Former Trustee and Historical Virginia Figure Turns 200 This Year

Angie Way

William L. Owen of Halifax had at least two sons attend Hampden-Sydney College, and he served as a Trustee of our College from 1876 until his death in 1881. His election as Trustee was likely influenced by his importance to Virginia during the harsh years after the Civil War and Reconstruction. During that time he was part of the major actions of the government and citizens to bring Virginia back into the Union, an effort which found him alongside, and sometimes caught between, many erstwhile advocates of the New South and Southern traditionalists.

He was a merchant by occupation and spent time after the Civil War in the state legislature, representing Halifax County. In a letter to John Bennett dated May 19, 1865, Owen sums up the economic state of himself and Virginia: “I shall lose largely by the war tho’ I made no investments in Confederate securities and at no time had any confidence in Confederate money. But the failure of the Confederacy carries with it all of our Banks and probably most of the State and County securities.”

He was elected to the legislature in 1865, and two years later was selected to represent Halifax at the Constitutional Convention for Reconstitution from winter 1867 to spring 1868. Owen voted as a Conservative throughout the convention with only one exception: he voted with the Radicals against a “roll call on the adoption of a minority report of one exception: he voted with the Radicals against the proposed constitu- tion were contro- versial to Virgin- ians, especially those provisions dealing with the disenfranchisement of former Confederates and suffrage. Politicians in the state urged compromise to allow a state- wide vote on the constitution. In order to determine the form and action of the compro- mise, “invitations for a conference to some of the prominent men of the state” were sent by conservative leaders. The meeting was held on December 31, 1868, in Richmond, with its main action being the formation of a committee “to go to Washington and make known to Congress the willingness of the members...to seek to obtain the best possible terms in regard to a constitu- tion.” William L. Owen was a member of that committee, which became known in Virginia history as the “Committee of Nine.”

The group traveled to Washington and met for about two weeks with committees of the United States Congress and President-elect Ulysses S. Grant. Their message was simple: Virginians were willing to compromise on suffrage in return for amending the disenfranchisement issues, and they hoped that Grant would not “demand a vote on the constitution as a whole, [but instead] submit the more controversial clauses for a separate vote.” “...Grant, who, without committing himself to [the committee’s] policy, agreed that the disfranchise- ment, test oath, and township clauses would have harmful effects.”

Many other entities were also present in Washington at the time, and the Committee of Nine worked hard to support the idea that the members were the voice of the majority of Virginians. The level of their success is clear, as more consideration and more advocates followed them to Washington. The Richmond Whig newspaper proclaimed, “We do not doubt that the committee which went to Washington and made known to Congress the willingness of the members...to seek to obtain the best possible terms in regard to a constitu- tion.”

The final sign that the Committee of Nine had some success was the adoption of the Under- wood Constitution in an 1869 referendum, with some of the more controversial portions voted on

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A 19th-century trustee was a delegate to the Virginia Reconstitution convention . . . PAGE 2

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Graffiti-inscribed berthing unit canvases from the troopship General Nelson M. Walker bear witness to anxiety and longings of men on their way to Vietnam; architectural relics show what might have been built at Hampden-Sydney . . . PAGE 4

William L. Owen, Hampden-Sydney College Trustee, defended giving the vote to newly-freed African-Americans in the constitutional aftermath of the Civil War.
William L. Owen to Family Member, “Cousin Jack P. Maddex, Jr.,
The Virginia Conservatives: 5. Eckenrode, 111.

fund-raising efforts to build the 1993-94 back
College and the Museum and participated in
of Hampden-Sydney College. He and his wife

green wall, to open up the gallery space for free
ing the small front office, walls, door, and lights;
remov-
gallery windows from the interior, making for

Hampden-SYDNEY COLLEGE has long
denjoyed close contact with the citizens of Southside Virginia and especially those of Prince Edward County. Among those founders were Venable’s brother-

William Owen, continued from page 1

Among those founders were Venable’s brother-

This spring two portraits (below)

THE ESTHER THOMAS ATKINSON MUSEUM OF HAMPSHIRE-SYDNEY COLLEGE

Front gallery renovation complete
The renovation of the front gallery was completed

Students Participate in Fall History Research Class at the Museum
As part of the Museum’s on-going mission to

Samantha Mowry, Jr., was a 1990 graduate of

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Supporting the Museum
The Museum’s operating budget comes

Artifice Donation
Thank you for helping us preserve the rich history

In-kind donations are tax-deductible if the
donor furnishes an independent appraisal of the
items. In-kind donations to the College are

University.
Judge Asa Dickerson Watkins 1878 was elected
to the Board of the College in 1896 and served
until 1918. He was Commonwealth’s Attorney
from 1895 to 1898, both in the Virginia
House of Delegates and the Virginia Senate,
and was a member of the board of the Farmville
Female Seminary Association.

