

The Historian

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Richmond County Museum*



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Indian Banks: Preserving and Sharing a Virginia Treasure

Sandy and Dean Garretson have owned Indian Banks at Simonson for about ten years, or perhaps it has owned them. The couple, formerly of Upper Marlboro, Maryland, realize that this colonial seat of the Glascock family, that rises from the former site a Moraughtacund Indian town and is listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places, must be lovingly preserved and held in trust for future generations. Fortunately, the Garretsons also realize how rewarding it is to share their charming home so replete with history, with today's community as well.

On September 14th, Richmond County Museum partnered with the Garretsons to host the museum's annual historic house party fundraiser. Guests explored the spreading peninsula where Morattico and Lancaster Creeks flow into the Rappahannock. They looked out on the beautiful natural harbor where the Morataughtacunds first caught sight of Captain John Smith's barge. Here in 1608 Smith and his men were entertained by the tribe and joined by Mosco, the black-bearded part-Indian guide on their exploratory journey up and down the river.



A replica of Smith's barge of exploration built by Reedville Fishermen's Museum on display at Indian Banks



Guests view the exhibits set up on September 14th at the "Historic House Party."

Thomas Glascock sailed into Morattico Creek in the 1650s to claim the land he patented. In time an important public tobacco shipping wharf would be established here, where vessels loaded with great hogsheads of the lucrative Virginia leaf sailed for ports in the British Isles, thus creating the wealth to build such a fine house as Indian Banks and furnish it with imported luxury goods.

Early History

The name Glascock is ancient Anglo-Saxon and may be derived from the words *glas* and *cot*, meaning a small house where a glass blower lived. Thomas Glascock immigrated to the Virginia Colony from the county of Middlesex near London in 1643, bringing his wife Jane and two others for which he received a "head rights" grant of 200 acres on the Piankatank River. In 1652, he surrendered these 200 acres in order to receive a new grant of 600 acres on Morattico Creek in what was then Lancaster County.

From the time of his arrival in the Northern Neck until his death twenty five years later in 1677, the immigrant Thomas Glascock (I) would have lived in a more modest frame house, from which he or an overseer managed the clearing of forests and the planting and shipping of tobacco. Glascock relatives spread out to other farms in the area.

The imposing brick mansion may have been built as early as 1699, but certainly was completed by 1728, when resident Captain William Glascock, son of Thomas Glascock (II) and grandson of Thomas (I), the immigrant, married Esther Ball of Lancaster County, first cousin of Mary Ball, George Washington's mother.

The Murder

Another grandson of Thomas Glascock (I), the immigrant, also named Thomas, whose father was Gregory Glascock, lived on Farnham Creek about three miles north of Indian Banks. On November 5, 1723 he stabbed to death William Forrester of Richmond County. His son Gregory Glascock was named as an accessory to the crime, but was later released. The case was heard before the General Court of Virginia sitting in Williamsburg. The convicted Thomas apparently fled west and his estate was forfeited to the Proprietors of the Northern Neck. Much of the confiscated land was acquired by Colonel Robert "King" Carter of Corotoman. Carter's 1726 will stated, "if my son John comes to enjoy the said Glascock's land under a good title that he then further consider the said Glascock's children."



Overseer's House



The central hall opens to front and back, a feature typical of many early Virginia Houses

A Home for Three Centuries

The house has been continuously inhabited since it was completed. As Richmond County Museum docent and tour guide for the day, Becky Marks told visitors, "This house was built to impress!" Two massive chimneys rise above a steep hip roof. When the walls were new, bright green glazed bricks shimmered among almost cherry red bricks. The projecting belt course between floors and a wave decoration of brick in the jack arch above the front entrance contributed to the dazzling impression. The latter is an English motif rarely seen in America.

Going inside, one gets a feeling of warmth. Arranged in a practical floor plan, the rooms are ample and gracious, but have the coziness and lack of pretention of a farm home. Pleasing features are the large corner fireplaces in the small room to the right of the front entrance, now used as a library, and in the large dining room just to the rear of it.

Doors have hand-forged L hinges and deep paneling surrounds the windows, some of which have window seats. Seeing the plaster walls, one wonders if there was perhaps more paneling that was removed at some point. The large deeply carved mantels appear to be post-colonial, perhaps belonging to the 1830s time period. A spacious kitchen wing with screen porch was added to the right side of the house in 1975.

Preservation

James and Connie Durham, owners of Indian Banks just before the Garretsons, in a huge undertaking, replaced the old crumbling brick basement walls with cinderblock, but when the the Garretsons arrived they found water leaking into the basement. To remedy the problem, it was necessary to dig a two-foot deep trench around the entire foundation. They did the digging themselves and had an expert point the bricks. The Garretsons also did extensive renovations on the overseer's house which apparently predates the main house. An underground shelf of brick that projects from the foundation of the overseer's house seems to be for drainage and is a feature usually found only in early English houses. Steps for entrances to the main house and the overseer's house were constructed from stone found on the property, that has been identified as ballast from ships' holds.



The land façade reveals the L-shape of Indian Banks, indicating its Jacobean influence. An ample dining room with corner fireplace occupies the first floor of the ell, at left.

In the basement at Indian Banks is an extensive collection of archaeological material collected on the property and preserved by the various owners. Many Moraughtacund artifacts were discovered by the Robert Allen Gambels of Richmond who bought the house in 1932 as a country home. Among the artifacts are pottery, axe heads, knives of bone, pipes and projectile points, as well as a stone foot-shaped mold used in making moccasins. Mr. Gambel was a leader of the rural cooperative that introduced electricity to the area.

Many initials and names have been carved over the years into the soft dark red brick in various places around the outside walls. The year 1699 appears twice under front windows and GW and a Masonic symbol remind us that George Washington was related to the family through Esther Ball Glascock. Perhaps as a young man he stayed at her home during the time he was said to have courted Lucy Grymes the “Lowland Beauty” of neighboring Morattico Hall,” just across Morattio Creek from Indian Banks. She eventually married Henry Lee II and became the grandmother of Robert E. Lee.

David Jett

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The Mission of the Richmond County Museum is to Preserve, Protect, and Interpret the Artifacts and Heritage of the County through its Exhibits, Programs, and Research.

Richmond County Museum

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