The Historian

Norfolk County Historical Society of Chesapeake, Virginia

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Dear NCHSC Members and Friends,

The summer is almost over, and the hot weather will soon be gone. As I said in my last newsletter, *our year is not over.* Norfolk County Historical Society is preparing for a fabulous anniversary celebration on December 9, 2025—the 250th anniversary of the Battle of Great Bridge. Our City of Chesapeake is planning a weekend of festivities, and we are excited to be part of this historic occasion. Two hundred fifty years is quite an achievement!

As I often tell our friends, it all happened right here in Chesapeake, Virginia, in a small, sleepy village called Great Bridge. Here, a band of farmers stood up against the mighty British army and won a small battle—often called a "skirmish"—that changed the course of the Revolutionary War. This fight on a wooden bridge drove the British and the Royal Governor, Lord Dunmore, out of Virginia. From that day forward, Virginia was in the hands of its patriots.

To mark this year's celebration, our society will bring out some of our rare King George III documents from our archives, illustrating the days when we were still a British colony. We will also present a chronological display of images from the battle. And our friend—and movie star—James Dean (cut-out) will be on hand, dressed as a patriot, to welcome visitors to the Wallace Memorial History Room.

Kay Ziegler and I have already created three beautiful posters that we are distributing to local businesses in Great Bridge. We hope they will display these posters in their windows for the 250th anniversary. We are working hard to spread the word to the entire community.

Continued next page.

Calendar of Events

September 2025
Closed
31 Aug -- 1 Sep
13 Sep

NCHSC Board Meeting via ZOOM
9 Sep 7:00pm

NCHSC Membership Meeting
21 Sep 2:00pm

October 2025
Closed
13 Oct

November 2025
Closed
4, 11 Nov
26 -- 30 Nov

NCHSC Board Meeting via ZOOM
11 Nov 7:00pm

NCHSC Membership Meeting
16 Nov 2:00pm

December 2025
Battle of Great Bridge Reenactment
6 Dec 10am to 4pm
7 Dec 10am to 2pm

Closed
24 – 31



Photo by Bob Ruegsegger, Freelance Journalist and Photographer

President's Message, *Continued*

We hope you will stop by and show your support for this year's 250th anniversary of the Battle of Great Bridge by taking home a commemorative poster. Donations are greatly appreciated! Hang a poster in your window to show your patriotic pride, and be sure to tell your friends and neighbors about the events planned for this milestone celebration.

As always, before I close my report, I want to thank all our members and supporters for your loyalty. We are grateful to have you as part of our NCHSC family—you are the greatest!

Robert B. Hitchings
President, Norfolk County Historical Society

Preserving Chesapeake's Past: Jim Bradshaw's Lifelong Dedication to Local History

Please join us at the Chesapeake Central Library on September 21st at 2:00 pm as we welcome guest speaker Jim Bradshaw. Mr. Bradshaw will present a program and slide presentation on the pictorial history of Great Bridge.



Jim Bradshaw, Photo from the *Virginian-Pilot*

Jim grew up in Norfolk County, which became the City of Chesapeake in 1963. From the 1950s through the 1980s, he collected newspaper clippings, photos, slides, and memorabilia of the city and Great Bridge. Over 15 years ago, he donated 16 Chesapeake scrapbooks to the historical society, along with many historic Virginia maps. He also published two books featuring images of Great Bridge and Greenbriar Mall from 1963–1981.

In 1964, at age 12, Jim's interest in local history caught the attention of Mr. Welton of Smith and Welton's, who invited him to cut the ribbon at the new store in the Great Bridge Shopping Center. The next year, he began as a summer intern in the Chesapeake Planning Department, returning for nine summers before working there full-time for nine more years. During that time, he rescued numerous maps and reports from disposal, including the first hand-drawn map of Chesapeake by Jim Kirby—now part of the historical society's collection.

In 1988 Jim became Economic Development Director for western Hampton Roads, and then served in several agencies for over 27 years before retiring in 2015. He now lives in Brunswick County, NC, with his wife, Joan.

Please note this meeting will take place in the meeting room at the back left of the first floor of the Central Library as the large meeting room will be temporarily closed. We look forward to seeing you at our September meeting. Light refreshments will be served. Don't forget to bring a friend!

Recognizing the Work of Our Wallace Room Volunteers

By Kay Ziegler,
NCHSC Treasurer and Wallace Room Manager

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all our wonderful volunteers who give their time and talents in the Wallace History Room. Their dedication has been remarkable.

