridge County to Fredericksburg. No doubt this comparative deficiency of trade accounts for the more simpler and rustic mode of life-style. The typical dwelling houses were those made of logs with large stone chimneys - the remnants of which some still stand in the more rural areas of the county. Nevertheless, the Scotch-Irish of the valley by sheer numbers weren't the isolated homesteaders as they were described in the early histories. In 1790, there were 74,767 men, women, children, and slaves in the valley. In Augusta and Rockbridge, there were 17,414 inhabitants alone, making the concept the solitary homesteader a deceptive notion.¹⁴

The whole concept of the Scotch-Irish as a pioneer breed has therefore been reevaluated in light of this information and it is evident that the settlers have been mythological into being something they were not. More importantly, this pioneer image of the Scotch-Irish of Shenandoah has been reflected on the Community at Timber Ridge and is personified in its founding members.

The most obvious example of this is the depiction of William Graham who has become somewhat of a legend at Washington

This graph reprinted from Robert D. Mitchell's Commercialism and Frontier-Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley (see footnote # 14).

Table 9. Population of the Shenandoah Valley, 1790 and 1800

	White males		White females		Others: nontaxable		Slaves		Totals		% of change, 1790- 1800	Mean annual % of in- crease/de- crease ¹
	1790	1800	1790	1800	1790	1800	1790	1800	1790	1800		
Berkeley	8,800	7,667	7,850	7,071	131	156	2,932	3,679	19,713	18,573	- 6.1	-0.6
Frederick	8,005	8,172	7,310	7,665	116	420	4,250	5,118	19,681	12,375	+ 8.6	+0.8
Shenandoah	5,188	6,027	4,791	5,698	19	84	512	738	10,510	12,547	+19.4	+1.8
Rockingham	3,468	4,759	3,209	4,507	-	56	772	1,052	7,449	10,374	+39.2	+3.4
Augusta	4,836	5,012	4,424	4,658	59	95	1,567	1,946	10,886	11,711	+ 7.6	+0.7
Rockbridge	3,049	3,822	2,756	3,956	41	97	682	1,070	6,528	8,945	+37.0	+3.2
Total	33,346	35,459	30,340	33,555	366	908	10,715	13,603	74,767	83,525	+11.7	+1.1

Sources: First and Second Census of the United States, 1790 and 1800.

¹Calculated on a logarithmic scale.

and Lee. Grigsby in his Address (Historical Papers No. 2), related him to an ancient Scotch who had broken through the Wall of Agricola, built by the Romans to stave off attacks from the Northern Britons.¹⁵ According to Christian (Historical Papers No. 3), it was not improbable that the blood of that fiery moss-trooper flowed in the blood of the Founder.¹⁵

Graham's obscure past is loaded with tales of courage, strength, and defense from Indian attacks. Probably, the largest miscalculation of them all is Ruffner's (Historical Papers No. 1) description of Graham as the most enthusiastic patriot in all the country.¹⁷ Graham, whose enthusiasm for education is unquestionable, can hardly be considered in a league with the other colonial statemen of the time. His war effort consisted of arousing a military to fight Col. Tarleton at Rockfish Gap, a battle which never took place due to Tarleton's retreat. However, when informed that the campaign would be a lengthy one, Graham returned home to study war no more.¹⁸

On the other hand, the Liberty Hall boys were a definite asset in the defeat of Cornwallis' armies in the Battle of Guilford Courthouse.

Another interesting element of Graham's past in his opposition to the Constitution as "every species of tyranny and despotism".¹⁹ In fact, his resistance to the Constitution was fanatical. He tried to politically hinder the Constitution by running as a delegate against ratification.

As mentioned in the Historical Papers, Graham was a chief proponent of the projected state of Franklin (later changed to Frankland) to be formed from the counties of North Carolina and Virginia. Basically, the state failed because of the indecision and conflicts between its supporters. It has been said that William Graham was seldom content to be a subordinate and was confident he had the ability and knowledge to lead others.²⁰ His bitter and satiric style alienated his cohorts (namely, the Rev. Hezekiah Balch) into disapproving his ideas for the state of Frankland. In an effort to smooth this incident over, the Rev. Ruffner describes Graham's impractical and highly idealistic notions on government as now being demonstrated to^{the} world as visionary.²¹ In any case, his political stand placed him in bad favor with both laymen and the clergy.

It is interesting to note that after every account of Graham's troublesome years, there is always a mention of, and reinforcement of his achievements at Liberty Hall. If one is familiar with the history at all, this is a needless point to make since his primary efforts obviously outweigh his later failure. Still, it would be inaccurate as the Historical Papers do to de-emphasize a certain phase of his life, in favor of concentrating on his success which has made him into an indefective legend.

Finally, there is also one other misleading subject that

can be analyzed as a separate entry in itself. This relates to the presence of Indians in the valley from the mid to late 18th Century which is given an ordinate amount of significance in the Historical Papers. In the early chapters there are several references of savage Indian attacks. Grigsby even alludes to William Graham as he springs into action to avoid an attack: "With musket loaded, young William headed the rally, and conducted the family safely to the fort."²²

There are many false notions that are circulated throughout the valley about Indian troubles in Augusta County. This results from the sheer size of the county and the surviving reports of Indian troubles, vaguely described as "being on the frontiers of an Augusta", ^{that} ~~that~~ led many writers into the false belief that the upper Shenandoah was as prone to Indian attacks as the rest of the huge county.²³ In almost every pre-20th Century history of the county, there are mentions of acts of savagery and Indian attacks, but these reports are usually weak in their documentation.

