

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION OF VIRGINIA  
HISTORICAL INVENTORY

112

COUNTY: Prince William

GLASS: Home

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--- "BEL AIRE" ---

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May 31, 1937

1. SUBJECT:

"Bel Aire".

2. LOCATION:

6 miles northwest of Dumfries, Virginia, north side of Route #640, 3/4 mile east of junction of Routes #640 and #643. 237 446

3. DATE:

Prior to 1750.

4. OWNERS:

By the boundaries the following appears to have been the original deed to Major Ewell, for what is now known as "Bel Aire". It is found in Deed Book D, Folio 336, dated 1739: "Between Ralph Walker, of the Parish of Port Tobacco in the Colony of Maryland, and Charles Ewell of the Parish of Hamilton --- tract containing 800 acres, commonly known as Walkertown, lying and being in the Parish of Hamilton, purchased of John Wood". It remained in the Ewell family for many years, coming by inheritance to Mason Locke Weem who married one of the Ewell daughters. The next reference is found in 1869, and is a transfer from Frances Weems to Jesse Weems recorded in the Land Records, page 60. It was sold to George Round of Manassas, during the 1880's, but the exact date has not been found. It was left by him to his widow, and some years later sold by her to Colonel Me C. Bucky, of Washington, D. C., the present owner, and is recorded in Deed Book 80, Folio 342.

5. DESCRIPTION:

There is a long lane which leads from the road to "Bel Aire". The lawn is shaded by some fine old trees, notably a cypress and a black walnut of remarkable size. There are but few of the old outbuildings left, and the old graveyard is so overgrown with brambles and bushes that it was impossible to get to the stones to read the inscriptions. The remains of the terraces are still to be seen, and it is said that the gardens were once very lovely.

At the present time there are brick steps to the porch which extends about fourteen feet in the front. An old picture of the house shows however that the porch went to the entire front of the house, supported by columns, thus giving the basement floor more prominence and light. There are beautiful stone and brick steps to the rear entrance. These are old and lichen covered, and like the house its the brick is beautifully toned by age.

as well as the wide hall is very fine, that in the hall being removable (as in the old Mundy House, at Dumfries) so that it could be made into one large room for balls and festive occasions. The stairway is notable for the unusually wide treads. The basement rooms are the same height as those of the floors above, one room having a very large fireplace.

#### 6. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

"Bel Aire" was built in the early 1740's by Major Charles Ewell, hero of what they called the "Old French War". He was one of the first Ewell settlers in Prince William County, the other being Bertrand Ewell who made some of the important maps and surveys of the county. Charles Ewell is mentioned by Washington in his Journal as "a man of affair". He married first Sarah Ball, of Lancaster County, who was related to Mary Ball, and second, a widow named Grayson, who is said to have named "Bel Aire" after her old home. Her son William Grayson, who grew up at "Bel Aire" became a prominent man in his day, and was the first United States Senator from Virginia.

Charles and Sarah Ball Ewell were the parents of Colonel Jesse Ewell, who moved to Greenville (farther up the country) after his marriage, and it was his daughter, Fannie, who married Mason Locke Weems. Charles and Sarah Ewell's daughter married Dr. Craik, Washington's friend, and Surgeon General to him. They were married at Bel Aire, and it is said that the crowd were so great that the floors had to be propped by big cedar posts put in the basement. Fannie Ewell and Parson Weems were also married here.

Jesse Ewell was Colonel of the Militia at the time of the Revolution, his Regiment was ordered to Yorktown, but on the way met with the news that there had been a victory, and was sent back. On the lawn at "Bel Aire" very likely under some of the trees which are still standing, Colonel Ewell feasted his men before disbanding.

Thomas Jefferson had been a classmate of Jesse Ewell at William and Mary, and was a frequent visitor. General Washington was such a close friend that one of the chambers has always been known as the Washington Room. After the death of Colonel Ewell, and his wife who was known as "Madame Charlotte" Parson Weems moved here from Dumfries. Here he did much of his writing, and was brought back to rest here after his death in Beaufort, South Carolina.

During the time that Parson Weems lived at "Bel Aire", another notable wedding took place, that of his daughter who was known as the "beautiful Fannie Weems". She married Robert

Tansill, of the United States Marines. His best man was Lieutenant Richard Ewell, United States Dragoons, a grandson of Colonel Jesse Ewell. Both of these men afterwards distinguished themselves in the Mexican War, and during the War Between the States, Lieutenant Tansill was Military Governor of San Francisco, while Richard Ewell succeeded to the command of Stonewall Jackson.

After the decline of Dumfries, the Ewell and Weems families finally gave up "Bel Aire", and it was in very bad repair at the time Mr. Rounds bought it. The house has now been restored, and while the grounds are sadly in need of attention the house itself is in far better condition than many of the old landmarks.

7. ART:

Photograph

8. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

Informants: Miss Maude Ewell, Haymarket, Virginia,  
Mr. Charles Callahan, Alexandria, Virginia,  
Mervin C. Buckley, Washington, D. C.

Prince William County Court Records.