

Our
readers
speak:

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Old Featherstone Farm

To the Editor:

One Sunday afternoon last fall I went down to the Old Hoover Ducking Club Property on Featherstone River Front. I worked as a guide during duck hunting season for about ten years during the 1930s. It was considered the best duck hunting location on Occoquan Bay or Potomac River.

This was the first time I was on the property since the day Hurricane Hazel went through this area and blew a big pine or water oak tree at least four or five feet thick at best down across the house and mashed the top in until it was the shape of a horse shoe upside down.

It's all been rebuilt now inside and out. To look at this house on the outside it looks just ordinary, but I never saw as beautiful house inside. I enjoyed talking to Mr. John Woodard on the history of his house and the rest of Featherstone.

I am the oldest man in this area to know Featherstone Farms. When I

was a youngster it was owned by a man named "Negley." The little flag stop railroad station was also named Negley. Mr. Negley went bankrupt on the farm, loaded two suitcases and a wheelbarrow, went to the station and left on the train. That was the last we ever heard of him.

In 1916 Featherstone, then called Negley, was bought by a New York millionaire named Frank Chambers. We never saw a farm built like that before. He had his own post office, school for his workmen's children, a big electric power plant that furnished electricity for the whole farm and a commissary. All his farm and dairy help had nice homes and gardens. He had fancy barns, silos, etc. kept as clean as a living room. He had mostly imported cows from the island of Holstein and Jersey. A lot of them had to be milked three or four times a day. He manufactured some kind of a milk drink that was sold from Quantico to

Washington. It was called Kumus. It was delivered in a fancy model T. Ford panel truck. All of his help in the barns and dairies were dressed in white uniforms and looked like hospital interns. Each family had a new modern house and a big garden and a flock of chickens.

While I was sitting talking to Mr. and Mrs. Woodard I mentioned the rock island out in Occoquan Bay near High Point. Mr. Woodard said he went out there last summer in his boat, but there was so many mosquitoes on the island he was afraid to go on it. Now I know Mr. Woodard has seen more of the country than I have. I have never been over one hour drive from Woodbridge, but I am sorry that I forgot to tell him about the big imported mosquitoes from the Orient.

All of the families working for Mr. Chambers had a large flock of chickens, and the foxes, coons, skunks opposum and different kinds of varmints caught nearly all of them. Chambers had a man working for him from some of the Pacific Islands, who said he could get rid of the varmints that were catching the chickens. So he brought in a couple pair of mosquitoes as big as bald eagles, they killed all the foxes, etc., then caught all the chickens. One of Mr. Chamber's overseers and his family lived in the house that Mr. Woodard lives in now and had a fine Jersey cow and calf. One morning the cow and calf were missing. The cow wore a bell and they heard the bell ringing down in the swamp. They went down in the swamp and found the skeleton of the cow picked clean of meat and a mosquito sitting up in a tree picking his teeth with one of the cow's horns. We had a big picnic on the river shore where Mr. Woodard's house is and Bob Burdett was getting ready to steam crabs and the mosquitoes got so bad he turned the pot upside down and got under it and one of them stuck his stinger through the heavy cast iron pot and Bob picked up a rock and clinched his stinger, and it flew away carrying the pot on his bill headed toward Maryland. This crab pot was in Bob Burdett's family since the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock in 1620.

After the mosquitoes killed the man's cow, all the duck hunters got together on a low tide and went in the swamp and shot most of them. What was left, being bugs from a warm climate, evidently froze to death. In 1920 Featherstone was subdivided and sold. What was left of Frank Chambers disappeared back to New York.

Carl Eike,
Woodbridge, Va.

VIRGINIANA FILE

Historic Sites - Featherstone
Farm

Prince William Public Library
Manassas, Va.

Weems - Botts Museum
Collection

See also: Yes Virginia there is a Carl Eike

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