Notes From The Free State Of Patrick November 2009

www.freestateofpatrick.com

J. E. B. Stuart’s Wife: Flora Cooke Stuart

In Detroit, Michigan, in 1876, an old man stood on a railroad platform waiting on the train to stop. Rain was falling all around him, but he did not care, his daughter was coming home. Illness delayed her trip in Cincinnati, Ohio, but now, finally, she was coming to visit with her two children. War literally tore his family apart a decade earlier. His daughter stepped from the train. She said of the trip that she was, “so petted and nursed” that it “quite overcame me.” She wrote of time with her parents stating, “Some of the most miserable days of my life have been spent there and again some very contented and happy ones.” When she first came face to face with her father, she thought it was rain on his face, but then she realized that her father a retired General of the United States Army was crying. Flora Cooke Stuart and Philip St. George Cooke embraced in the rain on the railroad station platform.

Rachel Wilt Hertzog Cooke gave birth to a daughter, Flora, named for the “goddess of flowers” on January 6, 1836, at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, where the United States Army stationed her husband Philip St. George Cooke. One month short of three years earlier Flora’s future husband James Ewell Brown Stuart was born at Laurel Hill in Patrick County, Virginia. The army brought them together nineteen years later.

Receiving an education at a girl’s boarding school in Detroit, Michigan, Flora returned to her parents at Fort Leavenworth in the summer 1855. Many suitors including future Confederate General Beverly Robertson came to call, but it was the red bearded warrior from Patrick County named Stuart who won her heart. Over a hundred years later one writer said it this way, “As they rode in the moonlight of the vast prairie and held hands the strains of the old Southern aire Lorena would float over the western breeze and soon the young couple found themselves deeply in love.” She married him on November 14, 1855, in her graduation dress. Her father commented that, “Flora was married rather suddenly to Mr. Stuart of Virginia. He is a remarkably fine promising, pure young man.”

After two years of marriage, Flora gave birth to a child named for her on November 14, 1857, at Fort Leavenworth in the Kansas Territory. Flora and “Jeb” Stuart’s next child, a boy named Philip St. George Cooke, named for his maternal grandfather came into the world on June 26, 1860, at Fort Riley in the Kansas Territory. In 1861, his father insisted they change the boy’s name to J. E. B. Stuart Jr. “Jimmie” after his grandfather Philip St. George Cooke stayed loyal to the Union.

She experienced tragedy during the war. Flora Stuart and her children “Little Flora” and “Jimmie” made their way to Lynchburg in the fall of 1862 as “Jeb” moved across into Maryland and the battle along the banks of Antietam Creek near Sharpsburg. Lynchburg was one of those behind the lines places that any war effort has to have with factories, iron foundries, gristmills, storehouses, prison camp and thirty military hospitals. Several railroads came into the city including The Virginia and Tennessee, Orange and Alexandria, The Southside and Virginia Central Railroad. “Little Flora” came down with “typhoid fever” and died on November 3, 1862. The home was and is today above the James River at Lynch’s Ferry called “Edgewood” and built by the
Moorman Family. They laid her to rest in Spring Hill Cemetery. “Little Flora” was moved from Lynchburg to Richmond’s Hollywood Cemetery in November 1863.

Flora and her children stayed at the home of Sarah Elizabeth Dabney and her husband John Scarsbrook Langhorne in Lynchburg. The Dabney and Stuart families had a long history going back to Archibald Stuart and Chiswell Dabney. General Stuart’s brother was John Dabney Stuart and Archibald’s sister was Nancy Anne Dabney Stuart Brown. Sarah Dabney Langhorne was the daughter of Chiswell Dabney, who was the son of George and Elizabeth Price Dabney. John and Sarah’s son, also named Chiswell Dabney Langhorne (1843-1919) married Nancy Witcher Keene. Their children included five sisters among them Nancy (1879-1964). She married Robert Gould Shaw (1871-1930) and then Waldorf Astor (1879-1952), the Second Viscount Astor in England. Lady Nancy Astor is famous as the first female Member of Parliament and the verbal foil of Sir Winston Churchill.

