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### The Story of Longwood: The Johnston Venable Estate in Prince Edward County, Virginia

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THE STORY OF  
LONGWOOD



**JANE WARING RUFFIN**

Published by  
**STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE**  
Farmville, Virginia  
1946



THE STORY OF  
LONGWOOD

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The Johnston-Venable Estate  
in  
Prince Edward County, Virginia

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Prepared as part of the requirement of the seminar class in  
Southern history, State Teachers College, Farmville, Virginia

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JANE WARING RUFFIN

June, 1945



## LONGWOOD

PROPERTY ACQUIRED 1765 BY PETER JOHNSTON.  
HOME OF PETER JOHNSTON, JR., LIEUTENANT  
IN LEE'S LEGION AND JUDGE OF CIRCUIT  
COURT OF VIRGINIA BIRTHPLACE OF GENERAL  
JOSEPH E. JOHNSTON.

PURCHASED 1811 BY ABRAHAM B. VENABLE, U. S.  
SENATOR; ORGANIZER AND FIRST PRESIDENT  
OF FIRST BANK OF VIRGINIA. GIVEN BY SAMUEL  
WOODSON VENABLE IN 1814 TO NATHANIEL E.  
VENABLE, OFFICER IN WAR OF 1812 THE PRESENT  
HOUSE ERECTED BY HIM IN 1815.

BIRTHPLACE OF LIEUTENANT COLONEL CHARLES  
SCOTT VENABLE, C. S. A. (1827-1900), MEMBER OF  
GENERAL R. E. LEE'S STAFF, PROFESSOR OF MATH-  
EMATICS AND CHAIRMAN OF FACULTY, UNIVERSITY  
OF VIRGINIA; AUTHOR.

THIS TABLET PLACED BY DESCENDANTS OF  
NATHANIEL E. AND MARY EMBRA SCOTT VENABLE  
1941

*Bronze Placque Placed Inside Doors at Longwood*

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## PROLOGUE

ANY sunny afternoon in the spring or fall of the year will find a group of college girls gaily trudging the narrow, twisted road that leads from Farmville to Longwood, the hundred acre estate<sup>1</sup> owned by the State Teachers College and situated approximately a mile east of the town. The usual route taken from the college leads from Main Street to Fourth Street, thence up Virginia Street and out Longwood Avenue, and the Longwood gates appear just above the junction of the old Farmville-Rice and Farmville-Hampden-Sydney roads.

Across a well-kept lawn and above the formal cluster of giant box bushes rises the large frame house, viewed first from the "approach".<sup>2</sup> The gravel road curves and passes in front of the house, which is raised some six feet off the ground on a brick foundation. The size of the stately trees which shadow the broad, level lawn as well as the house, are indicative of the many years through which they have stood guard there. The generous one story porch, topped by a balcony rail, leaves ample room for a spacious window on either side of the face of the house. Six wooden steps, which lead up to the porch, have borne the tread of many feet, especially since the place was bought by the State Teachers College as a recreation spot in 1928.<sup>3</sup> The door knocker, which was placed there

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1. Actual acreage of the estate is 103.58 acres. See pp. 34 f.

2. The "approach" is the term given to that part of the house which is seen first from the main road when the actual front is the other side of the building; it is not to be confused with the back of the house.

3. Deed Book 80, p. 108, records in the Prince Edward County Courthouse.



in 1929, erroneously bears the date 1828.<sup>4</sup> Entering the double doors with their heavy locks, one sees on the left wall a bronze plaque, which was placed there in 1941 by the descendants of Nathaniel E. and Mary Embra Scott Venable, who had the house built in 1815. The plaque reads in part:<sup>5</sup>

Longwood[.] Property acquired in 1765 by Peter Johnston. Home of Peter Johnston, Jr. . . . Birth-place of General Joseph E. Johnston. . . . Purchased in 1811 by Abraham B. Venable. . . . Given by Samuel Woodson Venable in 1814 to Nathaniel E. Venable. . . . The present house erected by him in 1815.

Much has been written about Longwood, emphasizing both the Johnston and Venable families. The most outstanding of these works are Harriett Venable Miller's *Word Pictures of Longwood*, printed exclusively for members of the family in 1941, and Miss Sally Bruce Dickinson's sketch of the estate in *Today and Yesterday In the Heart of Virginia*.<sup>6</sup> However, no complete and accurate story of Longwood has ever been told, and to fill in the outlines of an unfinished story is the aim of the author.

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4. The incorrect date was taken from a water spout on the house, according to statements to the author by Dr. J. L. Jarman, president of the college, and S. L. Graham, business manager of the college.

5. Complete text on p. 34.

6. Sally Bruce Dickinson, "Longwood", *Today and Yesterday in the Heart of Virginia* (A reprint of the edition of the Farmville Herald, March 29, 1935, Farmville, Virginia: The Farmville Herald, 1935), pp. 265-269.

## CHAPTER I.

### GENESIS

**I**N 1765 Peter Johnston, Sr. moved from Osborne's Landing to Prince Edward County, where he named his home Cherry Grove, later to be known as Longwood.<sup>1</sup> Much of the early history of Longwood remains to be positively authenticated. Records in the Prince Edward Courthouse indicate no land which corresponds to Longwood being deeded to Peter Johnston, Sr. after Prince Edward was separated from Amelia County in 1754. The land, then, was purchased by him while he still lived at Osborne's Landing, where he settled in 1727.<sup>2</sup> In this case the land record would be either at Amelia Courthouse or at Prince George Courthouse<sup>3</sup>, but it could not be found by the author. In her sketch of Longwood, Miss Sally Bruce Dickinson assumes that the land was purchased from John Nash.<sup>4</sup> However, in his will, Peter Johnston, Sr. leaves to his son, Peter Johnston, Jr. the land purchased from Thomas Nash.<sup>5</sup> If the land transfer to the

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1. Edgar Erksine Hume, *Peter Johnston, Junior* (Southern Sketches, Number 4, first series. Charlottesville, Virginia: The Historical Publishing Company, 1935), pp. 3-4.

2. Robert M. Hughes, *General Johnston* (Great Commanders. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1893), p. 5.

3. The land composing Longwood is part of what was Prince George County until 1735. Amelia County, including this tract of land was formed from Prince George in 1735, and in 1754 Prince Edward County, including Longwood, was formed from Amelia County.

