

Wilson, Donald L

From: Wilson, Donald L
Sent: Thursday, August 03, 2000 2:02 PM
To: 'Cunard, Jan'
Subject: FW: Bel Air questions

Jan - Back again for a few minutes ...

4. (Continued.) Re George Washington spending his honeymoon at Bel Air: This appears to be a tradition that has often been repeated, perhaps based on contemporary reports.

Here is one published statement: *Potomac Squire*, by Elswyth Thane (1963), p. 41, says that Washington "married the widow Custis at her home in New Kent County in January of '59, and their honeymoon journey was to Williamsburg, where he took his seat as Burgess for the first time." [p. 44] "Impatient to begin his new life at Mount Vernon, George received leave to depart from Williamsburg before the end of the session and with Martha and the children in the Custis coach he took the road ... towards Fredericksburg. ... [They stopped at Millbank, the home of Washington's sister Betty, and paid their respects to Washington's mother and then...] [p. 45] Near Dumfries the Washingtons stopped at Bel Air to visit the Ewells, who were faintly related to George and had always entertained him on his journeys to and from the capital. [They arrived at Mount Vernon on April 7th.]

The Journals of the House of Burgesses show that on Mon. 2 April 1759: "Ordered, That Mr. Washington have Leave to be absent from the Service of this House for the Remainder of this Session." [Journals 1758-1761, p. 113] They probably left Williamsburg the next morning, perhaps pausing at Martha's home in New Kent the evening of April 3, perhaps near Bowling Green on April 4, at Fredericksburg probably April 5, and finally at Bel Air on April 6. (Bel Air is about mid-way between Fredericksburg and Mount Vernon.) This is my interpretation of a possible itinerary based on Thane's book, allowing up to 30 miles travel each day.

Unfortunately I have been unable to find anything in Washington's own writings to verify his presence at Bel Air. His letterbooks and diaries are lost for this time period. I found one of his letters to London, dated 1 May 1759, which shows he is back in Williamsburg at that date. The papers of George Washington are now on the internet at <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/gwhome.html>, and can be searched by keyword.

Douglas Southall Freeman in *George Washington: a Biography*, v. 3, also discusses the return to Mount Vernon, but does not mention Bel Air. On Thurs. April 5, Washington wrote to a servant, John Alton, asking him to get the key to Mount Vernon from the Fairfaxes at Belvoir and open up the house and make it ready for them. That they were at Mount Vernon by April 7 is proved by an expense account of that date. [p. 13] The message says "I have sent Miles on today, to let you know that I expect to be up tomorrow..." Although Freeman says "It is likely ... that he arrived [at Mount Vernon] on the 6th, and methodically charged up his expenses the next morning, but there is a possibility that the party did not reach the house until the 7th."

The message makes clear that Washington was expecting to reach Mount Vernon by the evening of April 6. If the note was written in Fredericksburg, then he could hardly have stayed overnight at Bel Air, unless the last leg of their journey was delayed. (If they were on schedule, they might have dropped in for lunch.) It is possible, however, that the note was written from Bel Air, in which case they would have stayed the night of April 5. All this is speculation.

Until next time... **Don**

From: Wilson, Donald L
Sent: Monday, July 31, 2000 8:59 PM
To: 'Cunard, Jan'
Subject: RE: Bel Air questions

Jan - Some additional comments regarding Thunderbird's letter.

2. I don't have immediate access to the VDHR guidelines they refer to, so cannot comment on whether Prince William required more than the state agency. Thunderbird (William Gardner) states their research design "was to evaluate for potential National Register of Historic Places nomination the sites that Mr. Johnson did locate or justify why the site was not further evaluated." Is that what their contract or letter of intent stated? "This latter [justifying why the site was not further evaluated] was done based on artifact counts, soil descriptions and Johnson's own evaluation." Again, they seem

to be ignoring Johnson's recommendation that a more thorough study be made of the history of the site, over and above what artifacts were in a cursory survey.