Records of Flora Cooke Stuart exist in several manuscript collections. They show a varied life for her. On September 27, 1866, she received $90.18 from Gibsdell, Peirson and Co. in St. Louis, Missouri, settling an account of her husband. On January 5, 1868, she began an annual subscription to the Richmond Dispatch. On June 23, 1868, Flora was in Lynchburg, where she bought a black silk dress for $6.50 and another of three quarters crinoline for $0.43. On April 24, 1869, Flora received merchandise at Saltville. This allows a researcher to track her location before her move to Staunton.

Flora and her brother-in-law, William Alexander Stuart, developed a close relationship. On June 25, 1863, William wrote, “Jeb” that “You may rest perfectly assured that as long as I have anything it shall be shared with you and yours.” Through financial support, he allowed her family to survive and he thought of it as keeping the promise he made to his brother before his death fighting in war. Their letters are now part of the Virginia Historical Society Collection in Richmond. One of these letters reveals that William was able to get the $5,000 that his brother received for his patent on the saber-hitching device in 1859. When Flora received the check, she immediately turned part of the proceeds back to her brother in law repaying him for his help.

Following in the example of Robert E. Lee, who went to Washington College and spent the remaining years of his life involved in the education of young Southerners, Flora and her sister in law, Mary Tucker Stuart Headen, lived and taught school in a cabin still standing in Saltville. The 1870 Census of Virginia lists Flora living in Abingdon. Two years earlier, she traveled to Richmond with her brother John.

In 1876, she traveled to Detroit, Michigan, to visit her parents. Three years later, she went to the Lutheran Seminary in Staunton, Virginia, to teach. The next year she went to the Virginia Female Institute (VFI) and stayed for the next nineteen years replacing the Reverend Dr. Richard Phillips in 1880. Years earlier, Robert E. Lee served on the Board of Visitors for the school and recommended her for the position before his death ten years before she assumed the post.

The Virginia Female Institute, the oldest girl’s school in Virginia founded in 1844 was to be a sister school to the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington. During the Civil War, it served as the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind. Flora Cooke Stuart took over on August 1, 1880, and began the work that caused the school to be renamed Stuart Hall in her honor in 1907.
Several letters of Flora survive in the Washington County Historical Society in Abingdon, Virginia, including the one about visiting her parents in 1876. This letter has Flora in Richmond, where she may have been teaching, making her leaving Saltville earlier than originally thought. Another in 1879 recounts another trip to her parents and tells how J. E. B. Stuart, Jr. nearly drowned in the wake of a steamer while swimming and that he lost his hearing in one ear. A letter from daughter Virginia Pelham Stuart written in Staunton recounts being in Abingdon “as usual,” not going to Missouri on vacation, doing calisthenics and gymnastics with her mother including dumbbells, rings and Indian clubs while referring to her mother as “Mrs. General Stuart.”

Mrs. General J. E. B. Stuart, as she often wrote and referred to herself, protected her husband’s memory with a devotion that approached obsession. She discouraged his friends such as David French Boyd from publishing his article “The Boyhood of J. E. B. Stuart.” She asked John Mosby, who wrote to her that it was his “sacred duty to defend the memory of General Stuart,” not to attack James Longstreet in print. She did not approve of her cousin, John Esten Cooke’s writings on Stuart and fell out with him per her letter to Boyd.

Showing a selflessness that spoke of her Christian faith, Flora left the Virginia Female Institute when her daughter Virginia Pelham Stuart died on September 9, 1898, due to complications of childbirth. She moved to Norfolk, Virginia, and helped her son in law raise her grandchildren.

On May 10, 1923, two days short of fifty-nine years since he left her Flora joined her “Jeb” after falling and striking her head on a sidewalk in Norfolk, Virginia. They carried her to Hollywood Cemetery to lie beside him and the namesake daughter high on the hill above the James River in the city he gave his life defending. One writer wrote this about it. “In the midst of winding trails where flowers bloom in profusion and the gentle Southern breeze whispers ever so softly in the Virginia twilight far from the sound of cannon, and the blaze of battle glory Flora Cooke Stuart sleeps beside her gallant husband where time is endless and glory eternal.”