4. Sally Bruce Dickinson, "Longwood", *Today and Yesterday in the Heart of Virginia* (A reprint of the Farmville Herald, March 29, 1935. Farmville, Virginia: The Farmville Herald, 1935), p. 268.

5. Will Book 2, p. 72, records in the Prince Edward Courthouse.

elder Johnston could be found these items would be cleared up, but they are not essential to the story of Longwood.

The author has been unable to establish definitely the boundaries of the estate of Peter Johnston, Sr. However, it is known that his land extended beyond the present site of Hampden-Sydney College since in 1774 he offered to the Hanover Presbytery a tract of land on which to erect the Prince Edward Academy,<sup>6</sup> which later grew into Hampden-Sydney College. In addition he willed to his second son, Andrew, the portion of land known as the "courthouse tract"<sup>7</sup> indicating that he must have owned land as far south and west as Worsham, since the courthouse of Prince Edward County was at that place until its removal to Farmville in 1872.<sup>8</sup>

Peter Johnston, Sr., was the first of that family to come to this country from Scotland.<sup>9</sup> He migrated to Virginia and settled at Osborne's Landing in 1727 at the age of 17. Osborne's Landing was situated on the James River, near Petersburg, and was then the chief place in the colony for the inspection of tobacco and an important shipping point. America had been opened to emigrants from Scotland only with the union of England and Scotland a few years before, but Scottish emigrants were still regarded as foreigners in the colonies. Doubtless the youthful Johnston ran into difficulties, and he climbed the ladder to success in the mercantile business in which he engaged only step by step. He was so engrossed in business affairs that he reached his fifty-first year before he could find time for an adventure into matrimony. In March 1761, he married Mrs. Martha Rogers, daughter of Mr. John Butler, a merchant of Prince George County, who lived on the south side of the James River below

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6. Minutes of the Hanover Presbytery for 1774, from a photostatic copy in the Hampden-Sydney College Library.

7. Will Book 2, *loc. cit.*

8. Charles Edward Burrell, *A History of Prince Edward County* (Richmond, Virginia: The Williams Printing Company, 1922), pp. 40-41.

9. For more about the Johnston family origins, see Hughes, *op. cit.*

Petersburg. In 1765, Johnston, with his wife and young son, Peter, Jr., removed to Prince Edward County.<sup>10</sup>

Evidence that Peter Johnston, Sr., soon became a leading man in the section in which he finally settled, Prince Edward County, is given by the fact that he was elected as one of the original trustees of Hampden-Sydney College in 1775,<sup>11</sup> by the fact that he was selected a member of the House of Burgesses from Prince Edward County in 1769,<sup>12</sup> and by the fact that he is referred to as "Peter Johnston, gentleman" in Prince Edward Code Book for 1775.<sup>13</sup>

Though according to all available sources of information, Peter Johnston, Sr. was an ardent or at least active member of the Church of England,<sup>14</sup> he was interested and instrumental in the formation of the Prince Edward Academy under the auspices of the Hanover Presbytery. In 1774 he offered a tract of land which he estimated to be 100 acres to the Presbytery for the site of the school.<sup>15</sup> His offer was accepted on February 2, 1775.<sup>16</sup> The tract of land, when measured for the school, was found to be only 98 acres,<sup>17</sup> but work on the school was begun at once. To

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10. Hume, *op. cit.*, p. 6, See also, Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

11. Calender of Virginia State Papers, v. 6, p. 25.

12. *Journals of the Burgesses of Virginia, 1766-1769* (Richmond, Virginia: Colonial Press, Everett Waddey Company, 1906), p. 182.

13. Prince Edward Code Book for 1775, p. 493, Prince Edward Courthouse.

14. Hume, *op. cit.*, p. 4: "Peter Johnston the elder had many of the characteristics of members of the Episcopal Church of Scotland. . . . To the new Presbyterian college, for all that he was a high churchman, Peter Johnston the elder sent his son and namesake, whom he had hoped to see enter the Episcopal holy orders."

Also Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 6: "Mr. Johnston was a member of the Episcopal Church, and all his predilections and opinions were conservative in their tendency and in favor of the crown. . . . Mr. Johnston was a staunch churchman."

Also Dickinson, *op. cit.*, p. 265: "Mr. Peter Johnston, Sr. was a member of the Episcopal Church and was loyal to the crown. . . . A staunch churchman."

15. Minutes of the Hanover Presbytery for 1774, from a photostatic copy in the Hampden-Sydney College Library.

16. Minutes of the Hanover Presbytery for 1775, from a photostatic copy in the Hampden-Sydney College Library.

17. *Loc. cit.*

this school the older Johnston sent his son Peter<sup>18</sup> and his other three sons,<sup>19</sup> born after his removal to Prince Edward County.<sup>20</sup>

Little is known of the dwelling of the Johnstons. It is probable that the site of the house is the same as the site of the present house at Longwood. The house itself is described as a "rambling, story and half frame cottage, much like the one at Slate Hill."<sup>21</sup> Mr. Johnston surely found Longwood virgin land, probably mostly wooded, and he created from it a working farm and turned the house into a cultivated home. Judging from the characters and careers of the four sons<sup>22</sup> who were reared here, one presumes that the Johnstone household was pervaded with a wholesome, intellectual atmosphere, an atmosphere conducive to the development of such citizens as these four sons were.

Peter Johnston, Sr., died at Longwood and was buried there. His grave at the present time is not marked.

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18. Hume, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

19. Dickinson, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

20. Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

21. Elizabeth Marshall Venable, *Venables of Virginia* (New York. J. J. Little and Ives Company, 1925. Printed exclusively for members of the family), p. 107.

22. See Chapter II of this work.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SECOND GENERATION

THE second generation of Johnstons in Prince Edward County lived up to the reputation of their father, and no story of Longwood can be complete without a mention of all four of them. However, the author will place more emphasis on the eldest son, Peter Johnston, Jr., who inherited the land from his father.<sup>1</sup>

Born on January 6, 1763,<sup>2</sup> two years before his parents moved from Osborne's Landing, Peter Johnston, Jr., was in one of the first classes at Hampden-Sydney College. There he absorbed many of the popular ideas of the day, republican hostility for the British being the one with the most far-reaching effects. The students at Hampden-Sydney formed a company of all students over 16,<sup>3</sup> and in 1777, the company, sixty-five strong, marched to Williamsburg in defense of the colony.<sup>4</sup> Among these youths was Peter Johnston, Jr. Realizing that his father's sympathies lay with the British, the seventeen year old lad, with Clement Carrington, of Charlotte, ran away from school and joined the ranks of Light Horse Harry Lee's famed legion.<sup>5</sup> He served with Lee throughout the Revolution, and so narrow were several of his escapes it seemed that

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1. Will Book 2, p. 72, records in the Prince Edward Courthouse.

