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<b>Author</b>	• Morton, Susan R.
<b>Title</b>	• <u>survey report, Journal of John Davis of Occoquan</u> : 1938 Mar. 9 / research made by Susan R. Morton.
<b>Material</b>	10 leaves.
<b>Gen. note</b>	Class: Papers Date: 1796 Location: Barnes home, Occoquan. Primary owners: Mr. Barnes Includes transcription of <b>Davis'</b> journal documenting his stay in Occoquan. Describes the town, people, and buildings. Includes transcription of some of his poetry and letters received by friends and acquaintances.
<b>Other Format</b>	Also available on microfilm.
<b>Format</b>	Computer file. Richmond, Va. : Library of Virginia, 1998. 10 image files.
<b>Issuing Body</b>	This write-up is a part of the Virginia W.P.A. Historical Inventory Project sponsored by the Virginia Conservation Commission under the direction of its Division of History.
<b>Subject - Personal</b>	• <b>Davis, John.</b>
<b>Subject -Geographic</b>	• <u>Occoquan (Va.) -- Description and travel -- 18th century.</u>
<b>Genre/Form</b>	• <u>Surveys.</u> • <u>Diaries -- Virginia -- Prince William County.</u> • <u>Poems.</u> • <u>Letters (correspondence) -- Virginia -- Prince William County.</u>
<b>Added Entry</b>	• <u>Barnes, Mr., informant.</u>
<b>Added Entry</b>	• <u>Virginia Historical Inventory Project.</u> • <u>Virginia Conservation Commission. Division of History.</u> • <u>United States. Works Progress Administration.</u>
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*Travels of Four and a half years in the US of America during 1789, 1799, 1800, 1801 and 1802 available on google books*



WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION OF VIRGINIA  
HISTORICAL INVENTORY

COUNTY: Prince William

CLASS : Papers

JOURNAL OF JOHN DAVIS OF OCCOQUAN

(1798)

This write-up is a part of the Virginia W. P. A. Historical Inventory Project sponsored by the Virginia Conservation Commission under the direction of its Division of History. Credit to both the Commission and W. P. A. is requested for publication, in whole or in part. Unless otherwise stated, this information has not been checked for accuracy by the sponsor.

Research made by  
Susan R. Morton,  
Haymarket, Virginia.

March 9th, 1938.



1. SUBJECT:

Journal of John Davis.

2. LOCATION:

In the home of Mr. Barnes, the owner of "Rock Ledge", in Occoquan, Virginia.

3. DATE:

1798.

4. OWNERS:

Mr. Barnes, Occoquan, Virginia.

5. DESCRIPTION:

6. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

"It was my custom every Saturday to ride to Alexandria, where I read the Northern papers at the Coffee Room, and at Thomas Bookstore regaled myself with the new publication imported from Philadelphia, but I sought in vain for an advertisement that was to arouse the diffusion of the Wanderings of William, and looked forward with solicitude for the moment that was to reward my labor with emolument, and satisfy my vanity with praise. In elaboration of this state of suspense I wrote my friend Dulief an elaborate epistle in French execrating the honeyed promises of the great men in power who had doomed me to the obscurity of Occoquan, and earnestly demanding intelligence of Wm., who occupied my waking and sleeping thoughts. The lively answer of Dulief will amuse others who understand French and they who are ignorant of the language can find some linguist among their friends to interpret it. "Mon cher Favori du Appolin, j'ai ete plus fait que surpris d' apprendre que vous ariz fait un demande inutile. Je ne voyois rien de moins sur que ce don vous etiez glatile, et Hout c' stoit la parole du Colonel Albert, qu' il falloit avoir, pour etre sur d'une Lieutenance dans son Regiment, "Je vous auroie engage amicalment a attendre parme nous une Lettre. mais etant pres des Vacances, Je n' ai, vu dans votre Voage qu' moyen agreable de passer un tems de des verunements." I ' ai oprense plus d'une fois a William, tant pour le livre moi-- memé, que pour vous en vendre si je pris, beaucoup d' exemplaines, Chacun a see tribulations dans ce monde. J'ai a present le chagrin de voir qu mon Commense ne va aucunement, pour y faine diversion je me suis jette dans le profondeur de la metaphisique cue lock et Condillac. "Adieu! pantez-- vous bien. Je vous Sale en Pope en Shakespeare, Votre affections, N. C. Dulief Le 5, d' about, 1801. "