See Tom Perry at these Events In 2009

October 17, Oktoberfest, Downtown Martinsville 10-4

October 31, Ararat Ruritan BBQ, 10-2

November 6-9, Charity League Bazaar, Martinsville, Virginia

November 10, Frank Stringfellow: Confederate Scout, Martinsville Minister at Wytheville SCV Camp at Wytheville Museum at 7 p.m.

November 21-22, Richmond Civil War Show

December 19-20, Battle of Saltville, www.saltville.org
Born on January 4, 1801, in Pittsylvania County, Virginia, to David and Bethenia Letcher Pannill, Elizabeth Letcher Pannill Stuart came into the world less than twenty years since the treaty with Great Britain brought the United States of America into being. Eighty-three years later, she would pass on after seeing the nation nearly torn apart by Civil War and her youngest son become famous because of it. Sadly, she would outlive all her children except one daughter named for her mother Bethenia and a son William Alexander Stuart, who took the mantel of family provider for many of his siblings, their widows and his mother.

Elizabeth Letcher Pannill married Archibald Stuart in 1817. A strict religious woman with "no special patience for nonsense," tradition states that she had a good head for business ran the family farm. She and her brother divided the family estate, with Elizabeth and Archibald receiving the land in Patrick County called Laurel Hill.

Eleven children would be born to the union: Ann in 1818, Bethenia in 1819, Mary in 1821, David in 1823, William in 1826, John in 1828, Columbia in 1830, an unnamed son that died in 1834, Virginia in 1836 and Victoria in 1838.

On Wednesday, February 6, 1833, Elizabeth gave birth to James Ewell Brown Stuart, the eighth of her eleven children who was the youngest of five sons to survive. Here on the family's fifteen hundred acre farm adjoining the North Carolina-Virginia boundary line, he spent the first twelve years of his life. Educated at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, “Jeb” Stuart served seven years in the cavalry of the U. S. before joining the Confederacy. He rose in rank and fame to Major General under Robert E. Lee in the Army of Northern Virginia.

The year 1855 took Elizabeth Letcher Pannill Stuart on a new path for the next nearly thirty years of life. Archibald Stuart died on September 20, 1855, at Laurel Hill. Elizabeth buried him there high on the hill with the vista of the Blue Ridge and began to move on with her life.

On July 9, 1859, Elizabeth Letcher Pannill Stuart sold the 1500-acre Laurel Hill farm to Robert R. Galloway and Dr. Joseph Hollingsworth, for $12,000. She reserved three parcels including one acre on the Volunteer Road “for the purpose of erecting a church.” The other two reserved parcels include the graveyard of William Letcher and “others” and the graveyard of Archibald Stuart.

After the sale of Laurel Hill she moved to Danville. In 1861, Mrs. Stuart was in Richmond. On February 4, she wrote to her former son in law Peter W. Hairston with her left hand as her right was injured, about the approaching War Between the States. She wrote about being “alarmed at the prospect of Civil War” and thought the “panic” would push “Carolina and Virginia to go to war with each other.” A few months later she wrote Robert E. Lee on April 23 about her son James Ewell Brown Stuart telling Lee that, “As soon as he hears of the Secession, he will fly to place himself by your side. Can you save a place for him?…educated under your eyes and was with you at Harper’s Ferry. He is greatly attached to you and to all of your family.”
The next year 1862, she was in Danville, where she met Pere Louis-Hippolyte Gache, a Catholic priest detailed to Danville Hospitals. The former Chaplain 10th Louisiana Infantry wrote from Lynchburg on November 18, 1862, about the “wondrous events in Danville” “a place where Protestantism reigned with such absolute sway…notions which the local people have of Catholicism are derived from ridiculous and slanderous fables…people honestly and sincerely believe Catholics are low scoundrels…I met only one person there who was an exception to this rule Mrs. Elizabeth Stuart, the mother of the general who has done such wicked things to the poor Yankees.” Gache described Mrs. Stuart as a High Church Episcopalian, who visited the convent in Danville searching for a book. She explained to Gache that once she had lived in St Louis, Missouri, and while there read a book about St. Ignatius Loyola and wanted to reread it. The book was not at the Danville convent, but the Jesuit priest described her as a “marvelous old lady…charming.” Gache stated that Mrs. Stuart told him she believed “most of the doctrines that Catholics hold and the Protestants reject…I believe in miracles, in the Communion of Saints and I also believe in confession.”

