

Society Receives Father Tabb Papers

In February, Amelia native George K. Taylor, now of Staunton, donated to the Society over three dozen primary and secondary documents pertaining to “Amelia’s gifted son – Poet, Priest, and Soldier – Father [John Banister] Tabb,” (1845-1909). The papers included clippings about Father Tabb’s funeral in November 1909 and the 1936 dedication of the Tabb Memorial. Located near the site of his former home, The Forest, which is no longer standing, the Memorial is off today’s Grub Hill Church Road. The papers also featured the text of a speech by Dr. Lewis H. Taylor of both Dykeland in Amelia County and Washington, D.C., from that dedication and a book of Father Tabb’s poetry in which Dr. Taylor had written an anecdote from the priest’s life.

The bulk of the papers, however, comprises primary documents, many in Father Tabb’s own hand, and others that he dictated to students and other transcribers at St. Charles College in Ellicott City, Maryland, during his late-life period of degenerating health and eyesight. These include some thirty-five poems, one or two of which perhaps have not been published. Most are on neat scraps of paper, postcards, folded notebook pages, or stationery. Several of the poems, written in a shaky or miniscule hand, are difficult to decipher.

Others contain small sketches done by Father Tabb, for which he also was noted.

The collection further contains four letters from Father Tabb, including one to Dr. Armistead G. Taylor (Lewis’ father), who also lived at Dykeland, near Chula, a few miles “down the creek” from The Forest. Tabb frequently visited Amelia during his post-Civil War career and sometimes left quatrains

or other literary tidbits with his friends and relatives. He often departed from such visits without much warning or goodbye, coming and going with little fanfare.

The Society has transcribed these papers gifted by Mr. Taylor and will preserve the originals for future research and possible display. Father Tabb published numerous poems in his lifetime in American and British journals, and his works sometime appear in poetry anthologies today.

John Banister Tabb is one of several minor Amelia County historical literary figures. Others include the prolific domestic writer Mary Virginia Hawes Terhune (also known as Marion Harland, 1830-1922) and African-American poet Herbert Clark Johnson (1913?-1988), whose 1943 volume, *Poems from Flat Creek*, reflect his experiences and reveries growing up in Amelia County.



Father John Banister Tabb and His Work

This year the Society received papers from Father Tabb (portrait, left, by Rodney Thomson). Documents included letters, poems, and sketches in his hand (as above), plus clippings and speech texts. George K. Taylor, now of Staunton, donated them from a small trove held by his family.

In The Background.
Augusta holds her son in law,
And Harriet the cat -
& pair of kets that I abhor,
And they, because of that,
Hold on to "Willie" & to "V"
And turn their sister back on me!

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President's Message

*"I sense there's something in the wind,
that seems like 'tragedy's at hand.'"*

The above sentiment, from "Sally's Song" in Danny Elfman's *The Nightmare before Christmas*, strikes me as particularly apt since at least late January 2020. We should all hope that "the play is *not* the thing," but the lyric seems to haunt us, given the ever circulating and deadly COVID-19 pandemic. Together with our pole-axed economy and continuing socially skeptical undercurrents across America, perhaps we should not be blamed for waiting for the other shoe to drop. But your Historical Society is hanging in there, and by more than a thread, even after a significant hiatus of in-person interactions and a relook of our "business as usual" model. Life goes on. Here is a quick update since my last communiqué of nearly a year ago, for which lapse I apologize.

Librarian Sylvia Gray is now working on Mondays on a voluntary basis. COVID precautions have impacted her duty days since last spring, in a period when operating funds tightened even more than usual. I sincerely appreciate her pro-active shift in employment on our behalf. Former President Pearl Clifton generally assists her, while I have picked up holding down the fort on Fridays. We are operating during normal hours (10 a.m.-4 p.m.) on those days, after having been by appointment only from August through October. I thank each of our volunteers who have contributed their time, money, and efforts to return the Society to a semblance of normality this autumn. This includes Ann Clarke, from whose COVID mask sales we received a generous donation, and from all of you who renewed or expanded your memberships. Special thanks to those who have contributed extra to keep us going.

I also thank Charlie Eudailey and Linda Shaffer as they completed their Board terms this year. Charlie departed at the end of March and Linda will wind up on New Year's Eve. We shall miss their input.

We also continue to receive artifact and document donations, such as the Tabb papers and a large collection of journals and magazines from Judge Valentine Southall, Jr., and others. Our map, photo, and book holdings have thus expanded, opening up new research areas of promising potential. I invite anyone interested in study, historical writing, curating, or archiving to assist us in projects that will edify our members and the general public, and that may offer educational outreach and fundraising potential. We always have good ideas in mind, but often not enough man- and woman-power to see them to good effect.

Finally, the Board of Directors has begun investigation to structurally shore up Namozine Church (especially the chimney, ceiling, and underpinnings), and to organizationally assist the Amelia "Save the Hindle Building" Committee. COVID precautions have interrupted progress on those efforts, but each will remain on our radar. We hope next year will turn the corner on today's calamities—and early vaccine deliveries give us hope—but I pledge that we shall approach whatever challenges that we encounter pragmatically. Patience will be a virtue. In the meanwhile, keep a candle in the window and persevere. I wish each of you happy holidays.

Michael F. Whitaker, President

Recipes for Christmas

—From *Marion Harland's Cookery for Beginners, 1893*

Sponge Cake

Do not attempt this until you have had some practice in management of ovens, and let your first trial be with what are sometimes termed “snow balls,” – that is, small sponge cakes, frosted. Put six eggs into a scale and ascertain their weights *exactly*. Allow for the sponge cake the weight of eggs in sugar, and half their weight in flour. Grate the yellow peel from a lemon and squeeze the juice upon it. Let it stand ten minutes and strain through coarse muslin, pressing out every drop.

Beat the egg yolks very light and then the sugar into them; the lemon juice; the whites, which should have been beaten into a standing froth; –finally, stir the sifted flour swiftly and lightly. Bake in a steady oven from twenty-five to thirty minutes, glancing at them now and then, to make sure they are not scorching, and covering with white paper as they harden on top.

This is an easy, and if implicitly obeyed, a sure recipe.

Ambrosia

Peel fine, sweet oranges, and cut into small pieces, extracting the seeds. Put a layer in a glass dish and sprinkle well with sugar. In this scatter a thick coating of grated cocoanut, strewing this also with powdered sugar. Over the cocoanut lay thin slices of bananas, peeled and cut crosswise. Fill the dish in this order, the top being covered with banana.



Marion Harland and Grandchildren – The frontispiece from *When Grandmamma Was New, The Story of a Virginia Childhood* by Marion Harland – Lothrop Publishing Co., Boston, 1899, & Norwood Press, J. S. Cushing & Co. – Berwick & Smith, Norwood, MA.

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→ Also accepting other selected Amelia historical school items, such as pennants, student newspapers, ticket stubs, posters, sports/event programs, tokens and small souvenirs.

“Contributions in Cash, Kind & Spirit”

Thank You!

As *A.D. 2020*—a truly calamitous year—passes, the Board of Directors gratefully recognizes each and every person and organization that generously contributed their money, time, artifacts, other resources, and efforts to the sustainment of the Society’s mission and operations. Our friends, officers, and members remain a continuing source of hope and inspiration in these dire times. The Board cites those below for their beneficence since our last newsletter in November 2019. Please forgive us if we inadvertently have overlooked you or anyone you know.

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