

The  
**Smithfield  
Review**

*Studies in the history of the region west of the Blue Ridge*

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“Smithfield” is an important historic property adjacent to and surrounded by the campus of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia. The manor house, constructed around 1774 on the Virginia frontier, is a premier example of early American architecture and is one of few such regional structures of that period to survive. It was the last home of Colonel William Preston, who immigrated to the Virginia Colony from Ireland in 1739. Preston was a noted surveyor and developer of western lands who served as an important colonial and Revolutionary War leader. He named the 1,860-acre plantation “Smithfield” in honor of his wife, Susanna Smith.

The Prestons’ commitment to education as well as Preston farmlands were both critical factors in the creation of Preston and Olin Institute and its subsequent conversion into Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College (VAMC) in 1872. VAMC has now evolved into a world-class, land-grant university—Virginia Tech.

The manor house and outbuildings are now a museum, interpreted and administered by a large group of volunteers. Historic Smithfield<sup>®</sup> is owned and operated by the Smithfield-Preston Foundation, Inc. The primary goal of the foundation is education about the Preston legacy and life in the region during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This goal is realized using both historic and contemporary venues for programming, educational activities, meetings, arts presentations, music, and commemorations.

Under the auspices of the foundation, *The Smithfield Review* was founded in 1997 with the purpose of helping to preserve often neglected history of the region west of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia and adjacent states. *The Smithfield Review* Editorial Board encourages authors to submit articles for review. Such articles should focus on important people and events; reports of archaeological discoveries; and analyses of the social, political, and architectural history of the region. Whenever possible and appropriate, the articles should incorporate letters, diaries, business papers, speeches, and other primary documents that convey a direct sense of the past to the reader. Inquiries and submissions should be directed to Co-editors Clara B. Cox and Sharon B. Watkins at [smithfieldreview@smithfieldplantation.org](mailto:smithfieldreview@smithfieldplantation.org).

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## A Message from the Editors

Volume 21 begins a new era for *The Smithfield Review*. After 20 years, Hugh Campbell, founding editor, has relinquished his duties but remains on the editorial board. The board has named two of its members as co-editors: Sharon B. Watkins, a retired history professor, and Clara B. Cox, a retired university publications director. Additionally, Peter Wallenstein, a Virginia Tech history professor who reviewed articles, has stepped aside. Daniel B. Thorp, also a Tech history professor and an associate dean in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, has filled the role of history advisor.

In another significant change, Volume 21 and future volumes will go online six months after publication, courtesy of Virginia Tech's University Libraries and library personnel Gail McMillan, director of scholarly communication, and Peter Potter, director of publishing strategy. Plans are also underway to add volumes 1–20 to the website, with the exception of articles by authors who request that their work not be included. The online address for *The Smithfield Review* will be <https://smithfieldreview.org/>. This move to the Internet will give the journal an international presence.

This volume has no overarching themes, with a range of topics revealing the variety of time, place, and people in our region. In the first article, “New Maritime Records of James Patton,” author Ryan S. Mays examines five previously undiscovered manuscripts about Patton located by the author. This material contributes several maritime exploits, including a daring escape from Cornish pirates, and adds to known existing biographical data of Patton.

The next article looks at “Alexander Black and His World, 1857–1935: Part I: 1857–1887.” Author Sharon B. Watkins relates Black's early life through his Civil War childhood and college years. She also examines the familial and community influences that shaped his life, leading to his significant contributions as an adult, which will form Part II of the biography.

The third article, “True Friends of the Confederacy” by John Hildebrand, recounts the unsuccessful peace efforts of several members of the Confederate Congress, including a number of regional politicians. Hildebrand relates the barriers, particularly Confederate President Jefferson Davis, faced by these men who could foresee Southern defeat and wanted to halt the loss of lives in battle.

“‘The Nigh and Best Way’: The Early Development of Roads in Montgomery County,” the fourth article, provides an in-depth examination of the development of routes in the county, travelers using those routes, and factors—economic and topographical, for example—that influenced their location. It was co-authored by Jim Page and Sherry Joines Wyatt.

The tuberculosis sanatorium in Catawba provides the focal point of the final article. Written by Grace Hemmingson, “Catawba Sanatorium: Its Founding and Early History” covers conditions leading to establishment of the hospital by the Commonwealth of Virginia, its early operations, different medical personnel, and factors affecting its successes—and failures.

One Brief Note, “Possible Scottish Baptismal Records of James Patton’s Children” by Ryan S. Mays, looks at birth records from registry books in Dumfries, Scotland, likely to be those of Patton’s children.

The editors thank these authors and extend appreciation to Barbara Corbett, graphic designer, and to the anonymous reviewers who provided feedback on the articles.

Co-editors: Clara B. Cox and Sharon B. Watkins

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