They have been diligently inventorying our collections—a challenging task in itself—transcribing documents from the Revolutionary War era and earlier in preparation for the Virginia & Chesapeake 250th Anniversary, digitizing our history and photo files, and organizing countless boxes of documents.

Their efforts are preserving our history for generations to come. I am deeply grateful for each and every one of them.

Charlton Family Cemetery at NSA Northwest Annex

By Susan Ward Fleming,
Former NCHSC Board Member

On April 4th, Kay Ziegler and I met with Mr. Miller at the NSA Northwest Annex on Ballahack Road to search for the third known cemetery located on the base. We successfully located the **Charlton Family Cemetery**, which is enclosed by fencing. The only marked grave is that of **Elizabeth Charlton (1858–1909)**. According to an obituary published in the *Ledger Star* on March 6, 1909, Elizabeth was the wife of **Wilson W. Charlton** and passed away at her home in Northwest.

Although his grave is unmarked, Wilson W. Charlton is also buried in the cemetery. His obituary, printed in the *Ledger Star* on October 2, 1920, states that he was buried in the "family burying ground at Northwest." Wilson was born on October 14, 1847, and died on September 30, 1920. He married **Elizabeth Wilkins** on April 18, 1881, in Norfolk, Virginia.



Elizabeth Charlton Gravestone

Their first son, **Luther Devane Charlton** (b. July 26, 1883 – d. December 20, 1944), is confirmed to be buried in the family cemetery based on his death certificate. He died unmarried of cancer of the larynx.

Charlton Family Cemetery at NSA Northwest Annex, *Continued*

Their second son, **Harry Fauntleroy Charlton** (b. 1890 – d. January 21, 1931), was also buried in the family plot, as indicated on his death certificate. He passed away from angina in Cape Charles, Northampton County, Virginia. His wife, **Jane Cox Charlton**, is buried in Forest Lawn Cemetery in Norfolk, VA.

Their third son, **Raleigh Hugh Charlton** (b. November 10, 1891 – d. June 27, 1941), died of a coronary occlusion. His burial at the Northwest family cemetery is also noted on his death certificate, though his grave is unmarked.

Their youngest son, **Percy Buell Charlton** (b. August 26, 1893 – d. February 28, 1926), died by self-inflicted gunshot wound and is also buried in the family cemetery.



Charleton Family Cemetery at NSA Northwest

The Charlton's had three daughters:

- **Julia Charlton Willey**, who died in 1966 and is buried in Olive Branch Cemetery.
- **Virginia Charlton Rea**, who also died in 1966 and is buried in Forest Lawn.
- **Gladys Gertrude Charlton**, the youngest daughter, passed away in 1989 and is buried alongside her sister in Forest Lawn.

In summary, at least **five unmarked graves** are confirmed within the Charlton Family Cemetery, based on obituaries and official death records.

Court Record Reveals a Country in Transition

By P. S. Vredenburg, NCHSC Board Member and Volunteer
Photos by Helen Rogers, NCHSC Board Member and Volunteer

Helen Rogers, Wallace Room volunteer and board member, recently discovered a 1783 Norfolk County court summons that contained a watermark (called a royal cipher) in our history files. The summons, among the 18th century court records in the Wallace Room, was prepared on a preprinted form that was created by the British government during the reign of King George III. These forms were printed for use by courts throughout the British empire on high-quality paper made especially for the king (as indicated by the royal cipher embedded in the paper). While the

