

The Historian

Bulletin of the
Richmond County Museum

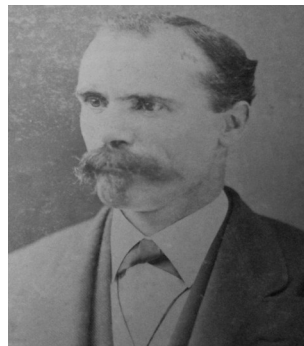


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The Lemoine-Griffith House: Marriage, Memory and Mystery in Emmerton

The union that gave this Richmond County landmark its hyphenated name occurred in 1899, when Olivia Staige Lemoine, daughter of its builder, Oscar M. Lemoine, was married to local merchant, Benjamin Blake Griffith. Today this expansive white frame Victorian farmhouse with a third-story central tower and inviting front porch, is one of only a few 19th century buildings remaining in the village of Emmerton. It stands proudly beside Route 3, about six miles southeast of Warsaw on the corner of Mulberry Road (Route 619) just across this road from Jerusalem Baptist Church.

When the house was constructed in 1887, the privations caused by the Civil War and the great economic depression of 1873-79, were easing and the *Northern Neck News* could report that Mr. O. M. Lemoine is building a “fine new dwelling house in Emmerton.” Lemoine’s large general store stood just across Mulberry Road from his home. A barn and a family cemetery, now gone, the graves moved to Farnham Episcopal Church, were once behind the residence where a smoke house with pyramid roof still stands. The ample home speaks of a time when families were larger. Oscar M. Lemoine, was one of eight children of Dr. Fereol Lemoine, Jr.



Maria Braxton Lemoine, great-great-great grand-daughter of Carter Braxton and her husband, Oscar Mitchell Lemoine.

Courtesy of Vance Hall and David Griffith



Current owners of Lemoine-Griffith House, from left, Darlene and David Griffith, and David’s daughter, Donna Griffith. Oddly, David, who has done extensive renovations to preserve the house bears no relation to the earlier Griffith residents.

Courtesy of David Griffith

Front Yard the Site of an Early Church

Here stood the historic Royal Oak Baptist Church, the seed that grew to become Emmerton’s Jerusalem Church of today. Maria Braxton Lemoine’s grandfather, Reverend Thomas Corbin Braxton founded the congregation in 1832 when a rift occurred at Farnham Baptist Church where he was pastor. He shepherded 143 members to the new site. Here they worshipped seated on wooden slab benches, in a small one-story log building beneath towering old oak trees. By 1840, the membership had outgrown the rustic building and a larger church was built a short distance to the west.

As the members of Jerusalem Baptist Church increased and the settlement grew, in 1837 a post office called Durrettsville was established nearby at the intersection of Route 3 and the road leading to the Rappahannock, now called Sharps Road (Route 642).

Durrettsville and the The Lemoine Family

The new village post office of 1837 was named in honor of resident, Dr. Richard Durrett who practiced medicine there as well as serving as Richmond County Overseer of the Poor for several years beginning in 1826. Another early resident of Durrettsville was Dr. Fereol Lemoine, Jr. who was of the second generation of this family in the Northern Neck. His father, Dr. Fereol Lemoine, received his medical education in France and emigrated from Calais in the late 1700s, eventually settling and rearing a family at "White Cottage" near Lancaster Courthouse.

Dr. Fereol Lemoine, Jr. was born in Lancaster County in 1804 and married Ann Maria Saunders in Richmond County in 1833. Their home, called Oakland, was on the Sharps road. He served as postmaster at Richmond County Courthouse, 1831-33. During his tenure the name of the county seat was changed to Warsaw. Lemoine was also Richmond County Sheriff and Commissioner of the Revenue, 1849-1852.

During the Civil War, on June 13th and 14th, 1864, about four hundred and seventy-five soldiers of the Thirty-sixth U.S. Colored Troops camped at Durrettsville. This incident must have lingered as a vivid memory in the minds of village residents for many years afterwards. The black troops, stationed at Point Lookout, Maryland had crossed the Potomac under the command of Col. Alonzo Draper, to plunder the Northern Neck. They carried away horses, mules, cattle, wagons and farm implements intended for use at a free black settlement planned near Point Lookout. On the morning of June 15th, the black troops marched from Durrettsville to Union Wharf on the Rappahannock, spent a day and a half rebuilding the burned wharf, then embarked for Essex County where the raid concluded on June 20th.

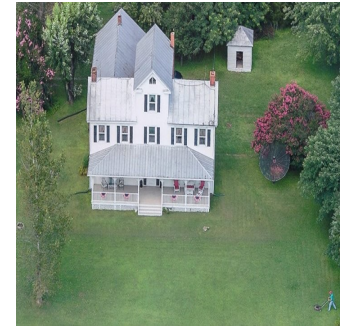
Fereol Lemoine, Jr.'s son, Oscar Mitchell Lemoine was born in Durrettsville in 1841. At age 19, he was working as a merchant and at age 25, in 1870, he was a boarding in the home of store owner John Staige Braxton, son of the founder of Jerusalem Baptist Church. Braxton purchased the property where the Lemoine-Griffith

House stands from John R. Conway and Son, merchants of Baltimore in 1868, the tract then containing 80 acres. It was known as Hill's Store, then Braxton's Store.

A Fresh Start:

Emmerton is Born at Braxton's Store

Mysteriously, in 1869 the post office at Durrettsville closed and its postmaster, James A. Johnson traveled just one mile up the road to become the first postmaster at Emmertton. Early rural post offices were usually located in general stores, and it was not unusual for their names to be changed. Probably the store at Durrettsville closed and John Staige Braxton's store offered a good place for the post office to be relocated nearby. Both Braxton and Oscar Lemoine returned from service in the Confederate Army to resume work as merchants. Oscar almost certainly worked in the store of his father-in-law to be.