They who delight in walking must, during the summer in Virginia



embrace the night to stimulate their muscular energies, the fierceness of the sun would suspend the steps of the hardest traveler! But amidst the freshness of the night, there breathes only fair odours in journeying the woods. No walk could be more delightful than that from Colchester to Occoquan, when the moon was above the mountains, you traverse the banks of a placid stream over which impend rocks in some places bare, but more often covered with an odiferous plant that regals the traveler with its fragrance.

So serpentine is the course of the river, that the mountains, which rise from its bank, may be said to form an amphitheatre, and nature seems to have designed the spot for the haunt only of fairies for here grow flowers of purple dye, and here the snake throws her enameled skin, but into what regions, however apparently inaccessible, has man not penetrated!

The awful repose of the night is disturbed by the clack of the huge mills, which drown the song and echoes of the mocking bird, who nightly tells his sorrows to the listening moon.

Art is here pouring fast into the lap of nature the luxuries of egotic refinement. After climbing over the mountains, almost inaccessible to human toil, you come to the junction of the Occoquan with the noble river of the Potomac, and behold a bridge, whose semi-elliptical arches are scarcely inferior to those of princely London, and on the side of the bridge stands a Tavern where every luxury that money can purchase is to be obtained at the first summons, where the richest viands cover the table, and where the Maderia that has been thrice across the Atlantic. The English bewail the lack of convenient Taverns in the United States, but the complaint is, I think groundless, for I have found Taverns in the woods of America, not inferior to those of common market towns of England.

My description of the Tavern at the mouth of the Occoquan partakes of no hypobolic amplifications, the apartments are numerous, and at the same time spacious, carpets of delicate texture cover the floor and glasses are suspended from the walls from which a Golliah might survey himself. No man can be more complaisant than the landlord, Enter but his house with money in your pocket and his features will soften with delight and your mandate is obeyed.

Often when the moon light slept upon the mountains near my dwelling, I have walked before my door and gazed in silent rapture on the orb of night, whose beams trembled on the stream that gave motion to the mill, while the tall bark was seen dancing on the waves at a distance, and the mocking bird in the saddest strain was heard from the woods. It was during one of these enights, that the recalling the images of the evening I combined them in an ode to the place;

#### Evening at Occoquan

Slow the solunn sun descends,  
Ev'nings eye comes rolling on,  
Glad the weary stranger bends,  
To the banks of Occoquan!



Now the cricket on the heath,  
Chirping, tells his merry tale  
Now the owlet ventures forth  
Loping to the sighing gale.

Still the busy mill goes round,  
While the miller plies his care  
And the rocks send back the sound  
Wafted by the nightly air.

So! the moon with lustre right  
On the stream beholds her face,  
While the sea, by bending o'er  
Chides the talking waves below.

Now the mocking songsters strain  
Fills the pauses of her brood,  
And her pliants, the ear retain,  
Echoing from the distant wood.

Hanging o'er the mountain brow,  
Lo, the cattle, herbage find,  
While in slumber sweet below,  
Peaceful rests the College hind.

Now the student seeks his cell,  
Nor regrets the day is done,  
But with silence loves to dwell  
On the banks of Occoquan.

I never was one of those who sleep well at night, all hours are of equal value and the tranquility of the night invites to study, hence I have been recently compelled to change my lodging, as the good woman of the house was in fear that her curtains might catch fire, and set the dwelling in a blaze.

