

A Stroll Down Caroline Street, Fredericksburg, 1772



1890 Fredericksburg map

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This month we'll take a stroll down Caroline St. (or Main Street as it is better known) and see who's here. We'll meet some of our neighbors who are merchants, tavernkeepers, doctors, tradesmen, and just plain folk.

Before we start our walk I must point out that none of the properties will have street numbers for MANY years. In our day the standard lot is $\frac{1}{4}$ acre, 4 lots making up a city block (or "square"). Most of us do know the lot numbers as that is how we purchased/leased property. We would also know the property simply by whose shop/home was on it. After all, we aren't a huge town. Most of us know (or are related to) each other. Let's go.

We'll start at the north end of town, at the intersection of Caroline and today's Canal Street. I say today's Canal Street for in 1759 when the town was expanded, there was no canal nor a Canal Street. The town just ended with a road going north toward the ferry for Falmouth. On both sides of the street, the lots between Canal and Pitt Streets are still vacant – and for sale if you'd like to build. Talk to Mr. Fielding Lewis for the best terms! You can probably pick one up for under £50.

As we cross Pitt Street, we get into inhabited territory. On the west side, lots 93 St 91 (going north to south as all will be given) are owned by Anthony McKetrick. Alas, currently I am

unfamiliar with Mr. McKetrick/McKittrick other than the fact that he was a local merchant who died in 1774 without a will. He purchased the lots from Fielding Lewis in 1761 (who also conducted an inventory of his estate in 1774).

Across the street, on the corner of Pitt is lot 82, owned by Margaret Gordon, widow of John Gordon the tavernkeeper who died in 1749. His tavern, Gordon's, is now owned by his son-in-law, George Weedon. We'll get there soon enough. The lot directly behind and fronting Sophia Street, #81, is also owned by Mrs. Gordon. Next door on lot 80 is Mr. George McCall, a Scottish merchant, who also owns the lot behind on Sophia, # 79. George was half of the Scottish firm McCall, Smellie & Co. Smellie remained in Glasgow and McCall oversaw operations in Virginia. His partner in business in Fredericksburg was Henry Mitchell. In 1772 all four lots are now being purchased by Edward Vass where he plans to establish his brickyard. A nice town deserves nice houses, and that means building with brick rather than wood. We're becoming upscale. Mr. Mitchell is also building a merchant shop further down Main street that we'll come to shortly.

Crossing Hawke, we come to lot 89 on the west which is currently vacant. The next down is the home of Mr. Charles Washington, Gentleman, born 1738, lot 87 and 88 fronting Princess Anne Street. Mr. Washington, the youngest brother of Col. George Washington, purchased these lots from his uncle Warner Lewis in 1761 and built his home for his wife, (his cousin) Mildred Thornton, and their family. He is active in local politics and the vestry. He's a town trustee and a county justice. Charles likes taking his summers in the western part of the colony where he can enjoy the cooler temperatures in the summer and "take the baths" there also. In 1780 he will move away from Fredericksburg and establish a town – Charles Town, now in West Virginia. His home will eventually (1790) become a tavern, the Golden Eagle, run by John Frazer. It will be renamed the Rising Sun Tavern in 1927 when the APVA purchases the property as a museum. Across the street is the home/shop of saddler Richard Lewis, and his wife Ann, who purchased the lot (76) in 1764 from merchant Peter Lucas. In 1772 Richard sells the lot to his neighbor, Charles Washington.

On the east side on the corner of Hawke is lot 78. Behind it on Sophia is lot 77, and across Sophia on the river is lot 68. All three are owned by the Scottish firm of Mitchell, Lenox & Scott – John Mitchell [wife: Susannah] and Hugh Lenox (Mr. William Scott is deceased as will be Hugh Lenox in the coming year). They run their merchant business together with their wharf and warehouse on these lots. Another local partner in the firm is James Somerville, another Scotsman, who will sell a plot of land (lot 125) to his Masonic Lodge that will become their burying ground; as it remains today.

