

## CHAPTER 8

### Jefferson

Everyone likes a mystery and the town of Jefferson in Powhatan is a mystery. The reason for the town was obvious, but its disappearance is not easy to explain.

Jefferson was once a tidy little town sitting at the bend of the James River. The primacy of water transportation resulted in the need for river towns. Cumberland had Cartersville on the river as its entrepôt inland. Cartersville collected goods to cross the James and from there shipped into the mainstream of traffic from Richmond to Lynchburg via the James River and Kanawha Canal. The town of Jefferson served as the entrepôt for Powhatan and a means of getting goods down river to market in Richmond. The river was not just a source of pleasure for Piedmont folk; it was the great highway to the outside world.

Land travel improved. The Powhatan county court often had people work on the roads that crisscrossed the land. The easy and cheap method of travel was still the James River. Other roads from inland Powhatan led to various depository points along the bank; Jude's Ferry and Maiden's Adventure crossed into Goochland. Jefferson, with its centralized location and easy access inland, might well have continued to be one of the more important upriver towns. It had a good start. Jefferson might well have drawn trade away from Goochland, as there was a ferry at the river. There were other ferries, but Jefferson had the best location.

The town may have been named for the ancestors of Thomas Jefferson. The first time the name of the town appeared was in 1799 when Jonathan Mason took a license for the operation of an ordinary there.<sup>1</sup> Thomas Jefferson was then Vice President of the United States and about to enter that trying time before he was elected President. It is strange indeed that so important a man as Thomas Jefferson had only a little crossroads settlement named for him and that not even where it began.<sup>2</sup> The present Jefferson settle-

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ment is where Maxey's Store used to be. The town name was moved in the twentieth century after the death of the original river town.

The original town was laid out in 32 lots in blocks of four lots, making a town of eight squares. Each block was one-half an acre, making each lot in the block to be a fourth of that. The main street ran in a roughly northwesterly direction from the land side. This made the town two blocks larger than the courthouse plan for Scottville. The town was 647 feet east of Solomon's Creek which ran into the James River.

There were families in the area that were associated with the town. The various Cocke families used Jefferson as their source of supply, but it is unknown if any Cocke family ever owned property in the town itself. The Baugh family was associated with the town, but most of the Baugh property was in Scottville. In time, the Michaux family used the town, as did the Jordan family, the Clarke family and the families of Saunders and Whitlock. Just as the Cardozo family was associated with Scottville from its long residence in the town, so there were families that were owners of Jefferson.

From 1800 to 1805, Edward Cox owned and operated an ordinary in the village.<sup>3</sup> Since Cox did not take out a license to operate the tavern after 1805, it may be presumed that the operation passed to others who did. In 1807, John Baugh began his operation of an ordinary and was issued licenses by the county until 1812.<sup>4</sup> Then the business seems to have passed to Chancellor H. Saunders, for Saunders took out an ordinary license in 1817.<sup>5</sup> Before this date, the day of the issuing of licenses was recorded rather haphazardly. Sometime around 1820 a state law ordered licenses to be issued in May of each year and the tavern keepers appeared to get their licenses in that month.

To make access to Jefferson easier, Chancellor Saunders was appointed by the county court on February 16, 1814, to be the surveyor of county road No. 46. It was no honor for the local farmer or planter to have this job, and all were expected to do road work. By the early nineteenth century, Powhatan, like other counties, had begun to number its roads. Road work meant filling in the pot holes and clearing away the brush. People were fined for not performing this duty. Road No. 46 led from a place called Mill Bridge to Mr. Clarke's fence, but it ran through the main street of Jefferson and down to the ferry landing.<sup>6</sup> As the county order stated,

Saunders could use "the hands," meaning the laborers of James Cardin, John Pleasants, James Cocke, William Clarke, John Baugh, William Baugh, the late John Cox, and the men who lived on the plantation formerly owned by Samuel White. These were the names of planters who were near neighbors to the town. Saunders was appointed "in the room of John Baugh." That meant that Saunders replaced Baugh, who may have been busy with his other properties in Scottville.