Still in Danville in 1863, Elizabeth Stuart was the center of a humorous story involving the future mascot of Virginia Tech. Mrs. Stuart rented a house on Wilson Street in Danville. A visitor told that she had a turkey gobbler tied to her rosewood bedpost to prevent theft for food, as food was becoming scarce in war torn Virginia. Mrs. Stuart explained, “a friend from the country sent it to her for a Christmas turkey.”

The years passed and by 1868 Elizabeth wrote to “Dear Cousin Kitty” March 21 from Lynchburg that “one of the greatest miseries of poverty is that I cannot assist those that I would take the greatest pleasure in assisting.” Elizabeth joined the family at Saltville. William Alexander Stuart was keeping the promise he made to his brother James that he would take care of their family included his mother, his sister Mary and sister in law, Flora, at his Saltville home.

Elizabeth Letcher Pannill Stuart died on August 20, 1884, at Elk Garden, Virginia, the home of William A. Stuart in Russell County. She rests in the cemetery named for Patrick Henry’s sister Elizabeth Russell in Saltville along with many of her children. The family moved Archibald Stuart from Laurel Hill in 1952 to lie beside her. Her daughter in law Ellen Spiller Brown Stuart wrote in the family bible that she was “one of the most intellectual and cultured women in Virginia.”

Left, the grave of
Elizabeth Letcher
Pannill Stuart.
For Immediate Release October 6, 2009
Book Projects to continue fund raising at Bassett Historical Center

Tom Perry announces today the status of three book projects to raise money to expand the Bassett Historical Center, the regional history library of the Blue Ridge Regional Library. In May 2009, Arcadia Publishing released my book *Images of America: Henry County VA*. The book released in May has sold 1,197 copies of which I am donating all the royalty to the effort to expand the Bassett Historical Center. Today I am pleased to announce this book and all my other books sold at or for the library have raised $10,552.75 for the Building Fund of the Bassett Historical Center. The Henry County book and all my books are available for sale at the Bassett Historical Center and at www.amazon.com. The next royalty for the Henry County book will be in March 2010 and again all those funds will go to the library for as long as the book is in print.

The Building Fund is working to get a $200,000 matching grant from the Harvest Foundation in 2009, so if you buy or have bought *Images of Henry County VA* you not only get a book about Henry County history, but you will double the money as all the proceeds count towards the matching grant. With this matching grant my books have raised $21,105.50 for the expansion of the library. At this time the Building Fund Committee has raised $153,625.80 in 2009. With another $46,000 a total of $400,000 will go to the expansion of this library in calendar year 2009. This committee over the last five years has raised nearly $800,000 for this important work. In these tough economic times I think this is truly a remarkable accomplishment. I urge all those who have pledged to the effort to live up to their pledges and encourage all interested parties to help make a significant contribution to the preservation of our regional history. I believe that as time goes on only the racetrack and the VA Museum of Natural History will bring more visitors to Henry County than this library.

With the success of this photo book, I have decided to start a series of photo books on Henry County VA. The first will be on Martinsville projected for release in early 2010 with the same royalty going to the Bassett Historical Center. Here is the cover to the new photo book. I am asking people who have photos of interest to bring them to the Bassett Historical Center for scanning or to simply email them with me. I am interested in photos of events and people who have a good story. I am interested in photos before 1980, but any photo with a good story is welcome. Photos will be accepted through the end of the year.