The square bounded by Caroline, Princess Anne, Fauquier and Lewis, is the home and merchant shop of Fielding Lewis – the home on the corner of Lewis & Princess Anne (lot 84), the shop just below on the corner of Caroline fit Lewis (lot 83). Fielding, Betty and their children will remain here until they build the manor house in the mid 1770s, later renamed Kenmore by future owners. Their home on lot 84 will be sold to Edward Carter when the family moves to their manor house. Edward Carter's son, Charles, will one day marry Fielding and Betty's daughter,

Betty. The house will be owned by John Stanard in 1807, in whose home the great fire of 1807 will begin, burning down over half of our town.

Across Cardline Street from the Lewis square is the home of Alexander Kennedy (lot 74 on the corner of Fauquier). Capt Kennedy is the master of one of Fielding Lewis' ships. Just below Capt Kennedy's home is the current (2007) location of the library. It was here (lot 72) that Fielding Lewis' father, Col. John Lewis, built the first Lewis store for his son in the 1740s. Currently running a store on the lot is George Thornton.

As we cross Lewis, we're going "downtown." We'll start seeing more shops on every street. On this block, the west side has Charles Dick's merchant business on lot 51 (corner of Lewis Street). He began as an older partner with Fielding. John Lewis probably brought in the Scotsman to teach his son the business. They will remain friends and partners in other ventures throughout their lives. Charles' home is on the hill behind his shop and fronting Princess Anne Street – where it remains. Next to Dick is Mr. John Dalton, a local tailor, who uses part of lot 49 for his business/home, and part (on the corner) is probably in use by Dr. Hugh Mercer for his apothecary shop. The corner lot had previously been the site of John Jones' tavern, run by his wife after his death in 1752, until her own death in 1765. John Jones is the oldest standing stone in St. George's cemetery.

I say "probably" the shop of Mercer because the records are a bit confusing. We know that when Mercer opened his apothecary shop (with Dr. Ewen Clements in 1771), he had signed a lease for part of lot 49. However, by the end of the year, Dr. Clements had left the practice and Mercer took on Dr. John Julian as a partner. Julian, son of the late Charles and Phebe Julian, owns the lot across the street (lot 30) where his mother still keeps a tavern. It is logical to assume that Mercer and Julian set up shop there so as to avoid having to pay rent. However, one ad in the Virginia Gazette notes that Mercer opened his shop across the main street from Henry Mitchell's merchant shop. Mitchell's shop was in the very building now housing the apothecary shop, so that would put it where the Downtown Gym is located (lot 28). We just don't really know where Mercer's shop was located!

We do know that Dr. Mercer, his wife Isabella Gordon (daughter of John and Margaret), and their two children live in their home on lot 50 on the NE corner of Princess Anne and Amelia. But we're getting ahead of our story.

Back on the east side of Caroline Street on the corner of Lewis is the merchant shop of George Mitchell, but he is moving further downtown. (Yes, too many Mitchell's in town. All Scottish, but I still don't know if they are related!) Just down from his shop, about where the Unitarian Church is located, was the merchant shop of James and Robert Duncanson, factors for the Glasgow firm of Buchanan & Co. Robert died about 1764, is buried in St. George's cemetery, and the business was carried on by his younger brother. They were also founding members of the Masonic Lodge in town. James is married to Mary McCauly. They are starting a family and have

moved to lot 22 further down Caroline Street from the estate of the late Dr. William Lynn for their home and new shop.

As was stated, the Julian Tavern is on the corner lot (30) of Caroline and Amelia. Just above it (in the old Duncanson store), is the shop of our local milliner/mantua maker – Rachel Russel. Need a dress but don't want to make it yourself; see Rachel Russel.

