



## *Farmville - Prince Edward Historical Society*

*P.O. Box 546*

*Farmville, Virginia 23901*

*April, 2010*

### **Role of Some Virginia Colleges in the Civil War**

**presentation by  
Rev. Dr. William Thompson**

**Tuesday, April 20, 2010  
7:00 p.m.**

**PE Co Agricultural Center  
Hwy 15 South to 100 Dominion Drive**

**Board Meets at 6:00 p.m.**

### **“The Hampden-Sydney Boys” Company G, 20<sup>th</sup> Virginia Regiment**

The longest-tenured of Hampden-Sydney College presidents was J.M.P. Atkinson, who served from before the Civil War through Reconstruction (1857-1883). At the beginning of the war the student body organized a company, with the president as captain. These men, officially mustered as Company G, 20th Virginia Regiment, "The Hampden-Sydney Boys," saw action in the battle of Rich Mountain (July 10, 1861), were captured, and were paroled by General George B. McClellan on the condition that they return to their studies.

Internet research provides some glimpses into the role of “The Hampden-Sydney Boys” in the Civil War.

An excerpt from *Rebels at the Gate: Lee and McClellan on the Front Line of a Nation Divided* by W. Hunter Lesser reads as follows: “New recruits were schooled on the drill field. Their instructors were not always experienced soldiers. A company of young students from Virginia’s Hampden-Sydney College marched under the leadership of the college president Reverend Dr. John Atkinson. One of his ‘Hampden-Sydney Boys’ recalled drilling in the basement of the seminary building during a rainstorm: ‘Dr. Atkinson marched the front line straight into [a] wall, where the

men were forced to press their faces into the bricks until he could figure what order to give next.”

In *Virginia at War, 1864* by William C. Davis, *et. al.*, there is the following excerpt. “Hampden-Sydney college president John M.P. Atkinson had no military experience, but the student volunteers there elected him captain. Novice as he was, he chose to drill his students far from curious eyes, in the dead of night and in the basement of a campus building. It was not easy to see him at his work, but it is easy to see why he took such precautions, in view of how one of his cadets, seminary student G.T. Lyle, described President Atkinson’s instructions regarding the ‘double quick’: ‘Gentlemen, when I count one, you will bring up the right foot until the thigh is perpendicular to the body, and when I count two, you will bring up the other up beside it’ The ‘Hampden-Sydney Boys’ were mustered into service in May 1861 and soon received more practical instruction at Camp Lee in Richmond from the VMI cadets.”

Another excerpt from *The Scent of Eternity: A Life of Harris Elliott Kirk of Baltimore* by Donald G. Miller recounts this event. “...Dr. William U. Murkland, had left Hampden-Sydney College as a student to fight for the Confederacy, under the command of the president of the college, in a company known as “The Hampden-Sydney Boys.” After seventy-two hours of constant duty, night and day, and separation from their commissary, the company was captured. The morning after, as Murkland, the next to the youngest in the group, sat on the ground ‘famished with hunger and parched with fever,’ General McClellan rode up and asked if he belonged to the Hampden-Sydney Company. On receiving an affirmative answer, McClellan said that ‘he had ordered all their wants to be supplied, and was arranging by telegraph for their parole, that they might return to their studies.’ Fourteen years later, in 1875, at a reception and banquet in the Mount Vernon Hotel in Baltimore sponsored by Johns Hopkins University, Dr. Murkland was introduced to General McClellan. ‘I have seen you before, Mr. Murkland. I have been attending your church,’ said the general. To which Mr. Murkland replied that he had seen him before, then narrated the above scene and thanked the general for his kindness to ‘the boys.’ A warm friendship grew up between the two men.”

## This Day in April in Prince Edward County History

- 4-2-1905** The first black Baptist Church freed itself of indebtedness
- 4-3-1944** Gov. Darden attends banquet honoring the local company of Virginia State Guard
- 4-4-1902** "The Gladiator" opens at the Opera House
- 4-6-1865** Confederate forces are defeated in several battles along Saylor's Creek
- 4-6-1865** Gen. Robert E. Lee spends the night at Farmville's Randolph House hotel
- 4-7-1865** High Bridge partially burned; skirmish at Worsham; Federals occupy Hampden-Sydney; battles at Cumberland Church and Plank Road, Farmville occupied
- 4-7-1865** Gen. U. S. Grant, staying at Randolph House hotel, sends a note to Lee encouraging surrender
- 4-8-1865** U.S. Army segments consolidate at Prospect depot en route to Appomattox Court House
- 4-8-1896** Odd Fellows Lodge organized
- 4-9-1865** Army of Northern Virginia surrenders to Gen. Grant at Appomattox Court House
- 4-10-1865** Gen. Grant spends night near Prospect United Methodist Church
- 4-10-1922** First motorized fire truck acquired
- 4-12 -1861** Regional Congressman Roger Pryor helps to open fire on Fort Sumter
- 4-12-1892** Farmville Populist Party organized
- 4-12-1917** Farmville Guard dispatched to St. Paul, Virginia, to guard bridges and tunnels
- 4-13-1803** Initial meeting of board of Buffalo Circulating Library
- 4-13-1920** Mrs. Martha E. Forrester holds first meeting of her Council of Negro Women
- 4-14-1938** Asa Dickinson Watkins, sheriff, judge, commonwealth attorney, died
- 4-14-1974** Coronary Intensive Care Unit opens at Southside Community Hospital
- 4-15-1895** Thornton-Pickett Camp of United Confederate Veterans organized
- 4-15-1933** Roy Clark born nearby in Meherrin
- 4-15-1987** Farmville-Prince Edward Community Library opens; formed by merger of Reading Room and Public Library
- 4-16-1865** Memorial service for President Lincoln is held in Farmville Presbyterian Church
- 4-17-1924** B. M. Cox, sheriff, postmaster, Normal School business manager, died
- 4-21-1861** County representative J. T. Thornton votes for Virginia secession (vote: 88-55)
- 4-21-1936** Farmville High School burns
- 4-22-1866** Henry Watkins Allen dies in exile in Mexico City
- 4-22-1892** Birth of civil rights leader, Dr. Vernon Johns, near Darlington Heights
- 4-22-1901** Constitutionality of the Dispensary argued before Judge George Hundley
- 4-23-1919** Carter Glass trophy train came to Farmville displaying captured World War I weapons and material
- 4-23-1951** 450 Moton High School students stage strike, protesting inadequate facilities
- 4-24-2001** The Rotunda and Ruffner East and West destroyed by fire; Grainger Hall destroyed beyond repair
- 4-25-1946** Thomas Hardy Graham VFW Post organized.
- 4-25-1953** Robert Morris Chapter Order of the Eastern Star initiated
- 4-26-1924** Taylor Manufacturing Company located end of Buffalo Street burned
- 4-27-1905** Lodge No. 200 Odd Fellows organized here
- 4-27-1951** *Farmville Herald* dismisses Moton student strike as a "lack of discipline"
- 4-29-1820** Henry Watkins Allen, Brigadier General, CSA, and governor of Louisiana born near Farmville
- 4-29-1895** Philanthropist Lewis Ginter offers Richmond site for relocating Union Seminary
- 4-29-1901** All saloons in Farmville closed by liquor Dispensary law
- 4-29-1903** Farmville N&W Passenger Station opened
- 4-29-1916** Farmville Dispensary closes
- 4-30-1904** Colonel Richard A. Booker, Captain of Farmville Guard, tobacconist and proprietor of Randolph House, died