William F. Watkins, Jr., ’84, a grandson of Asa
donated his law degrees from the University of

The two join the portrait of charter trustee Francis

Nathaniel Venable and Paul Carrington. He
married Agnes Venable, granddaughter of

Venable’s brother-

William F. Watkins, Jr. ’84, a grandson of Asa
D. Watkins, received his law degree from the
University of Virginia, practiced law in Prince
Edward County from 1950 until 1999, and also
served as mayor of Farmville from 1958 to 1964
and as Commonwealth’s Attorney from 1964 to

William Norman Watkins ’79 graduated Phi
Beta Kappa and received his law degree from
the College of William and Mary. He practices law
in Richmond in the firm of Sands, Marks and
Miller.

supporting the history of Prince Edward County and
organized the committee for the selection of a site for the
proposed University of Virginia.

Judge Francis Nathaniel Watkins 1831, a son
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Female Seminary Association, now Longwood
Female Seminary Association, now Longwood
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As a result individual gifts of annual support

Appraisers.

or remote access to our website at www.edu/development/give.html. You may specify that your gift is to be used
by the Museum. All gifts to the College are tax-deductible.

In-kind donations are tax-deductible if the

Thanks for helping us preserve the rich history

are extremely important to the continued health
and the United States,
the history of Virginia
standing of the history of
Museum is to promote an

students will generate a final presentation of a
publication or exhibition based on their work.
The class is scheduled for the fall 2009

News Briefs from the Atkinson Museum
Front gallery renovation complete
The renovation of the front gallery was completed

Students Participate in Fall History Research Class at the Museum
As part of the Museum’s on-going mission to
complement the educational mission of the Col-
ge two Hampden-Sydney College students will
participate in a special research class taught by
Associate Professor of History Caroline Emmons.
Senior Janmar P. Riley and Junior Nahari Hylas
will work together on a research project with cura-
tor Angela Way while meeting weekly with Profes-
sor Emmons. Their project will require historical
research of items in the College collection and the
use of curatorial practices in cataloging and
organizing the items.

Professor Mary Prior is assisting with the class
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I appreciated very much Wayne Tucker’s “Museum” article about the Wauchope family and their boarding house trials! I can clarify some of the rest of the story of the house itself. Your August 2007 exchanges with George Bass and Wayne’s article focus on the family that was there in the early 1890s. For several years now I have been zealously researching and writing the history of the College Presbyterian Church, and I can pick up the story of that house from different parts of my own manuscript. I’m not sure how long these struggling Wauchopes managed to keep their boarding house afloat, but certainly College Church bought the house from them in 1907 and retained its ownership until 1920. In the 1880s the College Church minister was housed in the church manse, which was then the “Kinderton” house in Worsham (it burned in 1975). Some of the ministers of that era frankly wanted to be in the Hampden-Sydney village, but the church officers felt that moving their pastor’s residence to “The Hill” would seem to be favoring the academic community over the church’s rural constituency, so it was kept at Worsham.

The Wauchope house itself could not have been moved before the mid 1880s, when the electric service came to the village, and President William E. Thompson, College historian and pastor of the church, arranged for wiring to be installed in the manse (i.e., the Wauchope house) and the church; we can certainly imagine that this was largely exposed wiring and switches. The Gammons lived there somewhat reluctantly for two years without agitating about another residence, in large part because World War I was going on and it was a time of sacrifice and simplicity. However, very soon after the war was over, Dr. Gammon began agitating in early 1919 for a better manse with a more prominent location. A legal arrangement was finally approved between the Church and the College on 2 May 1920, whereby the church gave the house to the College in exchange for a lot on College Road just north of the church, where the present manse was then built and occupied in November of that year. I’m not sure when the original Wauchope house was demolished, but the present ranch model Wauchope House was constructed in 1967.