2. Robert M. Hughes, *General Johnston* (Great Commanders. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1893), p. 6..

3. "Sketches of Hampden-Sidney Before '61", unsigned article in *Hampden-Sydney Magazine*, May 1919, p. 109.

4. Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

5. Edgar Erksine Hume, *Peter Johnston, Junior* (Southern Sketches, Number 4, first series. Charlottesville, Virginia: The Historical Publishing Company, 1935), p. 4.

he had a charmed life.<sup>6</sup> The stories of his enlistment and exploits during the war are varied and numerous.<sup>7</sup>

At the end of the Revolutionary War, having distinguished himself<sup>8</sup> and gained the rank of Lieutenant, Peter Johnston, Jr., returned to his home in Prince Edward County. His parents, so opposed to his siding with the colonists, were completely won over. The boy, then barely 20, fell in with his father's wishes and began the study of law.<sup>9</sup> He applied himself as earnestly to this study as he had applied himself to the profession of arms during the war.<sup>10</sup>

In 1792 he was elected to the House of Delegates from Prince Edward County, and he served there almost continuously until his appointment to the bench in 1811, being for a time the Speaker of the House.<sup>11</sup> Peter Johnston, Jr., and his friend, Clement Carrington, were both original members of the Society of Cincinnati, the oldest military society in the country.<sup>12</sup>

Space and the limitations of the subject do not allow

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6. Hume, *op. cit.*, p. 5: "Sergeant Boone struck down a British dragoon who was in the very act of aiming a deadly sabre at Johnston's head. On another occasion the timely warning of a British deserter enabled him to forestall a would-be surprise attack and to capture his opponents. He seemed to have a charmed life."

7. The name of Peter Johnston, Jr. is associated with the legends of Peter Francisco, Virginia's "Strong Man" of the Revolution, whose home was in Buckingham County, neighboring Prince Edward.

Also, "Sketches of Hampden-Sidney Before '61", *Loc. cit.*, records that Peter Johnston, Jr., first applied to Eggleston's Dragoons, part of Lee's Legion, and that he was rejected because he was under age and under-sized, that he then sought out Lee himself and was "accepted with some hesitation, even when the general found that Peter had been the first to reach the ramparts of Guilford Court House." The author bases her doubt of the accuracy of this article on Hume, *op. cit.*, p. 5: "With Lee's Legion he [Johnston] went through the Southern campaign of 1870-71 and bore himself most creditably at Guilford Court House. . . ."

8. Necrology (upon the death of Dr. Ben Johnston, grandson of Peter Johnston, Jr.), proceedings of the Virginia Historical Association. Virginia Historical Journal, v. 26, p. xxxvii: "Johnston was publically thanked in 'General Orders' in the presence of the army. . . ."

9. Hume, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

10. Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

11. Hume, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

12. *Loc. cit.*,

a more detailed account of the life and career of this soldier and statesman, and room must be given to his three brothers, Andrew, Charles, and Edward. Andrew, the second son, was born at the family homestead, Longwood, and was educated at Hampden-Sydney College. To him, upon the death of his father came the land which vies for the claim of the birthplace of his nephew, General Joseph E. Johnston,<sup>13</sup> the tract of land near Hampden-Sydney College, known as Cherry Hill.<sup>14</sup>

The third son of Peter Johnston, Sr., and Martha Rogers was named Charles. While still a youth, Charles took a daring trip to what is now Kentucky and was captured by the Indians. His account of this experience was written into a book, "*Narrative*" and was for a time the equivalent of a present-day "best seller."<sup>15</sup> He left Prince Edward County at an early age and made his home in Botetourt.<sup>16</sup>

Few facts are known about the fourth and last son of this family. William Edward Johnston never married, and he moved from Prince Edward County and made his home in Columbia, South Carolina. He is described by Miss Dickinson as "a man of letters."<sup>17</sup>

The Johnston homestead, presumably the site of the present Longwood, was occupied by Peter Johnston, Jr., and his family for some year after his marriage to Mary Wood in June, 1788.<sup>18</sup> Mrs. Johnston was the niece of Patrick Henry, and has been called "so well educated that she could fit her sons for college not only in the elements of learning, but in the classics as well."<sup>19</sup>

And such a family as they had! Nine sons and one

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13. See Chapter III of this work.

14. See Chapter III of this work. The name was probably changed to Cherry Hill from Cherry Grove because of another home in Prince Edward by the latter name.

15. Joseph Dupuy Eggleston, *The Hampden-Sydney Record*, October, 1944.

16. Sally Bruce Dickinson, "Longwood," *Today and Yesterday in the Heart of Virginia* (A reprint of the edition of the Farmville Herald, March 29, 1935. Farmville, Virginia: The Farmville Herald, 1935), p. 268.

17. *Loc. cit.*

18. William and Mary Quarterly, first series, v. 8, p. 95.

19. Hume, *op. cit.*, p. 9.



daughter, and Edgar Erskine Hume stated that "not the least of Peter Johnston's gifts to his State and Country was his extraordinarily gifted family."<sup>20</sup> Although the Johnston family moved from Prince Edward County in 1811<sup>21</sup> and the careers of these children do not actually belong to the story of Longwood, they must necessarily be included in brief.

The eldest of the children was John, who followed medicine as a career. The second was Peter 3rd, a well-known practitioner of law in Southwest Virginia. The third son, Charles Clement, named for his father's comrade in arms, was sent to Congress from Southwest Virginia when quite young, and took an active part in the States Rights debates of 1831-32 on the nullification question. Drowned while crossing from Alexandria to Washington, D. C., Charles Clement is described by Robert M. Hughes as "a man of popularity and eloquence." Another son, Beverly, was also a prominent member of the bar in Southwest Virginia. Edward William Johnston, another son, was a well-known writer and was editor of the *National Intelligencer*. Algernon Sidney, another son, was an editor and was author of *Memoirs of a Nullifier*.<sup>22</sup>

The eighth and last son was Joseph Eggleston Johnston, general in the Civil War, who was named for Peter Johnston's company commander in Lee's Legion.<sup>23</sup> This son will be treated later in this work.

