



Biography of Colonel Benjamin Chapman House

On the north side of Route 620 near Stott's Crossroads, intersection of Routes 637 and 620.

From Helen Haverty King, "Historic Isle of Wight to accompany the pictorial, historical map 'Isle of Wight, 1608-1865'"

William Crocker I, a large landowner, left in 1817 to his son, William II, land on "Broadwater Road leading to Smithfield" (now Routed 620). On this, William II built a house in 1826. At his death in 1837 there was a chancery suite to settle the estate and it was sold at auction to Colonel Benjamin Chapman (1815-1857), son of John and Lucy Chapman. He married Mrs. Elizabeth Vellines Edwards, widow of a neighbor, Byrd Edwards, in 1839. Colonel Chapman added to the house in 1848. He died at age 42 in 1857. In his Will he left all his property to his wife, Elizabeth. he also directed that he be buried "at the west corner of my garden on the surface of the earth, in a vault made of the very best bricks and cement, 8 feet long, 8 feet wide, and 3 feet high - with a marble slab to cover the said vault with large letters on the top expressing such character as some friend may thing proper." Some friend evidently thought proper to write:

"to commemorate his virtue as a man, gentleman and citizen this monument is erected."

His wife and a family are also buried there.

In 1879, after Elizabeth Chapman's death the property was sold to Cornelius Hammel Chapman, son of Charles Hammel Chapman, a native of England. Cornelius married Hannah Godwin, sister of Capt. Charlie Godwin, the grandfather of the Honorable Mills E. Godwin, twice governor of Virginia. Cornelius Chapman was a brother of Benjamin Perry Chapman, merchant of Smithfield. Cornelius and Hannah Chapman had twelve children, eleven of whom lived to adulthood: Col. Charles Hammel Chapman; Ruth Ballard whose three children live in Charlottesville: Fletcher Christian whose three children live in Newport News, Sallie Pierce, Annie Maude Chapman; Zella Jones whose sons Jack M. and I Warren (Pete) live in Smithfield; Daisy M. Jordan; Hannah Barrett, whose four children live in Norfolk; Nellie Chapman; Ethel Chapman; Marian Hebditch.

Jack Jones of Smithfield remembers family dinners when he was a child and visited his grandfathers' home. The dining table seated sixteen and usually there were two sittings for a meal. The family worked very hard to farm 590 acres and support themselves.

The house is really two houses joined together. The south wing (ca 1826) is a story and a half with dormers. It has two large brick chimneys laid in American bond, much worn beaded weatherboarding, its own narrow steep stairway, one tall elaborate mantel and one fairly plain mantel in what is now the kitchen. The floors in both sections are originally heart pine boards of random width. The two-story north wing (ca 1848) has only one brick chimney. American bond and plain weatherboarding. This section is wainscoted up to the chair rails on both floors. The stairway goes up eight steps and makes a curved narrow left turn. Window and door framings match the hand carved mantels.

Only one dependency, which probably dates back to the 1820's, remains. It must have been a kitchen with a sleeping loft as the chimney, which has fallen down, measured approximately twelve feet in width.

Judge R. Franklin Edwards, deceased in 1982, purchased the "old Cornelius Chapman" place at the decretal sale to settle the property in 1943. It is now the property of his son Judge Robert B. Edwards and his wife, Laverne, of Moonfield Drive, Smithfield.