Oscar and Maria Lemoine's son Randolph Braxton did not live to enjoy the Lemoine estate. He died of typhoid fever at age 22, in 1899, while a cadet at Virginia Military Academy, in Lexington, Virginia. He would have been about ten years old, sister Olivia Staige, twelve and brother Oscar, Jr., six when the enlarged 1887 house was built.

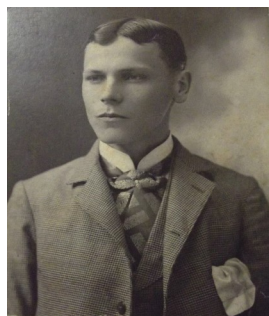
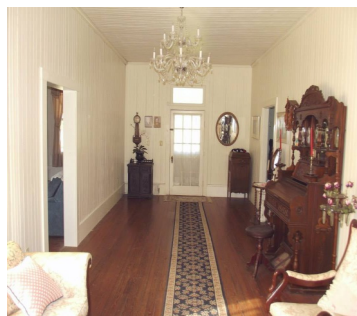
Courtesy Vance Hall and David Griffith

Braxton's daughter, Maria was married to Oscar in 1876. The Reconstruction era village was named in honor of Emma Lemoine, Oscar's younger, unmarried sister then 24 years old, whom he is said to have idolized. She would live with the family all of her life.

A House within a House ?

From an opening in the wall of the basement under the rear wing of the house, a crawl space and brick foundation under the front portion can be observed. Around the base of this foundation apparently earlier, larger bricks and the base of a brick chimney sitting on stone rubble seem to indicate that this simple front section of four rooms (two downstairs, two upstairs) predates the present house and somehow was incorporated within it.

Was the “fine new dwelling house” of 1887 built around an earlier house on the property or was one dismantled and used to build the present house? Family memory says that Olivia Staige Lemoine was born in the “smaller house” in 1879. Perhaps the smaller house was built by John Staige Braxton when he acquired the property in 1868, or was constructed even earlier by William Hill of Hill’s Store.



The front hall has the same dimensions as the “tower” on the third floor. Like much of the house, it is finished in wooden bead-board paneling. A pump organ replicates an earlier one in the hall. Benjamin Blake Griffith is shown at the time of his wedding in 1899. Courtesy David Griffith and Vance Hall

The Griffith Connection and a New Century

The marriage of Benjamin Griffith to Staige Lemoine in 1899 began a new generation in the house. Oscar died suddenly in 1897 at age 56 and subsequently Lemoine’s Store was sold to Ben Griffith’s brother, Fax. Ben also had a general store, which he expanded to include a Plymouth, Chevrolet and DeSoto dealership. The brothers operated a tomato canning factory as well. Ben and Staige had two children, Katherine who married William Tayloe Murphy, Sr., in 1923 and Emma who became the bride of Walter Vance Hall, Sr. in 1928.

William Tayloe Murphy, Sr., a native of Westmoreland County was a descendant of William Tayloe, II, builder of Mount Airy. He worked for his father-in-law selling cars in Emmerton and became the third president of Northern Neck State Bank in Warsaw in 1939. He was a state Delegate and state Treasurer.

Benjamin Griffith died in 1935 and Staige moved to Warsaw a year later. In 1943, the house was sold to Raymond Clarke whose family lived there until 1975. Subsequent owners were the Featheralls, until the 1980s, and then the Runnings.



Birthday party for Benjamin Blake Griffith, January 26, 1928. He is standing, rear center, wearing an overcoat. Wife, Olivia Staige Lemoine Griffith is on his right and daughter Katherine Griffith Murphy on her right. William Tayloe Murphy, Sr. is kneeling, front row, second from right, behind the dog. Courtesy of Vance Hall and David Griffith

A Preservation Success Story

By 2011, the house was under foreclosure and in serious need of repairs. David Griffith of Heathsville, Virginia, a retired electronics designer with a love of history and multiple construction skills, purchased it in December of that year. He moved in and began extensive renovations, replacing rotted wood, rewiring, and upgrading heating and air conditioning. He and Darlene Benson of Kilmarnock were married at Jerusalem Baptist Church in 2013. David’s research into the history of the house is a continuing effort to bring to light some of the many mysteries it conceals. David Jett



Emma Griffith, daughter of B.B. and Staige Griffith, married Walter Vance Hall in 1928. Her dress was made by a seamstress in Emmerton. Courtesy of Vance Hall and David Griffith

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Thanks

to David Griffith for sharing his knowledge and collection of Lemoine and Griffith family materials, including Richmond County Court and U.S. Census records and genealogical records prepared by Mary Ann Machen; and to W. Vance Hall, Jr.



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.

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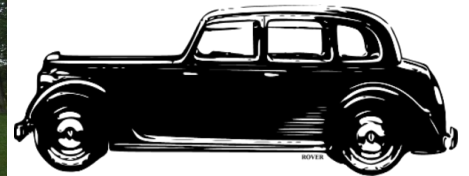
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*Please join us for our fifth annual
Historic House Party at the
Lemoine-Griffith House in Emmerton
Saturday September 19, 2015,
2 - 5 p. m.*



**Tours of the house, Vintage Car Show, Food,
Exhibits, Music. Tickets: \$25.00**

All to benefit museum, more information: call 333-3607