But the houses in Virginia for the most are not very superb, the people were never under any solicitude for the habitation I occupied had it been burnt to the ground a few boards and shingles would have constructed another. I never yet occupied a house that was not exempt from taxes, it was always valued by the tax gatherer as below \$100, about twenty pounds of sterling, and by an Act of the Assembl for a house to be worth less than \$300 there is no tax to pay! From the platform of my house at Occoquan there was a subterranean passage which led to a kind of kitchen. In this underground apartment dwelt Rachel, a negro woman, who was left a widow with 11 children, but her numerous offsprings were all provided for. Mr Carter, to whom the whole family belonged, had taken upon him the benevolent office, for he had sold one to Mr. A., another to Mr. B., to Mr. C. and to Mr. D, and son on, nearly half way around the alphabet. The student who values his health will practice study and exercise alternately. After reading a scene



in Hamlet, I took a few strides around the room, and indulged myself by repeating a part of his soliloquies, such for example as:

How weary, flat, stale and unprofitable  
Seems to me the uses of this world  
Rachel dwelling underneath, marveled greatly at this noise. Her perturbation made her immediately conclude that I was busied in prayer and in the morning my character was established for religion. "For" said she, to her gaping auditors, "they may talk of this new parson but our new cook massa beats em all by a heap!" "'Tis true as the mill is going round, that he walks up and down and prays the whole night long."

Rachel without carrying about her the mockery of woe, mourned sensibly for her husband, let my page record the words of her affliction. "I was raised at Port Tobacco, a heap of likely young fellows courted me, but I refused them all for the head coachman of Councilor Carter. He was a good husband, but he made me the mother of eleven children, woe to Rachel. When he died, Oh how I slap my hands and cry, but he's gone to the great Jehovah. I shall never forget it. t'was at the pulling of corn time. The poor creature was a little out of his head, he asked me if the corn was in tassel, in tassel, say I. God help you, you had some yesterday for dinner", but he changed the discourse and talked of the hymn, and parson Weems, and Pohick Church. It was good as any as any sermon, dear, sweet honey, he was a friend of the gospel. He loved the Church of England, and nobody can ever say that ever saw him go to a Quaker Meeting. Alack! Alack! my poor husband died the next morning, I knew his time had come, the whip-poor-will cried all night by the house, and I could not drive him away! God help us, die come in every part of the world, to white man and black man, all one day or another get their mouth full of yellow clay!

Occoquan scarcely supplies more literature than Ovid's place of banishment on the Black Sea, but at the Cheremount, near Fauquier Court House, lived a French gentleman by the name of Gerardine, whose reputation for for the Belles Lettres induced me to write to him from the solitude. I chose the French language as the medium and enclosed in the letter the little book of poems I had published in New York. The answer of Mr. Gerardine discloses an elegant mind. "Dans cette Solitude on les muses se font sifracement entendre vous concevenz aisement que l' envoi de vos jolis Poems a du exciteo a la fois la surprise et etle plaisio. Je compare volne present inaltendu a un joli arterre dans un. De Desertinculte et sauvage, dont l' email se sevoit effert continuelternment a Desertinculte et sauvage, dont l' email se sevoit effert continuelternment a vue.

Continuez, Monsieur, a carasser les muses avec Horace and Anacreon; le tens reprendra ses ailes vos heures en conlevont plus doucement, et vous ajonterez de nouvelle fleurs a la Guirlands Poetique dont vous ates de ja conronne Ovide chantoit encore sur les borde loin-



taines ou la trannie e Auguste l' avoit enchainee, envous avez celelve Coosohatchie.

"Je mesuie fait de repondre a votre Lettre obigeante dans une langue que vous ecrivez si bien, vous Bagatelles, je vous eusse as - sudemet pris pour un de mes Compatriates.

L ai l' honneur d'etre, Monsieur, Votre tres obeissant, tres humble serviteur, -C. Gerardine".

It was now that I had the bliss of having a elighted friend to whom I could pour out my soul on paper and enjoy the intercourse of spirit without the mediation of earthly fame. My friendship with Mr. George was still unimpaired and I consider it of no small felicity that I have been able to preserve so many of his letters amidst the casualties of a life of a wanderer.

The gloom of my solitude at Occoquan was cheered by the sincerity of his friendship and the sprightliness of his wit. An epistle from Ovid among the Getae to his friends in Rome could not have imparted half the delight that your letter has given the companion of Adversity.