In 1811, Peter Johnston was named a judge of the General Court of Virginia and assigned to Prince Edward County. He exchanged circuits with Judge William Brockenbrough, and moved with his family to Abingdon, Virginia.<sup>24</sup> Before leaving Prince Edward County, Judge Johnston sold his home, Longwood, consisting of 1181 acres to Abraham B. Venable.<sup>25</sup>

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20. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

21. Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

22. Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

23. Hume, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

25. Deed Book 14, p. 523, records in the Prince Edward Courthouse.

## CHAPTER III

### CONCERNING THE BIRTHPLACE OF GENERAL JOHNSTON

A study of Longwood would not include more than a brief sketch of the life of General Joseph Eggleston Johnston, since he was only four when his family moved to Abingdon. However, something must be said concerning the controversy about the exact location of the birthplace of this great Southern general.

The tombstone of General Johnston states that he was born at Longwood, in Prince Edward County, Virginia, and such facts recorded on tombstones are generally accepted as correct. On the other hand, the best of General Johnston's biographers, his nephew, Robert M. Hughes, names his birthplace Cherry Grove.<sup>1</sup> However, neither of these is conclusive evidence as to the exact location of the birthplace of the General.

Cherry Grove, it seems, was the name given to the entire estate of Peter Johnston, Sr., when he moved to Prince Edward County in 1765.<sup>2</sup> At some later date the name of the estate, or part of the estate, was changed to Longwood.<sup>3</sup> Miss Dickinson suggests that the name Longwood is a corruption of Loughwood, the Johnston castle in Scotland<sup>4</sup>, and if this is true, certainly the name was

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1. Robert M. Hughes, *General Johnston* (Great Commanders. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1893), p. 10.

2. Edgar Erksine Hume, *Peter Johnston, Junior* (Southern Sketches, Number 4, first series. Charlottesville, Virginia: The Historical Publishing Company, 1935), pp. 3-4.

3. *Loc. cit.*

4. Sally Bruce Dickinson, "Longwood", *Today and Yesterday in the Heart of Virginia* (A reprint of the edition of the Farmville Herald, March 29, 1935. Farmville, Virginia: The Farmville Herald, 1935), p. 265.

changed before Peter Johnston, Jr., sold the estate to Abraham Bedford Venable in 1811.<sup>5</sup>

To be sure, General Johnston was born on the Cherry Grove estate. The controversy, then, is delimited to whether the Peter Johnston, Jr. homestead was at the present site of the Longwood house, or whether the second Peter Johnston made his home on that part of the estate near Hampden-Sydney which retained the name Cherry Grove, and later was known as Cherry Hill.

The Calendar of Board Minutes of the College of Hampden-Sidney for 1776-1876 records Cherry Hill as "part of the old Johnston estate where it has been said that General Joseph Eggleston Johnston was born," and places it "within sight of the college."<sup>6</sup>

In addition to this suggestion is the description of "Hampden-Sidney in 1877," by W. H. Whiting, in which Cherry Hill is reported as "the home of Peter Johnston and the probable birthplace of General Joseph Eggleston Johnston in spite of the inscription on his tombstone," and is placed "about half a mile from Cushing Hall"<sup>7</sup>

However, in spite of these two pieces of suggested evidence,, there is no really logical reason to believe that the Johnston homestead was other than where stands the present Longwood house. It is possible that when the second Peter Johnston married he built a separate establishment for his family, but it is more likely that he remained in the house built by his father, which burned early in 1814. While the exact location of this original Longwood house is not positively known, it is probable that it stood where the present house stands. That location is the natural site on the estate for the dwelling place, for several reasons, namely, because it is near that part

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5. Deed Book 14, p. 523, records in the Prince Edward Court-house.

6. *College of Hampden-Sidney Calendar of Board Minutes - 1776-1876*, edited by A. J. Morrison (Richmond: Hermitage Press. 1912), p. 103.

7. W. H. Whiting, Jr. *Hampden-Sidney in 1877* (Typed manuscript by a member of the class of 1880. in the Hampden-Sydney College Library, brought up-to-date in 1939 by the author), p. 8.

of the Appomattox River which was used for transportation and for shipping, and because of its situation on top of the hill surrounded by large trees. In addition, the site is near the old Johnston burying ground, another point which leads the author to believe that it was the site of the original Johnston dwelling. A final point is that when Peter Johnston, Jr., sold his homestead to Abraham Venable and moved to Abingdon in 1811 the portion sold did not include the Cherry Hill property near Hampden-Sydney.<sup>8</sup>

The author is supported in her belief that the present Longwood house is the site of the birthplace of General Joseph E. Johnston by Dr. J. D. Eggleston, president emeritus of Hampden-Sydney College<sup>9</sup>, and by members of the Venable family.<sup>10</sup>

As for the General himself, he lived up to all that could be expected of a child of Peter and Mary Wood Johnston. After graduation from West Point, he served in the Seminole War and in the Mexican War. In June, 1860, he became quartermaster general of the United States Army, but resigned the following spring to become quartermaster general and later general in the Confederate Army. He was described by a fellow officer as middle-height, spare, soldier-like and well set-up, and talking with a calm, deliberate, and confident manner.<sup>11</sup>

But this great Southern general and his exploits do not belong in the story of Longwood.

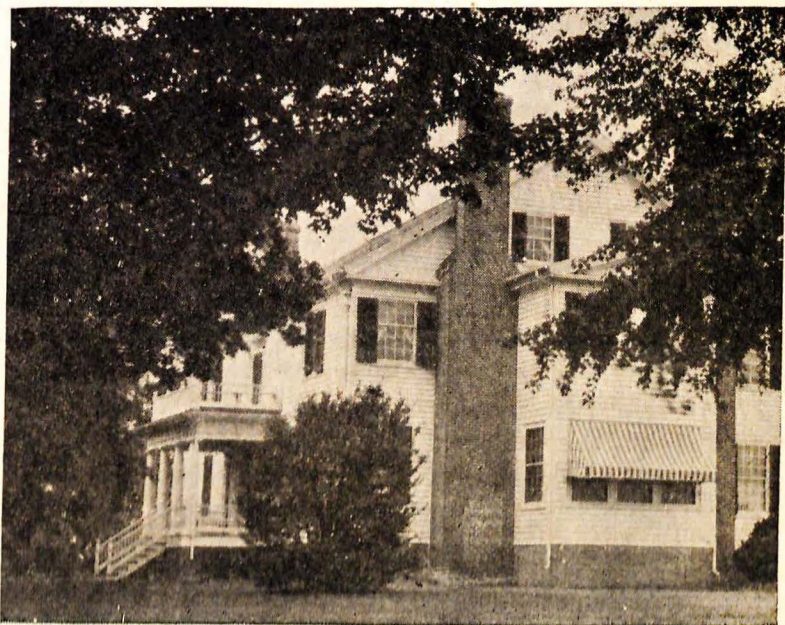
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8. Deed Book 14, p. 523, records in the Prince Edward Court-house.