The third book project I wish to report on is the *Henry County Heritage Book*. At this time we have 165 stories and have sold over 100 books. The book costs $55 if you wish to pick it up at the Bassett Historical Center and $64.50 if you wish it mailed. All the profits from the pre-publication go to the library and count toward the matching grant from the Harvest Foundation. There is no guarantee there will be any post publication copies available, so I encourage everyone to write stories and purchase a book before the November 5, 2009, deadline to be sure you get a copy of this book. Today, I have a draft copy along with a listing of the stories contributed so far for anyone interested. Interested
parties can watch the workshop on writing for the Henry County Heritage Book at the website or on VHS and DVD at the Bassett Historical Center.

I first came to Bassett, VA, over two decades ago to see a girl and it is love that still brings me back, a love of history. I drive 120 miles round trip to use the Bassett Historical Center because I believe it is one of the best libraries in VA. Twenty years ago I raised the money to save J. E. B. Stuart’s Birthplace with the help of many people who believed that saving history is a good thing. I grew up in Patrick County two miles from where J. E. B. Stuart spent his first twelve years and this is Patrick County’s library just as much as it is Henry County's. One of my mentors, O. E. Pilson, who was the primary writer of the History of Patrick County, left his entire collection to the Bassett Historical Center and he has an entire room in this library. Preserving history begins at the library because without books, manuscripts and photos, history would be thrown out in the trash or horded by selfish people who do not share. A library is the best way to share history. People who horde history for their selfish motives do not preserve history. I believe that by sharing my profits from these books I am preserving this history for the future generations. I thank all the people who have supported me and the efforts to preserve our regional history at the Bassett Historical Center.

Then and Now Patrick County Virginia $21.99

"Speaking of history, I recently received a copy of “Then & Now, Patrick County,” compiled by local author Tom Perry. I’ve quickly become a fan of Perry’s work, not only because I enjoy a good read about local history, but because Perry writes in an engaging manner. This book, though, is less about the writing and more about the pictures. In fact, it’s all pictures, along with captions, and it’s a fun visit through the decades in Patrick County. Taking a peak through the book you can find among the pictures a 1907 reunion of Confederate War veterans, dirt track racers in Ararat, Va., from the 1970s, family and church events spread across the decades, tobacco workers in the field, churches, barns, homesteads, landscapes, and loads and loads of groups of people working, playing and posing for the camera. In short, this is a picture history that shows off average, everyday people going through their normal lives, and there are no doubt a few folks from Mount Airy and Surry County who can find themselves, their relatives, or friends among those pictured there. If you want a fun, informal look at some of the goings on of the past 100 years or so just across the Virginia border, this would be a good book to pick up.
-- John Peters, Editor of the Mount Airy News
Twenty years ago a group of volunteers interviewed over 100 people from Patrick County. Today these tapes are available at the Patrick County Branch of the Blue Ridge Regional Library and in Special Collections in the Newman Library at Virginia Tech. Special Collections is digitizing the tapes to make them available on CD and possibly through the internet. I have brought out a new book with the information about the interviews and the topics discussed. This book is available from my website www.freestateofpatrick.com and from www.amazon.com and locally at various outlets including the following for $9.99. I am donating all the proceeds from this book to the effort to digitize this part of Patrick County history.

*J. E. B. Stuart Birthplace: A Guide for Educators and Visitors* is a new book aimed at tourists and educators taken from Perry’s over twenty years researching the site. Perry started the preservation effort to preserve the 75 acre site in 1990 and is the author of J. E. B. Stuart’s Birthplace: The History of the Laurel Hill Farm that tells the story of the Stuart Family from their arrival in America until today. It is also a history of the site and the effort to preserve it. The book includes three driving tours from Mount Airy, North Carolina, Meadows of Dan and Stuart in Virginia with history along the way to the site of the Laurel Hill Farm in Ararat, Virginia. The cover features the artwork of local artist Pat Gwyn Woltz. Her painting Laurel Hill 1842 features young “Jeb” Stuart knocking down a hornet’s nest at his birthplace at age nine.
History Books and DVDs From Author Thomas D. “Tom” Perry on Patrick and Henry Counties in Virginia, J. E. B. Stuart and Regional History including Surry County in North Carolina