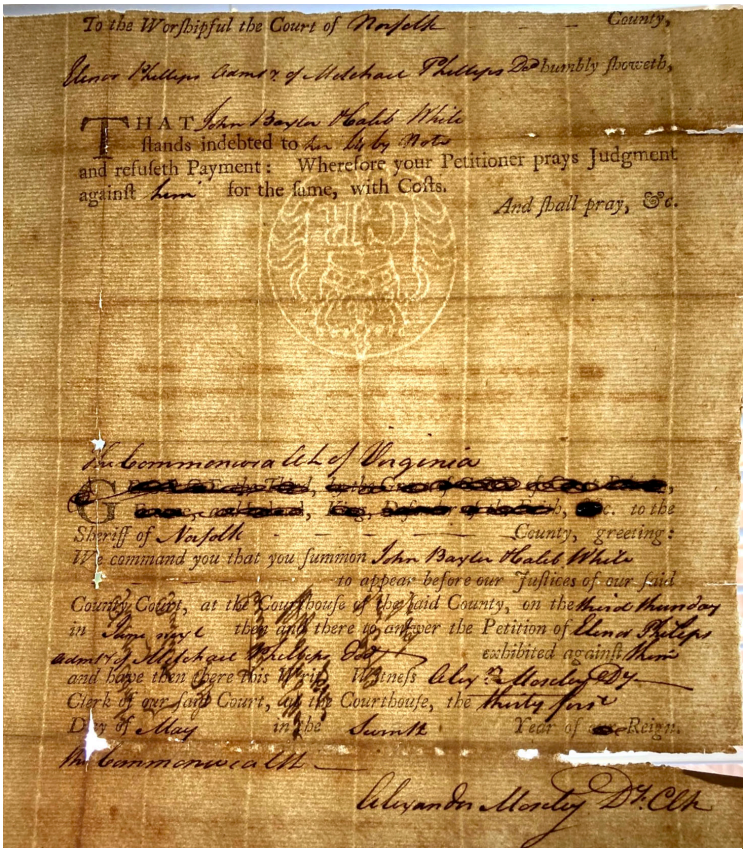
beautiful watermark is what first attracted us to the document, it revealed another story – a story of our country in transition.



Royal Cipher of George III
on Court Summons

The 1783 summons implicated two men, John Baxter and Caleb White, who owed money to the estate of a Mr. Philips of Norfolk County (deceased) and refused to pay his executrix/wife, Elenor Philips. It was completed and signed by a resourceful Deputy Clerk of the Norfolk County Court, Alexander Moseley, who repurposed the unused form and shrewdly crossed out all references to King George III and Great Britain.

Because England did not recognize U.S. independence until September 3, 1783, the U.S. import of paper and other goods was hampered by British Naval interference and a lack of international trade agreements. Ever-resourceful, however, Virginians like Mr. Moseley learned to repurpose, reuse, make-do, or do without.



To the Worshipful the Court of Norfolk County,

Elenor Phillips Admr of Melchael Phillips Dec humbly showeth,

THAT John Baxter & Caleb White stands indebted to her by Note and refuseth Payment: Wherefore your Petitioner prays Judgment against him for the same, with Costs.

And shall pray, &c.

The Commonwealth of Virginia

[redacted] to the Sheriff of Norfolk County, greeting: We command you that you summon John Baxter & Caleb White to appear before our Justices of our said County Court, at the Courthouse of the said County, on the third thursday in June next then and there to answer the Petition of Elenor Philips Admr of Melchael Phillips Dec exhibited against them and have then there this Writ. Witness Alex. Moseley Dy Clerk of our said Court, at the Courthouse, the thirty first Day of May in the Seventh Year of our Reign.

The Commonwealth

Alexander Moseley Dy Clk

1783 Court Summons Written by
Alexander Moseley, Deputy Clerk of the Norfolk County Court

Mr. Moseley was not alone! In 2024 *Archeology Magazine* reported that in 1776 another resourceful Virginian used the king's paper (royal cipher and all!) to draft one of the most significant and influential documents in U.S. history.

His name was George Mason, and the document was the Virginia Declaration of Rights. It would become the foundation for both the U.S. Bill of Rights, drafted by James Madison in 1789, and the French Declaration of Rights of Man, drafted by the Marquis de Lafayette in 1789.

Archeology Magazine:
https://archaeology.org/news/2024/06/11/kings-watermark-spotted-on-1776-virginia-declaration-of-rights/

Unearthed in the Wallace History Room: Revolutionary War Records of Polly Miller's Family

By Laura Lane,
NCHSC Wallace Room Volunteer

An article by reporter Bob Ruegsegger, titled *"On a Mission of Mercy,"* appeared in the Communities section of *The Virginian-Pilot* on Saturday, March 22, 2025 (page 6). The article highlights the remarkable life and Revolutionary War contributions of Polly Miller, a courageous woman remembered for her compassion during the Battle of Great Bridge in 1775.

In recognition of her bravery and humanitarian spirit, a street located in front of Chesapeake City Hall has been named *Polly Miller Circle* in her honor.