The primal incident of the valley and a prime example of how an event can be rendered differently in every history was the raid at Kerr's Creek. As a matter of fact, a fairly great legend has evolved around the Whiteman's ^{bravery} against the Shawnee savagery. The accounts of the Indian occupation at this time suggest that the valley was heavily inhabited by the Shawneese. "The whole frontier was thus thrown open to the ravages of Indians."²⁴

In reality, the Indian occupation was marked by transiency. They had no real concepts of land boundaries, hence, they moved wherever the game was.

Of the first three histories, only Christian's Address mentions the bloody massacre at Kerr's (pronounced Carr's) Creek. There are numerous reports of the incident and all of them are a shade different. The death toll is reported from between either 15 or 60 missing or dead from the two raides that occurred somewhere between 1763 and 1764.

Chrishan's Address describes the wars in the following manner: They were fought only in the direst necessity for fighting, amidst nothing but its horrors, against savage foes, a fierce unrelenting struggle for very life and death, with no hope for relief or respite in the bitter strife ...²⁵

It is descriptions like this one which help propogate the myth of the Shawnee activities. And as a result, they are historically depicted as ruthless killers. For example: "The Shawanese were the most bloody and terrible, holding all other men, as well Indians as whites in contempt as warriors, in comparison with themselves."²⁶

On the contrary, it is widely known that the Shawnee were generally receptive to Europeans until their encroachment reached their limits of toleration^{that} could stand no longer.

IN CONCLUSION

The Historical Papers, Nos. 1, 2, 3, although very informative in the general sense, are inaccurate in^{the} light of the more thorough and recent studies done on the Scotch-Irish of Augusta County and the Shenandoah Valley. However, when one considers when they were written and why they were written, it is easier to accept these versions as efforts trying to establish an honorable identity to base the heritage of Washington College. Reverend Ruffner, the past President of the College, obviously didn't intend his paper to focus on the unpleasant aspects at Liberty Hall, but to reinforce the honored legacy of the College. The same holds true for both Grigsby's and Christian's Alumni Address.

Nevertheless, these papers contain errors that mislead the reader in his understanding of the Scotch-Irish of the region.

It has been the purpose of this paper to reveal the laxity that causes the inexactness of the records of the lives and times of the Scotch-Irish. This was done by cross-checking the earlier sources with the modern and concise forms that are not only more reliable, but approach the subject in an unprejudiced manner.

In a more complete manner, this is achieved by the Liberty Hall Project which examines the history in light of the artifacts found at the various sites. Each artifact is significant in the sense that it can be used to either

verify or disclaim the various theories on the site excavated. For example, the hypothesis of the Scotch-Irish's isolation was refuted simply by the numbers of Chinese export porcelain which not only suggest a trading network, but suggest an emphasis by the Scotch-Irish on luxurious items usually not a characteristic of the "pioneer".

The concept of Indian occupation is equally refuted by the lack of projected points at Liberty Hall. At Kerr's Creek, on the other hand, many artifacts were found, thus confirming the raid.

Consequently, in order to have a complete understanding of the Scotch-Irish, one must examine the history being careful to extract the valuable information and then test the history academically and physically (through excavation) to reach the truth.

To me, this is the purpose of the Liberty Hall Project. It is an effective mechanism of inspired research in the field, in the lab, and with the history, for understanding the culture of the inhabitants of Liberty Hall.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ O. Crenshaw, General Lee's College (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 4.
- ² Rev. Henry Ruffner. "Early History of Washington College", Washington & Lee University Historical Papers (Baltimore, John Murhpy and Co., 1890), No. 1, p. 8.
- ³ Ibid., p. 11
- ⁴ Hon. Hugh B. Grigsby, "The Founders of Washington College", Washington & Lee University Historical Papers (Baltimore, John Murphy and Co., 1890), No. 2, p. 11.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 8.
- ⁶ Ruffner, p. 7.
- ⁷ Col. Bolivar Christian, "The Scotch-Irish Settlers In The Valley of Virginia: Alumni Address at Washington College", Washington & Lee Unviversity Historical Papers (Baltimore, John Murphy and Co., 1840), No. 3, p. 8.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 9.
- ⁹ O.F. Morton, A History of Rockbridge County Virginia (Staunton, The McClure Co., 1920), p. 40.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 41.
- ¹¹ Robert D. Mitchell, Commercialism and Frontier, Perspectives On The Early Shenandoah Valley (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1977), p. 143.

FOOTNOTES (Continued)

¹²Ibid., p. 143.

¹³Ibid., p. 152.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 99

¹⁵Grigsby, p. 4

¹⁶Christian, p. 15

¹⁷Ruffner, p. 24.

¹⁸Crenshaw, p. 13.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 15

²⁰R.G. Gillespie, Jr., "Reverend William Graham, Presbyterian Minister and Rector of Liberty Hall Academy" (Master's Thesis, University of Richmond, 1970), p. 41.

²¹Ruffner, p. 63.

²²Grigsby, p. 15.

²³Mitchell, p. 39.

²⁴J. Lewis Peyton, Annals of Augusta County (Staunton, Samuel M. Yost & Son, 1882) p. 6.

²⁵Chrishan, p. 25.

²⁶Peyton, p. 5.

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