Coming in 2010

Locally at the Just Plain Country Store in Stuart, Bassett Historical Center, Chapter’s Bookstore in Galax, Virginia Museum of Natural History and Binding Time Café in Martinsville, Mayberry Trading Post and Poor Farmers Country Store in Meadows of Dan, Ararat Grocery, Franklin County Historical Society in Rocky Mount, Claudville Café, Wytheville Museums and Wytheville Historical and Genealogical Association, Harmon’s Museum in Woodlawn, Fairy Stone State Park, and other locations from Wytheville to Danville in Virginia.
Thomas D. Perry holds a BA in History from Virginia Tech. In 1990, he started the J. E. B. Stuart Birthplace to preserve and interpret the 75 acres of the Laurel Hill Farm, the home Civil War General James Ewell Brown “Jeb” Stuart in Ararat, Virginia. Perry started The Free State Of Patrick Internet History Group in 2004 to promote Patrick County History. Perry is the author of ten books included here.

The Free State Of Patrick Internet History Group is Patrick County’s Largest Historical Organization producing a monthly newsletter and a daily blog. Membership is free by sending an email to freestateofpatrick@yahoo.com with the word ADD in the subject line.

A summary of Perry’s books follows. The Free State of Patrick: Patrick County Virginia in the Civil War in 380 pages tells the story of the people of Patrick County in the War Between the States 1861-65 concentrating on the role of the ordinary soldier from “The Free State of Patrick.” The book contains over 150 letters and 100 photos of soldiers who fought for the Blue and the Gray. Chapters on J. E. B. Stuart, Union General Stoneman’s Raid in 1865 and the home front in the county during the war are included. The book relies on original and published sources to tell the story of Patrick County during the biggest upheaval in our nation’s history. This revised second edition is 8x10.

J. E. B. Stuart’s Birthplace: The History of the Laurel Hill Farm comes after twenty years of research, this 226 page book tells the story of J. E. B. Stuart’s family and their journey to Laurel Hill, the 1500 acre Patrick County farm, where Stuart was born on February 6, 1833, to Archibald and Elizabeth Letcher Pannill Stuart. It tells the story of the Laurel Hill Farm from prehistoric times up through 2006 and the efforts to preserve the property as the only site in the nation specifically preserved to remember J. E. B. Stuart and his role in our nation’s history. This revised second edition is 8x10.

God’s Will Be Done: The Christian Life of J. E. B. Stuart is a 138 page book excerpted from J. E. B. Stuart’s Birthplace telling the life story of J. E. B. Stuart from the perspective of his Christian Faith. Stuart, first a Methodist and then an Episcopalian, founded churches in Kansas and gave money $100 for a church near his home in Ararat, Virginia. This revised second edition is 6x9.

Ascent To Glory: The Genealogy of J. E. B. Stuart in 112 pages tells the story of the ancestors and descendants of Civil War General J. E. B. Stuart. An introductory essay on the life of James Ewell Brown “Jeb” Stuart tells the life of the man known as the “Eyes and Ears” of Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia. The book relies on original and published sources to tell the story of Patrick County Virginia’s most famous historical figure. This revised fourth edition is 8x10.

Images of America: Patrick County Virginia tells the story in 200 photos of Perry’s native county. Formed in 1790, Patrick County is named for the Commonwealth of Virginia’s first governor, Patrick Henry, who lived in neighboring Henry County. Images of America: Henry County Virginia tells the story in 200 photos of the county with chapters on Bassett, Fieldale, Martinsville, and the county at large. Then and Now Patrick County in 200 photos gives an image from the past with a photo from the present telling more stories about Patrick County. In 2010, Perry will release three photo books Patrick County Postcards, Images of Mount Airy North Carolina, and Images of Martinsville Virginia. Other projects include “North Carolina Has Done Nobly” J. E. B. Stuart’s North Carolina Connections and Henry County Virginia in the Civil War.