In 1817, the sheriff of the county was ordered to call the magistrates to court because Samuel H. Saunders, Jesse Hughes, and George Payne, who ran the ferry from Jefferson to Goochland, wanted to raise the rates on the ferry. The court met and disallowed the increase.<sup>7</sup>

Then in August of the same year, Chancellor Saunders, James Bagby, William Clarke, and William Cocke were appointed to a commission to build a bridge across nearby Solomon's Creek.<sup>8</sup> The bids were advertised and let to the lowest bidder. By May of 1818, problems had begun. The fact that there was to be a bridge indicated that this road was important and more than just another fording place for a river or stream. People drove or rode through lazy creeks and small streams. Usually the court records read that small bridges, when necessary, were part of the usual road work. That this bridge was to be a bid construction indicated the importance of Solomon's Creek. Further, the records read that the bridge was to be rebuilt, indicating a previous construction. The court reviewed previous activity, including letting the bid to William Wilburn. Wilburn was to build the bridge below Samuel H. Saunders' mill. Wilburn, in accepting the contract, was to keep the bridge in good repair for seven years from March 1, 1818. He was to be paid \$300. Then,

We state it is our opinion that the said bridge is not built agreeable to the said engagement in as much as it was not done until upwards of a month after the time stipulated in the said bond. We further state it is our opinion that the abutments are not executed in a manner so as to stand the test of a freshet in the River, which has lately raised the wooden part from the Stone work so as to cause disrptures in the said abutments. We find that the wooden part of the said bridge is not altogether heart timber but may, it is by us presumable, answer the purpose for the Term of Seven years

from this date; but we entertain an opinion that the stone abutments are not done in a workmanlike manner and not agreeable in the rules of masonry, under the foregoing objection we have declined to receive the said bridge.

The opinion was signed by Chancellor Saunders, James Bagby, and William Clarke and was dated April 11, 1818.

Wilburn, the "undertaker," was also in court and represented by counsel. His answer to the commissioners was not recorded. The court took Wilburn's answer under consideration and appointed Jacob Michaux, Hugh French, Joseph Brackett, and John H. Steger to be added to the commissioners. A new examination of the bridge was ordered. A report of the new commissioners was to be returned at the next court session. If the new commissioners, or any three of them, reported that Wilburn's contract and bond were violated, they were to report in what manner he had failed to comply with the contract.<sup>9</sup>

At the July court, the second set of commissioners was in court and presented their report. The new bridge was well built and ought to be received. This time, the report was signed by William Cocke, who was one of the first commissioners, but who did not sign the first report. The court was in a dilemma. Whose report to believe? Rather typically, the court appointed a new set of commissioners, this time Mickleborough Montague, Noah Prince, Peter Leseur, and Danial Fuqua, to view the bridge and report to the court. The new commissioners were to make their report at the August court.<sup>10</sup>

The August report of the third set of commissioners was more detailed than the previous two reports. The description of the bridge was of interest. It read:

The pillar on the South side is very near ten feet high above the surfix (sic) of the water fully twelve feet long and six wide at the top with four Iron bars worked in the stone wall about four feet below the sleepers of the bridge, the pillar on the north side is nearly nine feet high, twelve long, and five at the top with four Iron bars placed in the wall nearly three feet below the sleepers with two strong Iron Chains, one on each side of the Bridge made fast with staples in both outside sleepers and extending to a large stump on each side. The wood work is forty eight feet long

and eleven feet ten inches wide with hand rails extending the whole length of the bridge.