9. A personal letter to the author from Harriet Venable Miller, who was instrumental in having the Venable plaque placed at Longwood, indicated that Dr. Eggleston approved the wording of that plaque, which places Johnston's birthplace at the site of the present Longwood.

10. A letter to Dr. J. L. Jarman from Mrs. M. E. Miller, descended from the Venables, states: "The present Longwood then is the site of the home of Gen. Johnston." Letters in Longwood file in the office of the president, State Teachers College, Farmville, Virginia.

11. Albert Bushnell Hart, *Welding of the Nation, 1845-1900* (American History by Contemporaries, volume IV. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), p. 284.



*Longwood Home*

## CHAPTER IV.

### INTO NEW HANDS

ON June 22, 1811, the Longwood estate became the property of Abram<sup>1</sup> Bedford Venable,<sup>2</sup> of Slate Hill. The land was sold for 3,543 pounds sterling by Peter and Mary Johnston,<sup>3</sup> but according to the records in the Prince Edward Courthouse, Mrs. Johnston did not feel well on that day and did not attend the sale of her home.<sup>4</sup>

The Longwood estate when purchased by Abram Venable contained 1181 acres,<sup>5</sup> and was bounded by the lands of Abner Watson, Josiah Chambers, Charles Allen, Sr., Francis Smith, the town of Farmville, and other lands already owned by Abram Venable.<sup>6</sup> When the land transfer was made, a certain spot was reserved: a plot 25 feet square, the family burying ground.<sup>7</sup>

The Longwood dwelling, the Johnston home, described earlier in this work, was standing at the time of the purchase of the estate by Venable, and as noted previously, it is probable that it was located on the site of the present Longwood house.

The purchaser, described by Sally Bruce Dickinson as "doubtless the most distinguished man that was ever born

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1. The name is spelled indiscriminately "Abram" and "Abraham" in contemporary documents.

2. Deed Book 14, p. 523, records in the Prince Edward Courthouse.

3. *Loc. cit.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 524.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 523.

6. *Loc. cit.*

7. *Loc. cit.*

in Prince Edward County,"<sup>8</sup> was born at Slate Hill on November 20, 1758,<sup>9</sup> and was the son of Nathaniel Venable, one of the original trustees of Hampden-Sydney College.<sup>10</sup> The young Abram studied at Hampden-Sydney,<sup>11</sup> the college which had its birth on his father's estate,<sup>12</sup> and received his A. B. degree from Princeton in 1780.<sup>13</sup>

He was a member of the United States House of Representatives from 1791 to 1799, and served in the United States Senate from 1803 until 1804.<sup>14</sup> When the Bank of Virginia was established in Richmond in 1804, Abram B. Venable was appointed its first president.<sup>15</sup> He served in this capacity until December 26, 1811, when he was burned in the Richmond Theatre disaster.<sup>16</sup> His name is conspicuous on the roll of the victims of the great disaster<sup>17</sup> which is at the entrance of Memorial Church, erected on the spot where the theatre stood.

Abram Venable was a trustee of Hampden-Sydney College from 1790 till his death in 1811,<sup>18</sup> he never married,<sup>19</sup> and at the time of his death he owned much property in Prince Edward County.<sup>20</sup> As he died without a will, this property was inherited by his brother, Samuel

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8. Letter to Dr. J. L. Jarman from Miss Sally Bruce Dickinson. In the Longwood file in the office of the president of the State Teachers College in Farmville.

9. Elizabeth Marshall Venable, *Venables of Virginia* (New York: J. J. Little and Ives Company, 1925. Printed exclusively for members of the family), p. 35.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 26. Through the efforts of Mrs. Willa Boysworth, Librarian at Hampden-Sydney College, the building where the original charter for the college was drawn up has recently been moved from Slate Hill to the campus at Hampden-Sydney.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

14. *Loc. cit.*

15. *Loc. cit.*

16. *Loc. cit.*

17. *Loc. cit.*

18. *Loc. cit.*

19. *Loc. cit.*

20. Sally Bruce Dickinson, "Longwood". *Today and Yesterday in the Heart of Virginia* (A reprint of the edition of the Farmville Herald, March 29, 1935. Farmville, Virginia: The Farmville Herald, 1935), p. 267.

Woodson Venable and by his various nieces and nephews.<sup>21</sup>

The Longwood estate passed to his brother, Samuel Woodson Venable,<sup>22</sup> of Springfield, also in Prince Edward County, and was in turn given to his son, Nathaniel E. Venable in 1814.<sup>23</sup>

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21. *Loc. cit.*

22. Harriet Venable Miller, *Word Pictures of Longwood* (Leesburg, Florida: Leesburg Commercial, 1941. Printed exclusively for members of the family), p. 7.