While at New York, I had expected a missive from the City in the Woods (Washington) and could only ascribe the silence to the distraction of business, when suddenly is brought me a new letter, dated at a place which however acute my researches in the geography of America, I never heard mentioned before.

"I thank you for the ode that you did me the honor to enclose, it is a happy imitation of Cunningham's manner, but the images are more pleasing from having the grace of novelty to recommend them. Nor shall I neglect to observe how much you have shown your skill in making the word Occoquan, the burden of your exordial and concluding stanza, a practice never dispensed with in local poetry, as without it the poem would have no particular application were the title lost. But it is useless to write anything for Americans taste has now so diffused its influence through the hemisphere as to cause the Poet to be cherished and though Orphues might have power to charm the woods, yet the inhabitants would be insensible to the harmony of his lyre.

"In this region the minuteness of the politicians takes place of the elevation of the poet.

"Occoquan, from your description of it must be a delightful spot and in prophetic language I would declare that your abode on the banks of the river will make the stream classical in the annals of American literature, let us continue with out failure to write each other, it will give life to our friendship, and soften the rigors of existance, whatever we write must partake of the spirit of the place in which we live, but sentiments may arise



from the solitude in which we live , and which the multitudiness ( a word which you taught me) of the distraction of a City might suppress more than excite.

" Is it possible that you live in a family of Quakers? Or that a Quaker should have selected you for a tutor for his children in the way that they should go? Alas, you will be inviting wicked rymes when you should be expounding to them a Scripture, and set before them the vanity of the compliments when they should utter 'yea' and 'nay'".

I spent last night at the Tavern in Colchester, and arose with the sun and journeyed leisurely to the Hills, catching the refreshment from the light air that stirred the levaees of the trees. The morning was beautiful, and my walk produced a little ode which will serve as a counterpart to that I have already inserted.

Morning at Occoquan

An Ode

In the barn the cock porclaims  
That the East is streaked with light,  
Strutting 'round the feather'd dames,  
Who the light of joy behold.

Sweet, Oh Sweet the breathe of Morn!  
Sweet the mocking songsters strain,-  
Where the waving stalks of corn  
Bend beneath the ripened grain.

Lo, the Martins now forsake,  
For a while their tender brood  
And the swallow skims the lake,  
Each in search of winged food.

See the cottage chimneys smoke,  
See the distant torrents gleam,  
Lo, the farmer to the yoke  
Pairs his meek submissive team.

Here the negro tills the ground,  
Trembling, weeping, woeful, wan,  
Liberty is ever found  
On the banks of Occoquan!

But not muses nor walks nor the melody of birds could divest my mind from the publication of my novel which has been so long in the press in Philadelphia. Suspense is ever an uncomfortable state of mind. I addressed Duleif another letter, whose answer calmed my solitude. My publisher soon after sent me a dozen copies of my novel, to gether with the number of the Pont Folio which con-



tains remarks about the volume. M. Dennie, my former panegyrist now welded his will, rushed against me, but I fear that only glancing the contents like the students in Gil Blas, he did not dig deep enough to discover some of the Licentiate. I insert his remarks- "the author, of the poems, chiefly in South Carolina, and the translation of Bonaparte's campaign in Italy, has just published a novel; entitled "The Wanderings of William" or "The Inconstancy of Youth". The author dedicates it to Flavia in a strain which seems to foretell the completion of the work, his words are 'Avail yourself of the moment that offers to indulge in the purusal of this work'. Take it read it, there is nothing to fear, your Governess is out, your Mamma has not risen. Do you hesitate, Werter has been under your pillow, and the Monk has lain in your toilet." It was our design at first to have abridged the story of the work but the un- of the task overcame our benevolences, for the author sacrifices reflection to birth and his page, however it may read with interest will not be remembered with advantage".