Miss Polly owned an ordinary—an inn or tavern—in Great Bridge and was a known Revolutionary sympathizer. Yet, despite her loyalties, she did not hesitate to offer aid to wounded British soldiers following the Battle of Great Bridge on December 9, 1775. She is credited with saving the lives of at least six British soldiers and is remembered for providing food and refreshments to all who participated in the battle—free of charge.

Polly Miller was an extraordinary woman for her time: unmarried, independent, and the successful owner and manager of her own property and business. She was always on the side of the patriots, and her family shared her commitment to the cause of American independence. Two of her brothers served in the Revolutionary War with the Virginia Continental Line. Sergeant Nathaniel Godfrey Miller served with the 1st Virginia Regiment, and Lieutenant Javan Miller served with the 4th Virginia Regiment. Both men survived the war and are buried in Brightwood Memorial Park in Chatham, Pittsylvania County, Virginia.

Polly Miller passed away on February 1, 1814, at the age of 74. Her obituary appeared in the *Norfolk Herald*, although her burial location remains unknown.

The Wallace History Room holds two original documents relating to Lt. Javan Miller's Revolutionary War service, which also reference his brother Nathaniel and other family members. For those interested in learning more, Lt. Javan Miller can be found on Find a Grave (Memorial #128487154), and Pvt. Nathaniel Godfrey Miller is listed under Memorial #128486692.

The Paul Revere of the South: Jack Jouett's Daring Ride

By Robert Hitchings,
NCHSC President/Archivist Historian

As a Virginian whose roots run deep in this area, I was surprised to discover how few people remember Virginia hero, Jack Jouett—better known as the "Paul Revere of the South."

Like Paul Revere, Jouett made a daring midnight ride during the American Revolution. From the Cuckoo Tavern in Louisa County, Virginia—his home—he rode 40 miles to Charlottesville to warn Thomas Jefferson that British forces, led by Colonel Banastre Tarleton, were on their way to capture him and other legislators. Thanks to Jouett's bravery, Jefferson and his associates escaped capture.

Jouett bore the scars of that famous 1781 ride for the rest of his life. Taking shortcuts through the forest to reach Monticello, he collided with low-hanging tree branches, leaving lasting marks on his face.

According to a report last year in *The Roanoke Times*, an archaeological team discovered the foundation of the tavern Jouett operated in Charlottesville after the war. They had hoped to locate his grave on the property, but as of today, it has yet to be found.

As we prepare to celebrate our nation's 250th anniversary, let us remember that history is not only written in great battles and famous names—it is also shaped by brave individuals like Jack Jouett, whose courage changed the course of events. Their sacrifices remind us that freedom is never guaranteed, but earned through determination, grit, and a willingness to act when it matters most.

Image is a silhouette of Jack Jouett
created by his son, Matthew Harris Jouett.

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https://www.amazon.com/s?me=A2NZFQ9MGEZ94B&marketplaceID=ATVPDKIKX0DER

The Arrival of the *Great Eastern* in Hampton Roads

By P. S. Vredenburg,
NCHSC Board Member and Volunteer



The *Great Eastern* at Harbor in New York City, 1860

On August 8, 1860, Hampton Roads residents lined the shores and jammed beaches and docks to get a glimpse of the nautical phenomenon known as the *Great Eastern* (originally called *Leviathan*). At 692 feet long -- 6 TIMES LARGER than any ship ever built -- the steamer from England anchored off of Old Point Comfort. Her size and deep draft prevented her from docking near most U.S. ports. New York and Norfolk were two of the few harbors that could accommodate her.

Originally designed for transoceanic voyages from England to points east and west, she could carry 4,000 passengers and 400 crew. Three 3,400-hp steam engines drove two 58-ft diameter paddlewheels and a 24-ft diameter propeller. To conserve fuel during her transoceanic crossings, she was also equipped with 6 masts and almost 60,000 square feet of sail.

The *Great Eastern* was certainly the technical marvel of her time. It would take 41 years for a ship, the *RMS Oceanic*, to surpass her in size. Her passenger capacity would not be surpassed until 1913 when the *SS Imperator* was built.

Unfortunately, she bankrupted her owners within a few years of her 1858 launch. The *Great Eastern* continued serving passengers and cargo for several years after her visit to Hampton Roads, but she ultimately earned her place in history when she was sold to Cyrus W. Field & Co. for laying the first transatlantic cable in 1866.



The *Great Eastern* at Harbor After Laying the First Transatlantic Cable, 1866