23. *Loc. cit.*





## CHAPTER V.

### "THIS IS THE HOUSE THAT NATHANIEL BUILT"

**A**BOUT Nathaniel E. Venable, who erected the present Longwood dwelling in 1815,<sup>1</sup> much can be told. The seventh child of Samuel Woodson Venable of Springfield, he was born there on December 5, 1791.<sup>2</sup> He graduated from Hampden-Sydney College in 1808,<sup>3</sup> and while there he was one of the founders of the Philanthropic Society.<sup>4</sup> He served in the War of 1812,<sup>5</sup> was a member of the Virginia House of Delegates and of the State Senate,<sup>6</sup> and was a trustee of Hampden-Sydney College from 1827 until his death in 1846.<sup>7</sup>

The wife of Nathaniel E. Venable was Mary Embry Scott, of Falkland, in Halifax County.<sup>8</sup> She was the daughter of Colonel Charles Scott,<sup>9</sup> a Cornet in the Revolutionary Army and a member of the original Society of Cincinnati.<sup>10</sup> Her mother was Priscilla Reade, whose father, Colonel Issac Reade was also a Revolutionary soldier.<sup>11</sup>

According to a sketch of Nathaniel E. Venable by A. J. Morrison, which is quoted in *Venables of Virginia*, he was

1. Bronze plaque at Longwood.
2. Elizabeth Marshall Venable, *Venables of Virginia* (New York: J. J. Little and Ives Company, 1925. Printed exclusively for members of the family), p. 105.
3. *Loc. cit.*
4. *Loc. cit.*
5. *Loc. cit.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
7. *Loc. cit.*
8. *Ibid.*, p. 105. Sometimes her second name is spelled "Embra".
9. *Loc. cit.*
10. *Loc. cit.*
11. *Loc. cit.*

a "man of large business," and was at first in partnership with his father.<sup>12</sup>

The original Longwood dwelling, the home of the Johnstons, was burned soon after the estate came into possession of Nathaniel E. Venable,<sup>13</sup> and he at once set about to replace it. While the present Longwood house was being built, Venable lived at another of his plantations, Scott-Greene,<sup>14</sup> less than a mile distant from Longwood. In the fall of 1815, a few months before the family moved into the newly completed Longwood house, the second daughter, Mary Priscilla, was born at Scott-Greene.<sup>15</sup> This estate was presented to her upon her marriage to her cousin, Thomas Frederick Venable in 1834.<sup>16</sup>

This work is not concerned with the Scott-Greene estate except in that it concerns the story of Longwood, but surely the grace and beauty of the place, which was named for two Revolutionary heroes,<sup>17</sup> must be mentioned. A complete and detailed sketch of the Scott-Greene estate can be found in the *Venables of Virginia*.<sup>18</sup>

The children of Nathaniel E. Venable and Mary Embry Scott numbered eleven,<sup>19</sup> and for this growing family the couple had built a really large house, with spacious rooms for entertaining.

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12. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

14. Letter to Dr. J. L. Jarman from Miss Sally Bruce Dickinson. In the Longwood file in the office of the president of the State Teachers College.

15. *Loc. cit.*

16. Venable, *Venables of Virginia*, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

17. *Loc. cit.*

18. *Loc. cit.*

19. *Ibid.*, p. 114 *et seq.*

## CHAPTER VI.

### ANTE BELLUM DAYS

ONE would like to draw a long word picture of Longwood in the ante-bellum days: life there would surely measure up to the novelist's dream of life in the South prior to the Civil War. But first a word about the second generation of Venables who lived there, the Venables who knew and lived that life.

The eldest of the children of Nathaniel E. Venable and Mary Embry Scott was Agnes Catherine, and about her little information is available. She is described in *Venables of Virginia* as a "famous beauty and belle of her day." She married her cousin, Nathaniel A. Venable of Haymarket, who attended Hampden-Sydney College and received his M. D. degree from the University of Pennsylvania. Her second husband was Gallatin McGehee of Alabama. She died childless.<sup>1</sup>

The second daughter, Mary Priscilla, has already been mentioned in this record. She was born at Scott-Greene in 1815, and married her cousin, Thomas Frederick Venable. They made their home at Scott-Greene.<sup>2</sup>

Of the third daughter, Sara Scott, little is known. She is described as "an accomplished musician, considered by some to have the elements of genius." She died single.<sup>3</sup>

The fourth daughter, Elizabeth Goodridge, "a woman much admired, and not only for her distinguished beauty," was the first child born at Longwood. She married in 1845

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1. Elizabeth Marshall Venable, *Venables of Virginia* (New York: J. J. Little and Ives Company, 1925. Printed exclusively for members of the family), p. 114.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 175

3. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

her cousin, William Fontaine Carrington, and had five children, at least two of whom were born at her home, Longwood.<sup>4</sup>

The oldest son and fifth child was named for his paternal grandfather, Samuel Woodson Venable. He was born at Longwood on May 7, 1825 and received his A. B. degree and M. A. degree at Hampden-Sydney College. A trustee of his Alma Mater and a tobacco manufacturer, he married Elizabeth Travis Carrington in 1852, and they had five children.<sup>5</sup>

The sixth child, and probably the most distinguished of the eleven, was Charles Scott. He was born at Longwood in 1827, and entered Hampden-Sydney in 1839. After his graduation in 1842, he spent two years there as a tutor of mathematics at which time he was also studying law. He was later professor of mathematics at his Alma Mater, and he studied further at the University of Virginia and in Germany. During his life he taught at the University of Georgia, at the College of South Carolina, and at the University of Virginia. He made outstanding contributions to the world of science as a commissioner to study the total solar eclipse in 1860, and in his series of textbooks in Mathematics.<sup>6</sup>

During the Civil War he served with distinction, first as a second lieutenant when he went to Charleston to help in the attack on Fort Sumter. Later, he served on General Lee's staff as Colonel. At the close of the war he returned to the University of Virginia as head of the department of mathematics there. He married twice, first to Margaret Cantey McDowell, in 1856, and they had five children. His second wife was Mrs. Mary Southall Brown, whom he married in 1876. They had only one child.<sup>7</sup>

The seventh child and third son in the Longwood family was Nathaniel Henry. Born at Longwood, he attended Hampden-Sydney College, and received his medical degree at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1856 he married Tennessee Marr of Alabama and they had two children.<sup>8</sup>

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4. *Ibid.*, pp. 114 *et seq.*

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 118 *et seq.*

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 119 *et seq.*

7. *Loc. cit.*

8. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

The eighth and ninth children, Marriet (*sic* in *Venables of Virginia*) Morton and Isaac Reade, both died young.<sup>9</sup>

The tenth child, Frances Isabelle, was born at Longwood, and was married there to Rev. Alexander Broadnax Carrington in 1860. They had four children.<sup>10</sup>

The youngest of the children in the Venable household was Paul Carrington. He was born at Longwood, and attended Hampden-Sydney College. He served in the Civil War as a member of Wade Hampton's staff. In 1865 he married Agnes Spruel Grey, and they had four children.<sup>11</sup>

With such a family, and so many grandchildren returning to visit their grandparents, it is easy to vision life at Longwood in those days before the great conflict between the North and the South. And in the case of Longwood, we are aided by a number of vivid descriptions left by those who knew that life.