The report noted that the north side was not as high as the south side of the bridge. Wilburn had to correct this. He also extended the bridge by six feet, though that was not in the original bond. The report closed with "the said bridge will answer every purpose intended." Therefore, this third set of commissioners felt that Wilburn ought to be paid his full amount. Accordingly, the court ordered the \$300 to be paid, plus any additional expense which Wilburn had incurred in the overbuilding of the bridge.<sup>11</sup> That was the last of Wilburn's bridge over Solomon's Creek, and it may be presumed that he kept the bridge in good repair for the necessary seven years.

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Sometime around 1820, Henry Whitlock came to Jefferson and opened an ordinary. License orders for Whitlock exist for 1820, 1821 and 1822.<sup>12</sup> By 1824, he was not only operating the ordinary at Jefferson, he was also running the ferry to Goochland.<sup>13</sup> In 1823, Gater and Richard Clarke were issued a license to operate an ordinary in Jefferson. It is unknown if this was a rival to Whitlock's or if Whitlock was out of business for a year.<sup>14</sup> Whitlock was back in operation by May of 1831, and licenses were issued to him through 1840.<sup>15</sup>

In 1836, Whitlock was refused a liquor license. Such action was premised upon the applicant's guilt of some minor crime or violation of the conditions of a previous license (such as selling liquor to black people or allowing them to assemble on the premises, selling liquor on Sundays or after hours). The reasons for this refusal were not given, but on December 5 of 1836, the license to Whitlock was renewed. This time a retailing addition meant that Whitlock expanded into the sale of foodstuffs. He was listed as a retailer in 1837, 1838, 1842, and 1843.<sup>16</sup> The Whitlock enterprises were extended in a house of "Private Entertainment" in 1843. This last term may have meant only that Whitlock refused to sell to the public.<sup>17</sup>

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In 1844, Whitlock did not operate, and after he ceased applying for his license, Patrick H. Whitlock was granted permission.<sup>18</sup> As late as 1875, William A. Whitlock operated a retail liquor bar in the town.<sup>19</sup>

Other names appeared. George Williams was a retailer in

Jefferson in 1836, 1837, 1840, 1842, 1843, 1844 but was out of the business after 1845.<sup>20</sup> Peter Archer was issued a license in 1829 to retail in Jefferson.<sup>21</sup> Tschaner Michaux and William Michaux were issued a license in 1836 and again in 1840.<sup>22</sup> Elbert Mosby was licensed in 1836, but he moved to Scottville in 1837.<sup>23</sup>

Others who had a retail store or ordinary or tavern or place of business in Jefferson were John Stratton in 1842 and 1843; Daniel Rogers in 1844. Rogers took out the first listing in the town for a place of private entertainment.<sup>24</sup> William A. Scruggs operated a place of private entertainment in 1848, 1849, 1850, 1851, and 1857.<sup>25</sup> The firm of John H. C. Tyler and Alexander C. Tyler came to town in 1850 and lasted until 1857.<sup>26</sup> The firm of William E. Harris and W. D. Taylor started in 1854 and appeared again on the records for 1856.<sup>27</sup> Others were Jno. Livingston in 1856, John Cox in 1849, and Edward Swann in 1857. In all, some seventy licenses were issued from 1799 to 1856 for the thriving river town.<sup>28</sup>

After the Civil War, from 1874 to 1880, James C. Jordan and Edward A. Baugh, William A. Whitlock, J. Nelson Harris, and Moses F. Swann operated bars in the town.<sup>29</sup> By the latter date, Jefferson town began to die.

In 1876, J. E. Maxey was the surveyor of the county. Maxey made a map of the town which showed the conditions in the late nineteenth century. All the land that had once been a town had come into the hands of two people. Mrs. J. Michaux owned five-and-a-half of the original eight blocks, containing lots 1, 2, 5, 6, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, and 25 through 32. The other property holder was J. C. Jordan who owned two whole blocks and two lots: numbers 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 19, 20, 23 and 24. All of Jordan's property was on the north side of the old main street. Only lot number 18 of the Michaux estate had a house, and there was a town building left on the Jordan property, on lots number 19 and 20.