We'll cross Amelia and see, as was just stated, Mr. Henry Mitchell's merchant shop on the west side on lot 47. He built this fine building in the past year. Below him, on the corner of William Street (lot 45) is the merchant business of James Robb & William Bogle. They are the factors for the London firm of Robert Bogle and Robert Scott. (Yes, we're not strictly a Scottish town.) Word has it that the firm of Bogle and Scott will not survive another season, but Mr. Robb will probably either move to another firm or become an independent merchant, like Mr. William Allason in Falmouth.

On the SE corner of Caroline and Amelia is the Royston Tobacco warehouse and official inspection station for Fredericksburg. It continues to Sophia Street taking up half of the block (lots 27 & 28). The remaining two lots on the block (25 & 26) are where John Gordon established his tavern in the 1730s. As was mentioned, John died in 1749 and his wife continued running the place. Then in the early 1760s, George Weedon, just back from 5 years in the French & Indian War, met Margaret's daughter, Catherine ("Kitty"), married her and soon took over the business renaming it Weedon's tavern. It was one of the best taverns in town and remained a fixture for years to come first under Weedon's management, then when he went off to the Revolution, under William Smith. It will be here in 1777 that Thomas Jefferson and others will discuss what will become the Freedom of Religion portion of the Bill of Rights.

George and Kitty have no children. Kitty's father, John, emigrated from Scotland to our region in the early 1720s and first built a tavern at Germanna, the first county seat of Spotsylvania. He moved that tavern to Fredericksburg when the court house was relocated here. If you have a court, a tavern will thrive! Oh yes, since Weedon and Mercer married sisters, they are now brothers-in-law and good friends.

Across another street, William. On our right is the market and church lots – the Public Square. It has no lot number as it was destined for the church's use. The half fronting William Street is where we hold our market fairs monthly. Right on the corner of Caroline and William (site of Crown Jewelers) is where the gentlemen of the town raised a subscription and erected a Town House by 1763. It is not a government building, but rather a place to hold dinners, balls, theatrical productions – a place to enjoy. As Ebenezer Hazard, an English visitor in 1777 wrote, "Even this small Town affords a Proof of the Luxury and Extravagance of its Inhabitants, for a House has been erected by private subscription, which is entirely devoted to dissipation. It is of brick (not elegant) & contains a room for Dancing & two for Refinement and Cards."

Next to the market lot is the church lot, the home and cemetery of St. George's church. It is the Church of England and the only church allowed by law in the county. It was created by the same

legislation creating the county. Our minister is the Rev. Mr. James Marye, Jr. (born 1731). He has been here since 1768 when he accepted our call while the rector of St. Thomas' parish in Orange County. He replaces the Rev. Mr. James Marye, Sr., his father. James Sr. was a French Huguenot who was first ordained a Roman Catholic priest (Jesuit) but later took orders in the Church of England when he left France. He was married to the sister of St. George's first minister, Letitia Staige Marye. James senior served as our priest from 1735 until his death in 1768. James junior is a graduate of William & Mary and was a tutor for 18 months to the family of Col. William Byrd. He received his church orders in England. James has had the ill-fortune of losing two wives in his life; his last, Mary, dying 2 years ago. The house has 4 children ranging in age from 5 to 10 years of age. He has recently taken as his third bride the widow Elizabeth Neale Grayson, about 7 years his junior. We wish them all the best.

What's new with the church today? We continue to grow – our tithables are 1,230, up nearly 200 over last year. Our vestry has petitioned the House of Burgess to sell the land fronting main (Caroline) street as it is too hilly for a suitable cemetery. They have also noted that the cemetery is full and there is a need to expand elsewhere. The House approved the request and our vestry is working with our Senior warden, Fielding Lewis, to purchase an additional piece of land to erect a new church. They are looking at lots 137-140, the current (2007) Hurkamp Park.