It is easy to picture the "broad, level lawn, shadowed by spreading trees, with grass growing long and thick up to their very trunks, and calves and colts grazing in the dappled shade."<sup>12</sup> The large gardens are abloom once more when one pictures that plot of land to the rear of the house in which flowers and vegetables grew side by side, and roses and violets mingled democratically with onions and cabbages, where sweet old-fashioned flowers bloomed in tiny borders and nut trees were cultivated. One can see the carefree youngsters as they romped with the colts and the frisky calves, and as they fished in the nearby streams and hunted small game in the forests on the estate.

One can see those same youngsters in a more serious mood, reading from the shelves of books the family owned, and learning to admire characters of fact and fiction in the shade of the great trees. The white children played freely with the negroes and no thought was given to the ethics of slavery.

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9. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

10. *Loc. cit.*

11. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

12. William M. Thornton, Sketch of the life of Charles Scott Venable, quoted in *Word Pictures of Longwood*, by Harriet Venable Miller (Leesburg, Florida: Leesburg Commercial, 1941. Printed exclusively for members of the family), quoted on p. 8.

There existed a simple piety, common among the landed gentry of the South, a devotion to duty, and there was the noble tradition of hospitality. In such an atmosphere did the young Venables grow into manhood and womanhood.

One can picture them older, at parties, barbecues, dances, teas in the lovely garden, weddings and receptions, at Christmas when the big house was decorated freely with pine and cedar and holly. One can feel the excitement at the return of a member of the family from a trip to the city, Richmond, perhaps New York, or even abroad, for they were a traveling family.<sup>13</sup> One can see the charming Mary Embry Scott Venable welcoming a traveller, dusty and weary, and the family, later on, listening to the tales he has to tell. The broad staircase in the big Longwood dwelling offered a lovely background for a young girl to sweep down in her new dress just brought from Europe; the polished floors and the wide hall and spacious rooms provided space for entertaining and dancing, and mother and daughter were all excellent musicians, good singers as well as players.<sup>14</sup>

Yet it was a simple life, without show and extravagance. For the most part they made their own clothes,<sup>15</sup> and the life was "cursed with neither poverty nor riches."<sup>16</sup>

One can picture Mary Embry Scott Venable presiding over this household, serene and steady, justifiably proud of the family she had reared and of the home she had made for them. She was always a faithful member of the church and each day the family and house slaves were called together for worship.<sup>17</sup> It was part of the creed of the household that the Sabbath be strictly kept, and all the slaves were taught to read the Bible.<sup>18</sup> This was Long-

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13. Letter from Harriet (Venable) Edmunds to her daughter, quoted in Miller, *Word Pictures of "Longwood"*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

14. *Loc. cit.*

15. *Loc. cit.*

16. Thornton, quoted in Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

17. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

18. *Loc. cit.*

wood in the first half of the nineteenth century, in the days before the Civil War.

Inaccurate tradition says that on the Longwood lands took place some of the heavy fighting during the war, and according to Matthew Walton Venable, General Lee and his staff spent at least one night at Longwood during the course of the fighting.<sup>19</sup>

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19. Matthew Walton Venable, *Eighty Years After* (Charleston, W. Va.: Hood-Hiserman-Brodhag Company Press, 1929), p. 57.

Matthew Walton Venable was the son of Mary Priscilla Venable of Longwood. He was born at Scott-Greene and his early memories include much about Longwood, told in the above book.





## CHAPTER VII

### AN UNEVENTFUL INTERLUDE

ON September 21, 1846, at the age of 53, Mary Embry Scott Venable was widowed by the death of her husband<sup>1</sup> For 19 years, until her own death November 11, 1865,<sup>2</sup> she endeavored to keep the Longwood estate intact and to care for it as had her husband. Upon her death, she willed the dwelling house and two hundred acres of land on which the dwelling house was located to her daughter, Sara Scott, and to her youngest son, Paul Carrington.<sup>3</sup> The remainder of the estate was left to Samuel Woodson Venable, Charles Scott Venable, Elizabeth Goodridge (Venable) Carrington, Nathaniel Henry Venable, and Frances Isabelle (Venable) Carrington, to be divided among them by sale and division of the proceeds.<sup>4</sup>

On April 1, 1873, 200 acres of land and the Longwood dwelling were sold to Wright Barber by the Venable heirs.<sup>5</sup> The portion of land sold was purchased for \$3000, and the family burying ground was reserved.<sup>6</sup>

Little can be said about the years in which the Barbers lived at Longwood. Certainly in those years the house and the estate lost much of the charm and beauty which was a part of the place during the "ante-bellum" days. The dwelling was allowed to run down and the grounds

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1. Elizabeth Marshall Venable, *Venables of Virginia* (New York: J. J. Little and Ives Company, 1925. Printed exclusively for members of the family), p. 105.

2. *Loc. cit.*

3. Will of Mary Embry Scott Venable, Section 4, records in the Prince Edward Courthouse. Quoted in Venable, *Venables of Virginia*, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

4. *Ibid.*, Section 6.

5. Deed Book 57, p. 426, records in Prince Edward Courthouse.

6. *Loc. cit.*

became overgrown and were not kept up. The family burying ground, which had been specifically reserved in the land transfer, was on the point of being desecrated when the outrage was discovered by Dr. J. D. Eggleston.<sup>7</sup> He, and two other citizens of Prince Edward County who were interested in preserving historical landmarks, P. T. Atkinson and R. K. Brock, purchased the burying ground and deeded it to Hampden-Sydney College.<sup>8</sup>

The remains of the estate were divided into small plots and sold in various directions until in 1928 the dwelling house and 88.7 acres of land surrounding it were purchased by the State Teachers College in Farmville from the descendants of Wright Barber.<sup>9</sup>

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7. Joseph D. Eggleston, an untitled article in *The Hampden-Sydney Record*, October, 1944.

8. *Loc. cit.*

9. Deed Book 80, p. 108, records in the Prince Edward Courthouse.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE ESTATE GOES TO COLLEGE

THE Longwood estate as it came into the hands of the State Teachers College was a worn down estate with an uncared for dwelling. It was the dream of Mrs. J. L. Jarman, wife of the president of the college to restore the place to its former beauty and to make it into a recreation spot for the students of the Farmville State Teachers College.

