

Buckland's Treasures

David Blake is on a Mission to Shape His Farm's Rich History

By George Rowand

There are thoroughbreds in the paddocks at Buckland Farm again, just like in the days when the farm was turning out stakes winners and even a double classic winner named Pleasant Colony. Perhaps there are not as many now as then, but still, they add to the bucolic atmosphere that is so appealing to many.

When David Blake bought the 400 acres that comprise Buckland Farm – part of which sits in Fauquier County – in 1998, he thought that he would settle into the life style of that place, breeding racehorses, playing polo and foxhunting.

Standing on the front porch of Buckland House, Blake pointed to the right.

"Pleasant Colony is buried right over there," Blake said about the 1981 Kentucky Derby and Preakness winner. "It is a great thing to have him back home, where he belongs."

When Blake did another type of digging, he was surprised to discover the history of the place. Now that study and research has occupied a lot of his life since.

"I came here with big ideas about what I intended to do here, but they pale in comparison to what is actually here," Blake said with a laugh while sitting in a parlor of Buckland House. "There is just so much here that is interesting that I haven't had the time to concentrate on anything else."

Like a lot of other locations in the area, Buckland Farm has produced artifacts from the history – Native American arrowheads and Civil War belt buckles, for example – and Blake said that the nearby town of Buckland has a considerable history (see accompanying article) that fascinates him and that deserves to be preserved.

"It's humbling to live here and see all the history that's

gone on before you," Blake said. "A man named Samuel Love lived here, and he married a Fauquier County woman," he continued. "Governor Patrick Henry appointed their son, John Love, to a committee that brought [American inventor] Oliver Evans' machinery to Virginia. The machinery increased the output of the wool carding factory, and some people called the place 'The Lowell, Massachusetts of Virginia.' Lowell was well known as a manufacturing town. Then John Love was hired by Oliver Evans to represent him in his patent cases, and one of them established the precedent of intellectual property."

Blake said that four sons of Samuel Love fought in the Revolutionary War. John Love became a famous attorney and land speculator. He served in Congress for two terms.

"Look at this," Blake said, pointing to the cover of the Harvard Business Review's History Review of Spring 1997. "On the cover is John Love's office in Alexandria. He was very well known."

The Buckland House has seen it's fair share of history as well, Blake said.

"One of the first things I found was that George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, even Teddy Roosevelt were all here," Blake said. "Teddy Roosevelt changed horses on his 100 mile ride from the White House to Warrenton. And Jeb Stuart had dinner in this house for his generals after the Battle of Buckland Mills."

The house itself has some features that are unique.



"Look at this newel post," Blake said, pointing to the post on a stairway between floors. "When we had the people from Williamsburg in here, they said that it was an exact copy of one that was in a tavern in Williamsburg. It must have been made by the same artisan.

"The moulding," Blake continued, "was the first of the style in the country. The porch was a Greek-style porch, which would have made the house look like a courthouse."

HORSES AND FARM LIFE

Blake said that important thoroughbred stallions stood at Buckland Farm centuries ago.

"There were stallions standing at Buckland for a big price, including Spread Eagle, the sire of Eclipse [from whom 90 percent of all thoroughbreds descend today]," Blake said. "Three of the 12 foundation sires stood at Buckland. These are the first real horses brought to the United States. George Washington bought a horse for his personal use from Charles Love, Samuel Love's son, and Washington told the U.S. Army how they should be buying horses off of Charles Love after he retired from the presidency."

Blake said that the farm became a model farm for the young country in the early 1800s.

"We have some unusual soil here," Blake said. "It is the widest, deepest deposit of this type of soil in the country, and it is great for growing wheat. It has a very high calcium content, a very high iron content."

That combination may have protected the Buckland wheat from the scourge of a foreign pest almost 200 years ago.

"When the Hessian soldiers came to America to fight for the British, they brought with them a fly in their meal," Blake explained. "Released into the country, that fly began destroying the wheat crops in America, and it started

in the north and worked its way south. But wheat grown on this farm was resistant to the Hessian Fly. President James Monroe came out here to see the wheat, and he bought 200 bushels for himself, 200 for Thomas Jefferson and 200 for James Madison. Jefferson later sent a letter to John Love about the wheat."

It is that sort of history that has attracted David Blake to the place he now calls home.

"Buckland lies at the midpoint of the Journey on the Hallowed Ground," Blake said. "We are the halfway point between Gettysburg and Monticello. It is a wonderful place to live, and I really want to help preserve what has gone on before us." **W**



If these walls could talk...

"One of the first things I found was that George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, even Teddy Roosevelt were all here," Blake said. "Teddy Roosevelt changed horses on his 100 mile ride from the White House to Warrenton. And Jeb Stuart had dinner in this house for his generals after the Battle of Buckland Mills."