In 1931, G. D. Hubbard surveyed the property. He used the Michaux survey of 1876 by Maxey. On May 14, 1963, the property was again surveyed for Miss Constance Johnson of Powhatan by Hart and Bell, a firm of surveyors. In the 1963 survey, the two southeastern blocks were only a vague memory and the town was surrounded by Michaux property. The tavern on lot 19 was in ruins as was the stone house across the street on lot 18. Only the ruins of an icehouse on lot 11 remained. Jefferson town was dead.

The question remains, what killed it? For more than 75 years, the town of Jefferson thrived. A. J. Davis, the New York architect, sent his plans to Phillip St. George Cocke at Jefferson, which Davis thought was the county seat of Powhatan. Taverns thrived, a ferry moved back and forth from Goochland, people built houses and lived in the town. Yet, by 1977, on a visit to the town site, only trees, vague mounds and a ruined brick chimney remained. Poison ivy covered all. The main street of the port was a cow path. Why?

The answer lies in the fact that the river was no longer the highway of Powhatan. An entire century of people had grown up thinking of land highways and improved road facilities. They no longer thought of the James River as the great free waterway to the west. It was in the 1870's also that Virginia finally gave up the dream of tapping the western trade by the James River and Kanawha Canal route. That expensive waterway, a dream of George Washington's, had capitulated to the new, faster railroad. The Richmond and Allegheny Railroad ran on the opposite shore. With the decline of river traffic, Jefferson had no reason to exist. The town became the end of a road going nowhere, not a stopping place for those going to Goochland on the north bank. Jefferson ceased to be useful.

Another reason for the death of the town was the arrival of the automobile. Jefferson was off the highway. Highways in the twentieth century crossed the river going north or south, but at Cartersville or at old Michaux Ferry-Maiden's Adventure. There was no need to cross the James River at Jefferson. Once on the other side, the traveller was still in farm country and not at another village. The roads to Jefferson dropped from three to one. By 1977 that one road ran out of pavement and became a dirt path to the property where the once-thriving community stood. Eventually the name was taken away. When someone mentioned Jefferson, people thought of the wide junction of highway #522 and state route #711. The original town had become a wilderness, a quiet spot on the slow-moving James River, a series of stones in the riverbed, a cool spot on a hot summer's day.

#### CHAPTER 8 FOOTNOTES

1. *Powhatan County Order Book* #6, 23.
2. William Eleroy Curtis, "The True Thomas Jefferson," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 10, No. 3, (January, 1903), 334.

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); #7, 214, 457; #8, 81.  
1, 241; #11, 185.

3.  
5.  
15, 63, 387.  
7.

23, 13-14; #25, 277-279, *passim*.  
8; #25, 280; #24, 254-255, 270, 448; #26, 111,

19. *ibid.*, #52, 109.
20. *ibid.*, #24, 40, 270, 451; #25, 280; #26, 115, 359-362; #27, 21.
21. *ibid.*, #21, 22.
22. *ibid.*, #24, 40; #25, 280.
23. *ibid.*, #24, 254-255.
24. *ibid.*, #26, 118, 359-360; #27, 20, 22.
25. *ibid.*, #28, 45, 73, 186, 361, 363, 519-520.
26. *ibid.*, #29, 204, 83, 507; #28, 365, 521.
27. *ibid.*, #29, 204, 323, 508.
28. *ibid.*, #29, 30 *passim*.
29. *ibid.*, #32, 36, 109, 358, 540.

easy water transportation. That was how the citizens and officials looked at it. It was to be improved transportation, not subject to the tides of the James River.

Second, there was much discussion of the Appomattox River Connection which was to run to Farmville from Petersburg. That branch would bring new outlets for the southern part of the county. With these outlets, citizens would gain a new prosperity. More than ever before, Powhatan needed connecting ferries.