James junior's siblings were well connected in their own right. Brother William, a physician, graduated from the University of Edinburgh, but died on the eve of immigrating to Virginia. Brother Peter, a William fit Mary graduate, was elected to serve Spotsylvania in 1769 as a member of the House of Burgesses. Through some election errors, the election had to be redone, and Peter lost his seat to Roger Dixon. Older sister Lucy was born in London. She married twice – to a minister then a doctor. Finally, sister Susannah married local physician Dr. Henry Heath, who just died in the last couple of years. In 1769, due to the size of the parish, the House of Burgesses split the parish in two. That portion between the Po and Rappahannock remained St. George's (the upper parish); the rest of the county became Berkeley Parish.

On the NE corner of Caroline and George Streets (lot 22) was the home of Dr. William Lynn, an Irish immigrant since his arrival in the early 1740s. Following his death in 1758, the home descended to his daughter, Ann Dent later Finnie, who sold it to James Duncanson in 1766 for his home. It was Dr. Lynn's wish to be interred in his garden at the house, so, presumably, there he remains. Interestingly, in his will, Dr. Lynn mentions his "reputed daughter" Hannah McCauley. James Duncanson's wife is Mary McCauley/McAuley, daughter of Hannah. James is beginning a merchant partnership with James Maury. They plan on extensive dealings with Whitehaven, England.

If there truly is a center of downtown, the next block is it. Why? Because the Court House fronts on Princess Anne Street between George and Hanover Streets. Just outside the doors of the Court House are the best locations in town for businesses that cater to the frequent litigants and their lawyers. When court days are in session, the town's population swells. With that, there is a good chance to make a little extra money if you sell to those travellers. That's why, in 1740,

Henry Willis bought the two lots on the west side of the block fronting Caroline Street (41 & 43) and intended to build an ordinary or tavern. He died, but stipulated in his will that an ordinary be erected. It was known as the Long Ordinary and in our day of 1772 is owned by Thomas James, whose father, George, ran it briefly until he was killed by a patron in 1753. It is currently managed by Benjamin Johnston. It is the best ordinary in the region!

Next to the Long, on its north side and on Caroline Street are the shops/homes of saddler/blacksmith Hugh Houston and his wife, Fanny; periwig (wig) maker and barber John Atkinson; and tailor James Fulton. Hugh inherited the business from his father, William, who ran it for many years until his death just a couple of years ago. His tanyard for the saddlery is located at the foot of Frederick Street on Sophia. On the corner of George and Caroline is the merchant shop of George Mitchell, he having moved from his location further up Caroline St. recently.

Interestingly, across from the Long Ordinary had stood for years Dowdall Tavern. It was eventually purchased also by Mary, wife of George James, who opened it as her own tavern (lot 18). She sold the property to Peter Marye in 1760. The lot also houses the saddlery business of Thomas Holmes.

As we cross Hanover Street, it's a bit confusing at this stage of research. I do know that on lot 15 & 16 (SE corner Hanover & Caroline, and along Hanover to Sophia) the merchant business of James Ritchie & Co. of Glasgow is in operation. The rest of the block is still a bit fuzzy, so I will not speculate yet.

Crossing again, this time Charlotte, we run into another Tavern on the west, Jacob Whitley's Tavern (lots 35 & 36). It will be renamed Indian Queen in the early 1800s. On the east side of Caroline is the home built by Charles Yates (born 1728 in Whitehaven) known now as the Chimneys. Yates was an English merchant from Whitehaven.

He comes to Virginia through some interesting acquaintances. In the late 1600s the widow of Lawrence Washington (Augustine's father) married a local English factor, George Gale. They returned to Whitehaven where they were married and the children (John, Augustine and Mildred) attended school. The minister of the church in Whitehaven was Rev. Francis Yates. His son, Charles, decided to try his luck at commerce in Virginia in the mid 1750s. He opened his business sharing space with the Gales on lot 2 on Sophia, buying them out by 1758. He then started buying lots around the area and owned lots 2, 11 & 12 for his wharf, warehouse, and merchant shop. Lot 12 is on the SE corner of Caroline & Charlotte Streets. It was here that he built his home and sold a portion of lot 12 last year to Scotsman John Glassell for his business.