He admits in the fourth paragraph of section 2 that with a 25-foot interval "you certainly could miss a small cemetery, a small tenant or slave site, or a prehistoric site." Although he says "in the case of the tenant, slave and even the prehistoric sites, these are almost always found with the initial testing at 50 foot intervals and defined using the shorter interval", he doesn't explain why they did not find any tenant, slave or other out buildings on the property.

3. I don't have any argument with him that Mike Johnson probably found most of the surviving prehistoric evidence. That's what Mike is best trained to find.

4. Regarding the fort on the Neabsco in the 1670s: I have not seen any convincing contemporary evidence that it was at Belair. I do know Dr. and Mrs. Flory believed it to be true, based apparently on Harrison's narrative and possibly some tradition handed down. (I think some of the early 20th century newspaper reports on Belair may have mentioned it.) If Thunderbird feels the tradition has no basis in fact, they should have stated that in their report and their reasons they believe that. I'm not an expert on archaeology of the 17th century, but if there had been a fort there, some evidence of it should remain, contrary to Gardner's statement. The state archeology office, doing a salvage dig at Gloucester Point about 10 years ago (in which I was involved), found evidence of a palisade fort of (I think) the Revolutionary War period, of which only soil stains remained.

I was amazed at the statement that present-day Belair was built between 1797 and 1806. That was news to me. Charles EWELL was certainly a resident and landowner in Prince William County at least since 1741, when he voted in the local elections. The absence of the name Ewell from the 1765 tax list is puzzling, but is probably a sign that the list is incomplete rather than the family was absent at that date. Other earlier and later rent rolls (land tax lists) certainly show what properties they owned here.

The Library is closing now, and I'll have to get back to you on Wednesday. Sorry for the delay. To be continued....

Don

-----Original Message-----

From: Wilson, Donald L
Sent: Thursday, July 27, 2000 3:15 PM
To: 'Cunard, Jan'
Subject: Bel Air questions

Jan - Here are some responses to the statements from Thunderbird (your fax to me 7/26).

This is only in response to the first item on the fax. Did not have a chance to finish notes/response Wednesday night due to other business demands. Am on leave until Saturday, will try to continue then. **Don**

1. Thunderbird said "This statement [that Mr. Johnson's interest and background was in prehistoric rather than historic archeology] is irrelevant. Mr. Johnson found historic artifacts. It is evident his interests and background did not render him blind. Phase I archaeology requires that both prehistoric and historic sites be identified. This is done regardless of the person's or firm's interest. As far as I know all firms do this as a matter of course. Certainly, we have found many more historic period sites than prehistoric in the past 26 years we have been in business."

Response: True, Mike Johnson found historic features within the area he surveyed. Certainly he did not ignore historic features he could identify. However, his specific recommendations (on p. 26 of his report) relate almost entirely to prehistoric features. At the end he states: "As previously stated a **complete professional history of Belair is recommended.** [My emphasis.] Such a monograph should provide a similar contextual source for the historic sites as the Neabsco Creek report should provide for the prehistoric sites."

On p. 19 and 24, he went into a little more detail, listing the historic features. He does not succeed in identifying any outbuildings. Then he says: "All of the functional and chronological assessments, and evaluations of the historic sites are preliminary (table IV). Belair appears to warrant a professionally researched historical monograph that will take into account not only the names and lives of its owners, but also the impacts they had on the land. This should be done with a mapping of the land use patterns over time in mind. Such a monograph would be indispensable in evaluating the historic sites on the Flory property." In other words, in order to do a competent historic survey of archaeological sites, a documentary survey needs to be undertaken, something not within the scope of his work. Without such a report, it would be easy to miss historic features that may be present on the property.

Thunderbird's statement that they have found many more historic period sites than prehistoric during the time they have been in business is probably beside the point. Did they identify the location of any outbuildings on Bel Air? (I have not seen Thunderbird's report, would need to study it to judge whether they have made a good faith effort to research the history of the property.)

Until next time... **Don**