The house itself was changed only slightly, in addition to being restored. The lines of the house and most of the materials are those planned by Nathaniel E. Venable in 1815. A small sun parlor was added to the east end of the house to give additional light and room to the interior. The interior of the house was furnished in a charming manner with pieces of furniture selected with care from far and wide, and it was furnished throughout not to be a museum place, but to be a liveable, pleasant recreation spot for the college girls.

The broad expanse of field stretching to the front of the house was made into a golf course; a riding ring was added to the east of the course. A small cabin and open fireplaces were constructed in the woods at the foot of the hill to the west of the house. The gardens were replenished and planted with many flowers. The giant box bushes were transplanted and trimmed, the lawn sodded and cared for. Large flood lights were attached to the outside of the house to light night occasions.

From time to time, more land has been purchased by the college to add to the original 88.7 acres, purchased for

\$20,000 in 1928 from the Barber heirs.<sup>1</sup> \* The burying ground, 155 feet from the Rice road, was deeded to State Teachers College by Hampden-Sydney College.<sup>2</sup> In 1936 the college purchased for \$3,000 an additional 14.88 acres from the Barber heirs, that portion of land which extends from the Longwood entrance road east to the present fence.<sup>3</sup> The total acreage now owned by the college is 103.58 acres.

In 1941 the descendants of Nathaniel E. and Mary Embry Scott Venable placed a bronze plaque inside the doors at Longwood. The plaque, topped with a coat-of-arms, reads:

#### LONGWOOD

Property acquired 1765 by Peter Johnston. Home of Peter Johnston, Jr., Lieutenant in Lee's Legion and judge of Circuit Court of Virginia. Birthplace of General Joseph E. Johnston.

Purchased 1811 by Abraham B. Venable, U. S. Senator, organizer and first president of first bank of Virginia. Given by Samuel Woodson Venable in 1814 to Nathaniel V. Venable, officer of the War of 1812. The present house erected by him in 1815.

Birthplace of Lieutenant Colonel Charles Scott Venable, C. S. A. (1827-1900). Member of General R. E. Lee's staff; professor of Mathematics and chairman of faculty, University of Virginia; author.

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1. Deed Book 80, p. 108, records in the Prince Edward Courthouse.

\* College file of Longwood shows \$23,000.

2. Deed Book 88, p. 457, records in the Prince Edward Courthouse.

3. Deed Book 89, p. 348, records in the Prince Edward Courthouse.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SPIRIT OF LONGWOOD

**T**ODAY Longwood stands as a beautiful memorial to the work and enthusiasm of Mrs. Jarman as well as to the memory of the illustrious Johnstons and Venables who lived on the estate.

The spacious rooms are once again filled with the lilt of young laughter, the tables are once again set for friend and stranger, once more young feet trip up the broad staircase and pause for a moment in the library there, once more gay singing is heard accompanied by the piano in the drawing room. The place is not restricted by ropes and "open to the public for inspection only"; the chairs and the beds were put there to be used, the piano is open to be played, the flowers were picked from the Longwood gardens to be admired and enjoyed, and the kitchen is strictly practical. The large dining room has been filled with small tables for groups of college girls and their friends to be refreshed with cool drinks and "Longwood buns". These buns, made for the girls by colored Nannie Pickett, have become a tradition and are a real treat.

Before the war a regular hostess was employed at Longwood, and the house was open on week-day afternoons and on week-ends. At the present time the house itself is not open during the week, and on week-ends it is opened under the auspices of a student organization, Longwood Association, formed for this purpose in the winter of 1943-44.

The week-end activity is only part of the present Longwood, however. During the week, eager students practice on the golf course as well as expert players from the town who hold membership in the Longwood Golf

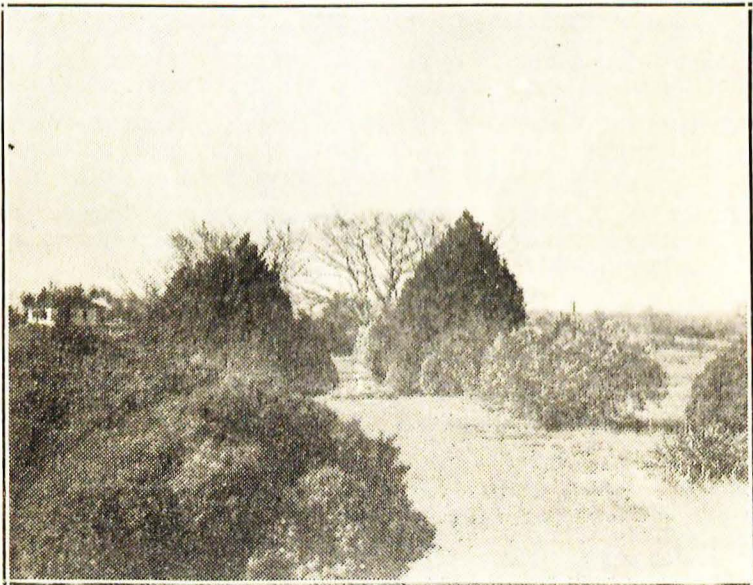
Club. Each day the horses are ridden from the college stables to make the rounds in the ring or to be ridden on the "trail". Here in the spring is held the annual May Day; in the dell classes and sororities and honor organizations have picnics and parties; various groups from the college spend week-ends in the Cabin or in the big house; banquet tables are set up in the house for formal occasions; and on hot spring week-ends many trudge to Longwood for one of those famed buns or perhaps just a cool drink of water from the spring.

When students graduate from the State Teachers College they carry with them memories of many and various happy hours spent at Longwood, and when they return to their Alma Mater on a visit, Longwood is always a point of interest. Since the place was purchased by the college the weddings of several alumnae have taken place in the house and in the grove made by the giant box bushes.

Truly, Mrs. Jarman's dream has come true. Longwood, just as charming as it ever was and now as much a part of the college campus as are the buildings in town, sheds forth its light and shares that charm with all who come.

## EPILOGUE

**G**IVEN at the end, much is left to be said. Words can not adequately describe Longwood, and information is lacking and unauthentic in places. But this is the story of Longwood, home of the Johnstons and of the Venables, and now part of the campus of the State Teachers College in Farmville. The author hopes that she has not omitted any important detail or placed emphasis where it is not deserved, and that this story of a beautiful and charming estate will prove of interest to someone.



*Part of Borwood Gardens at Longwood*



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