

Featherstone Farm

by Lucy Phinney - published in March, 1990 newsletter

The year is 1946, it is summer and Jay is eight years old. He lives in Alexandria with his parents and older sister but every summer since he was five he has visited his grandparents in Woodbridge. Their names are Mr. and Mrs. George W. Herring and their Woodbridge farm is called Featherstone.

The distance from Alexandria to Woodbridge seems long to Jay but when the car crosses the Occoquan River on Route 1, he knows he's getting closer. He looks for the railroad station on his left and then for "Fats" Davis' garage on the right. He passes some farms and a few stores and when he sees the Featherstone Bar and Grill on his left he knows he's really close. At the corner where the little store with two gas pumps is, the car turns left onto Featherstone Road. About half a mile down the dirt road, at the big red barn, the car makes a right hand turn into a dirt driveway going up a hill.

At the top of the hill, Jay's grandparents are waiting for him at their "Featherstone" farmhouse. Jay's grandfather raises cattle now on the farm, but he used to own the Wallace and Herring lumber business in Alexandria before he "retired." He also is a former member of the Virginia House of Delegates. Jay's grandmother has never really liked the big twenty-three room house on the hill in Woodbridge; it is too far away from civilization for her but Jay thinks it is just right. He loves to sit on the big wrap-around porch and watch the boat traffic passing on the Potomac River before him. Nothing comes between the house and the river except his grandfather's cattle and maybe a corner of his grandmother's big garden. She puts up enough vegetables to last through the winter, storing them down in the cool basement of the farmhouse.

Along the river, to the northwest, beyond the railroad tracks is Powell Davis' hog farm. Jay wrinkles his nose as he thinks how that smells every time he gets near there must be hundreds and hundreds of hogs down there. Davis is the father of "Fats," whose garage Jay passed on his way to the farm.

That summer of 1946 is the next to the last one for Jay's visits to "Featherstone Farms". His family moved far away and then, in the 1950's the big house burned to the ground. Firemen attributed the blaze to a short circuit; lack of water hampered their three hour fight to save the house. The big red barn was saved and long time Woodbridge residents remember it well near the present day site of the 7-11 store on the corner of Blackburn and Featherstone Roads. Two or three overseer's small cottages across the road from the barn are also well remembered.

An earlier tragedy in the house is also recalled. Twenty-five years before the fire, the owner of the then dairy farm, Mr. Frank Chambers, killed himself and when his teenage daughter learned of the death, she too killed herself. Mr. and Mrs. Herring purchased the estate after the tragedy.

Jay grew up to become James W. O'Loughlin, director of Communication for the

Fredericksburg Police department. He donated the photograph of "Featherstone Farms" to Historic Prince William and the information in this article was gathered in a conversation with him in March, 1990.

History of Prince William County
Historic Prince William