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THE LEGEND OF FEATHERSTONE

Every name has a beginning and every name has an origin. Some names have historical background, while others are based upon legend. Legendary names are derived from stories which are passed from one generation to another by word of mouth. A legend may be composed of all facts or it may be both fact and fiction. The origin of Featherstone is legendary. The fact is that a place named Featherstone existed. The legendary part is how the name came into being.

The subdivisions of Featherstone Shores, Featherstone Terrace, and Marumscow Woods are located on what was originally "Negley", then "Featherstone Farms", in historic Prince William County. It is assumed from the best information to date, that the main house was on land where California Street is now located.

In 1915 a family by the name of Chambers, from New York State, had a son, Frank R., with whom they were displeased because of the life he had made for himself and his family. His father gave him a large sum of money, several servants, among them an Indian Maiden named Featherstone, and sent him on his way. He proceeded South with his family and finally settled in Prince William County, purchasing the 1500 acre estate of "Negley" from Edward Cockrell. (There is no available information as to when "Negley" was built.) Soon after settling on the estate the Indian Maiden was killed. Since he did not like the name "Negley", legend tells us that he renamed the estate "Featherstone Farms" in memory of the Indian Maiden.

Frank Chambers, called by many a "playboy", began the expansion of his land. He renovated the main house and had an Overseer's house constructed nearby. He also added three tenant houses and one house for boarding many of the people who worked on the land. Later, he added a post office, naming it Featherstone, and at the same time renamed the railroad depot from Negley to Featherstone.

Established for the families who lived on the estate, the post office was operated by Germans who had been displaced from Washington, D. C. during World War I. The Germans also did other work on the land and remained with Mr. Chambers until he sold the property.

"Featherstone Farms" soon became a prosperous estate. Cattle and horses were raised on the land, and "Koumiss" was produced here and sold to the surrounding area. "Koumiss" is a fermented beverage made originally by the nomadic peoples of central Asia from mare's milk. The idea of this type of drink being made from cow's milk and being produced in this area was originated by a Dr. Brush from Mt. Vernon, New York, whose son,

Edward, supervised the production of the drink at "Featherstone Farms". Edward and his family lived in the Overseer's house.

Also located on the estate was a private school, housed in part of the Overseer's house, and operated by Miss Laura Chamblin. The school was established for the children of parents who lived and worked on the estate and for children of parents who were friends of the Brush and Chambers families.

The entrance to "Featherstone Farms" was on Washington-Richmond Highway, located .2 mile North of Featherstone School. A wooden sign indicated the entrance and contained the name of the farm, the owner, and how it received its name. Years of misuse resulted in the destruction of the sign. Mr. Chambers purchased a lighted sign which read "Featherstone Farms" and had it installed atop the barn which was located near the main house.

By 1922 Frank Chambers had been forced to sell most of the land in order to continue operation of the estate. In 1922 he was forced to sell the balance of the estate at auction. By this time there was only 650 acres, which included six houses, a barn, railroad depot, and post office, along with cattle and horses. The entire estate which remained was purchased by George Herring and Gus Wallace, partners in the Herring-Wallace Lumber Yard in Alexandria. A future dissolution of the partnership resulted in Mr. Herring purchasing Mr. Wallace's share of the estate.

The main house was destroyed by fire in the early part of 1950, and soon afterward the Overseer's house was destroyed. In 1951 the estate, which by now consisted of 400 acres, was purchased by T. P. Davis and John Leary, who sold it to the C. D. Hylton Corporation in 1960 for the construction of homes.

In 1960 the Prince William County School Board purchased land from the Hylton Corporation for the construction of Featherstone Elementary School. Two of the areas served by the school, Featherstone Shores and Featherstone Terrace, along with Featherstone Road, received their names from the estate "Featherstone Farms". The school received its name as a result of the name given these areas.

Once a large and prosperous estate, "Featherstone Farms" has passed into history. The 1500 acres have been sold off over the years and on this land there are now three subdivisions, two schools, a shopping center, and numerous other small businesses. Approximately 400 acres of the original property is still open land, most of it owned by the Harry Tyrrell family and Mrs. Wallace P. Dawson, both of whom trace their history back to the early days of Woodbridge. Three of the six houses and the post office are all that remain of the dwellings on "Featherstone Farms". These are all owned by Mrs. Wallace P. Dawson. Two of the houses are located on Walnut Street while one house and the post office face on

Featherstone Road. The houses are presently being rented. The post office was converted into living quarters in 1940, and has since served as the meeting place of Cokesbury Methodist, Riverview Baptist, and the Assembly of God churches, and the Boys Club of Greater Woodbridge. It now houses Dailey's Air Conditioning Firm.

The legend of Featherstone, both fact and fiction, is an interesting part of the history of Prince William County and Woodbridge.

(Our thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Harry Tyrrell and Mrs. Wallace P. Dawson who provided much of the factual information as regards Featherstone, the name, and "Featherstone Farms", the place.)