Back on the west side of Caroline, at the corner of Wolfe (lot 33) is one of the largest merchants of the region. It's the "Reid Store." William Reid is the local operator for the Glasgow firm of Andrew Cochrane, William Cuninghame & Co. They are one of the largest dealers in tobacco in Europe and have a string of stores in Virginia and Maryland, from which to procure tobacco and

give credit in merchandise to their planter customers. They have had the store here for several years.

Directly across Caroline Street from Reid's is the shop of William Waddell, local staymaker. A hit with our ladies, I'm sure. Behind his shop are more tobacco warehouses fronting Wolfe and Sophia Streets.

Across Wolfe, or should I say IN Wolfe Street, on the east side (lot 17.17) is the home of Benjamin Grymes, Esq. (born about 1728 probably in Gloucester Co.). I'll work up a special article on the life of this interesting character, but for now I'll just say he was a justice, a Burgess, a businessman and entrepreneur. He was married first to Elizabeth Fitzhugh and later Priscilla Rootes. He came from a prominent family but had no sense or personality for business and easily made enemies. He established a bloomery (small iron furnace) near the city docks on Sophia Street, but this too was a failure. He is currently involved of one of his many schemes, heavily in debt, and with few friends.

Just down the block on the east side, on the corner of Prussia (now known as Lafayette) and Caroline, is lot 258. Here Thomas Blanton, a local carpenter, with his wife Jane, lived until selling the parcel and house to a local tailor, William Paul and his wife Fanny in 1770. Mr. Paul's clients include Richard Brooke, Gentleman, of "Smithfield." Paul has a good reputation in the area. In 1770 he and his wife had a public spat with each taking out ads in the Virginia Gazette against the other. I believe Fanny left town about this time, but have no firm evidence. William's little brother, John, occasionally came to town on his merchant ship – normally 2 times a year. In 1776 John will become known to all in America as John Paul Jones. Did he actually live here for any extended period? Probably not.

Across Prussia and we start coming back into a residential area, but with few residents. On the west side (lots 246 & 247) are two rental properties of Roger Dixon. In fact MOST of the lots south of here are still owned by Roger Dixon. If you'd like to purchase one or more, they are available at fair prices!

On the next block, beginning on lot 254 on the corner of Princess Elizabeth Street, was Benjamin Grymes' Bloomery extending down to the river through lots 264 & 272 (it's closed). Rumor is the Bloomery will be soon purchased and turned into a brewery! That's an improvement!

We cross Princess Elizabeth and are about to the end of our journey. On the east side on lot 253 is the fine home of Rev. John Dixon, brother of Roger Dixon. No, Rev. Dixon does not live here. He is from Williamsburg. He purchased the land years ago to help his brother, Roger, "jumpstart" his real estate dealings. Alas, few bought outside the family. Roger did convince John to have a house built, which he did (probably under Roger's plans). The house, 213 Caroline Street, remains to today. I understand that Dr. Charles Mortimer of Essex County has been eying the property with a plan on moving here. We could always use another good physician.

Across on the west side (lots 241 8t 242) is where Roger Dixon built his home and store in the 1760s. Just southwest of here on Hazel Run Dixon has also built a mill. He still hopes to sell some lots and "strike it rich," but as it has been slow in selling, many fear he has overextended himself. Lucy, his wife, steadfastly sticks to him and hopes for the best for her husband and their family. Alas, Roger dies in the spring of this year heavily in debt. He leaves a grieving wife and 8 children. A failure in business, he is never the less well liked by his community.

The town of Fredericksburg in 1772 is obviously much more than one street. It stretches from today's Canal Street in the north to just past Dixon Street in the south; from the river to Prince Edward Street. Many more shops and houses dot the cityscape. We will eventually meet some of these residents, but I wanted to begin our trek with the main street of the town with a hope that we will all become a little more acquainted with our neighbors.

If you discover little nuggets about any of these folk, or other interesting folks in our fair town, please share with me including the source you found the information. Together we can really flesh out our town and our neighbors.