On the banks of the Occoquan there is a pile of stones, which indicates that an Indian warrior is interred there. The Indians from the back settlement traveling north never fail to come here, leaving the main road to do so, they visit the grave of their departed here. If a stone be thrown down they religiously restore it to the pile, and sitting around the rude monument, they meditate profoundly, catching perhaps a local emotion from the place. A party of Indians, while I was in Occoquan, turned from the common road into the woods to visit the grave on the banks of the Occoquan; The party composed of an elderly Chief with twelve young War captains, and a couple of squaws, of the women, the youngest was an interesting girl of seventeen remarkably well shaped, and possessed of a profusion of hair, which in color was raven black. She appeared such another object as the mind images Pochontas to have been, The people of Occoquan with more curiosity than breeding, assembled round the party, but they appeared to be wholly indifferent to their gazes. They amused themselves by chopping the ground with their tomahawks and the women busied themselves in making a garment for the Chief. Among the whites was a young man of gigantic stature he was perhaps a head taller than any of the rest of the company. The old Indian could not take his eyes off the lofty statue of a man, and at length rising from the ground went up to the giant stranger and shook him by the hand. This raised a loud laugh from all the lookers on, but the Indian still remained in inflexible gravity. The second time that I saw the squaws they were just come from their toilet. Women throughout the world delight in finery, the greatest art is to suit the colors to the complexion. The youngest girl would have attracted notice in any circle in Europe. She had fastened to her long hair a profusion of ribbons, which the bounty of the people of Occoquan had bestowed upon her. The tresses of this dark Indian beauty which before had been confined around her head was rioted luxuriously down her shoulders and back, the adjustment of her dress one would have thought she had learned from some English female fashion, for she had left it open before



so that the most attentive eye could not fail to see the rise and fall of a bosom just beginning to fill. The covering of this young woman's feet riveted the eye of the stranger with the novelty and splendor, nothing could be more delicate than her moccasins, they were each of them formed of a single piece of leather, having the seams ornamented with beads and porcupine quills, while a strip of scarlet ribbons confined the moccasins around the instep and made every other part of it fit close to the foot. The moccasin was of bright yellow and made from the skin of a deer which had been killed from the arrow of one of the Indian youths. Let me be pardoned for having spoken of this lady's foot with such minuteness, a naturalist would develop a whole chapter to the examination of a bird, count the feathers of its wing and declaim with the highest rapture on its variegated plumage, and a traveler may surely be forgiven for a few remarks on the seductive foot of an Indian beauty!

Of these Indians the men had not been inattentive to their persons, the old Chief was clad in a robe of furs, and the young warriors had blackened their bodies with charcoal.

The Indians being assembled around the grave, the old Chief arose with a solemn mein, and knocking his war club against the ground, pronounced an oration to the memory of the departed warrior. "Here rests the body of the Chief of our Nation, who, before his spirit took the flight to the country of Souls, was the boldest in war, and the fleetest in the chase. The arm that is now mouldering beneath this pile could once wield the tomahawk with vigor and often cause the foe to sink beneath its weight". (A dreadful cry of whoo, whoo whoop) It has often grasped the head of the expiring enemy, and often with the knife divest it in the scalp (Yell of whoo, whoo, whoop). It has often bound to the stake the prisoner of war, and piled the blazing faggots round the victim, singing his last song of death (yells). The foot that is now motionless, was once fleetier than the hare, and in danger it was ever more ready to advance than retreat, but the Head has not gone provided to the Country of Souls, his tomahawk was buried with him to repulse the enemy in the field, and his bow to use for the deer that flies through the woods."

No orator of antiquity ever exceeded this savage Chief in the fervor of his emphasis, and the propriety of his gestures. Indeed the whole scene was highly dignified. The fierceness of his countenance, the flowing robes, the elevated tone, the naked arm and erect statue, with a circle of auditors seated on the ground, and in the open air could not but impress upon the mind a lively idea of the celebrated speakers of ancient Greece and Rome. Having ended his oration, the Indian struck the war club with fury against the ground and the whole party obeyed the signal by joining in a war dance, leaping and brandishing their knives at the throats of each other and accompanying their menacing attitudes with a whoop or yell which echoed with the fervor tenfolded from the banks of the river.



7. ART:

8. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

Informant: Mr. Barnes, "Rock Ledge", Occoquan, Virginia.