With the return of local ferry operation to the county, there were requests for increases in the ferry rates. In June of 1809, Thomas E. Randolph appeared before the county court to ask for an increase in the rates he could charge at Jefferson.<sup>15</sup> A month later on July 20, at the next court, Jordan Harris proposed raising the ferry rates at Jude's.<sup>16</sup> These two events implied several things: Jude's ferry was out of the hands of that family and that there was a ferry at Jefferson.

By October 15, 1817, the Jefferson ferry was being operated by Samuel Saunders. Saunders was ordered to do a better job with the operation of the ferry, implying that he had not done as well as he might. He was also ordered to appear in court to give bond and security for the operation of the facility.<sup>17</sup> Saunders apparently did not have the necessary money for his bond. In November, Samuel H. Saunders and Hannah, his wife, gave deeds of trust on all they owned, including the ferry.<sup>18</sup>

Henry Whitlocke gave a deed of trust on the Jefferson ferry on October 19, 1826, to Charles Ellis and Jno. Allan, "Merchants and partners trading under the firm of Ellis and Allan." John W. Dance and William S. Dance were made trustees on property that was listed as, "the Ferry across James River at Jefferson in the County of Powhatan, and one lot of Land in the said Town of Jefferson, known by the number 17 . . ." <sup>19</sup> Apparently all of the ferries that were to make money did not do so, but one might have expected the Jefferson ferry to be profitable.

Down until the Civil War, little was written about ferries in Powhatan. They probably ran. All transportation was disrupted by the war. In the county records appeared a copy of a note sent to Powhatan and other counties from Amelia. It read that the Amelia court ordered John N. Brazeal, P. F. Southall, and A. C. Tucker to meet with commissioners from Chesterfield, Powhatan, and Cumberland counties to confer "with each other as to the propriety of

establishing Ferrys and regulating charges, etc., across Appomattox River and make report to their respective Courts." The note was dated August 7, 1865. At that time there was very little trade or transport between counties.<sup>20</sup>

Then came the railroad, which killed the James River and Kanawha Canal in 1880. It had been a Virginia dream. It cost too much money and did not tie the Ohio River to the Chesapeake. The Canal had continued to operate, despite financial losses, river freshets, and cheaper transportation. The Civil War killed it, for both Confederate and Union troops destroyed portions of it. After the war, the Federal government attempted to breathe new life into the Canal. Its facilities stretched in ruins for miles along the north shore from Richmond to Buchanan. No part of the Canal ever made a great profit, except the turning basin and docks around Richmond. Still the little ferries moved across the James River to the various depots along the Canal. Finally, in the 1880's, the canal was beaten. The Richmond and Allegheny Railroad tracks were laid on the towpath beside the canal or over the dried remains of the all-water route. Nonetheless, the railroad brought the profit that the Canal did not.

By the 1880's, ferries were operated by the railroad, if they were not licensed for private control. In August of 1880, Moses Swann applied for a license to operate the ferry at Jefferson. The county court found that Mrs. Mary E. Michaux had a legally established ferry within half a mile of Swann's proposed one, a ferry that was not "disused" for the last two years and six months, and so rejected Swann's application.<sup>21</sup>

The Norwood ferry was a private operation, that is, it was not established by the railroad. On February 1, 1881, W. T. Walker was granted permission in Goochland to operate a public ferry across from his farm, Dover, to Norwood in Powhatan, across the lands of Mrs. Nannie R. Selden, Charles R. and William U. Kennon. In accordance with Section 13, Chapter 64 of the 1873 *Code of Virginia*, the Powhatan court appointed L. H. Finney, W. W. Campbell, and J. S. Winfree as commissioners to view the proposed ferry. They reported favorably. The court ordered the ferry to be operated at the rate of 4¢ per head and 4¢ per wheel as the law directed.<sup>22</sup>

The Norwood ferry came in two parts. First, passengers who wished to catch the train to Richmond or to go up river, had to