

## A Glimpse of Arlington in the Eighteenth Century

*By: C. B. Rose, Jr.*

“On the twenty first day of October in the sixth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord George the third by the Grace of God of Great Britain France and Ireland King Defender of the faith and so forth” the Justices of the County Court of Fairfax heard a plea from one Aminadab Seekright against Timothy Dreadnought.

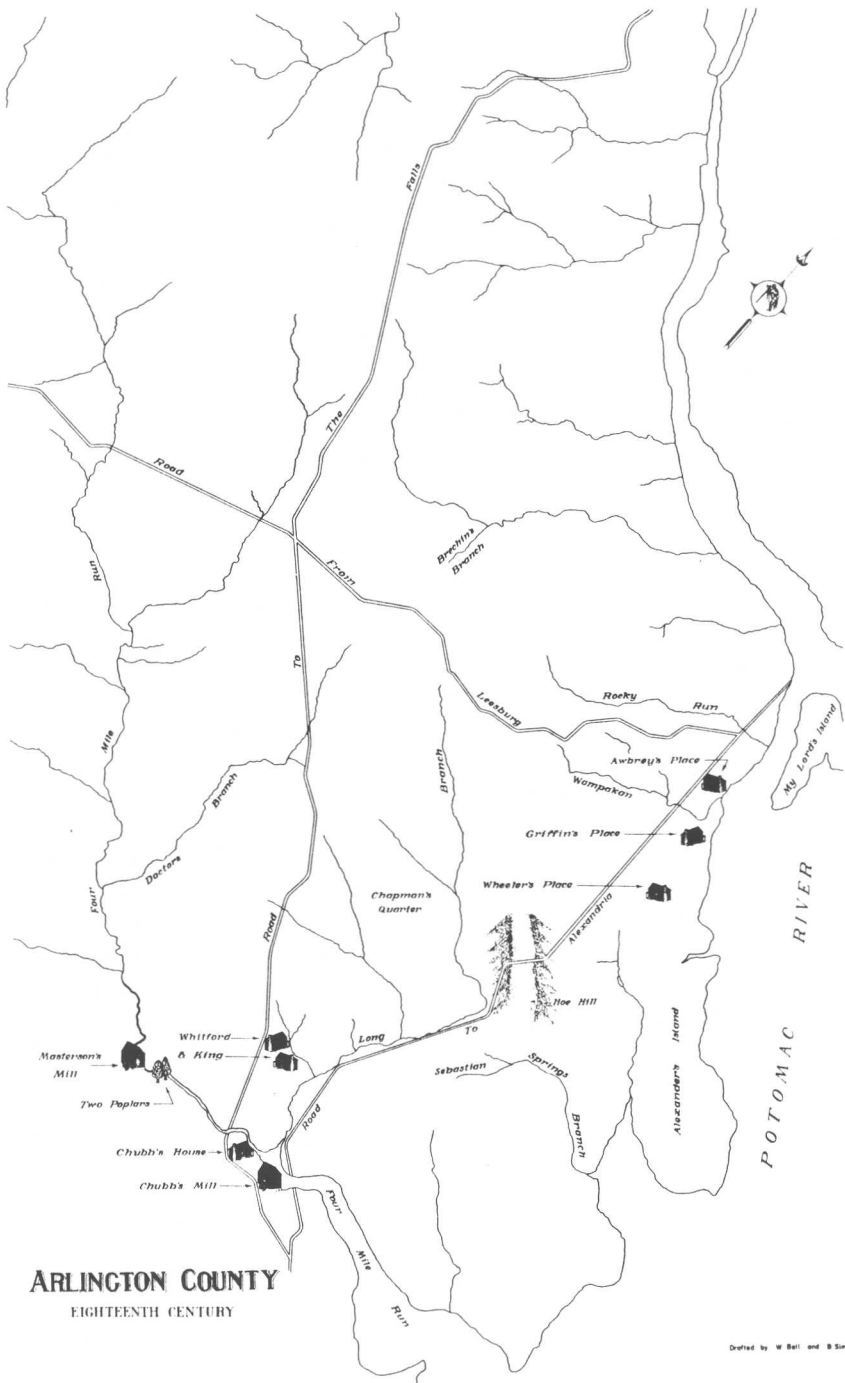
This was, in fact, one more suit concerning the lands of the Alexanders, in 1767 still Arlington's largest landowners. In the quaint style of the time, fictitious names were given to the plaintiff and defendant who actually were John Carlyle, a prominent citizen of Alexandria, and Charles Alexander. Carlyle had brought an action against Alexander to settle the right of possession of a certain tract of land. In the course of the trial depositions were taken from 24 witnesses whose testimony gives us quite a lot of information about what is now Arlington and the people who lived there in the 18th Century. It is fortunate for the historian that the Alexanders were so given to going to law over their lands, for those records of these suits which have been preserved are the principal source of our knowledge of the early centuries of Arlington's history.

The Alexander family originally had acquired its holdings by the purchase of what is known as the Howson patent. Robert Howson, a ship's captain, had been granted 6,000 acres “in the freshes of Potomack river” by William Berkley, Governor of Virginia, in 1669.<sup>1</sup> Under the headright system of the day, those paying for the transportation of immigrants to Virginia were entitled to 50 acres of land for each person so brought in.

On November 13, 1669, John Alexander of Stafford County bought the patent from Robert Howson for 6,000 pounds of tobacco “and cask.” As it turned out when the property was surveyed it came to more than 8,000 acres instead of the 6,000 for which he had paid. This discrepancy together with considerable uncertainty over the exact boundaries of the tract led to frequent and prolonged litigation which was not finally settled until 1790.

John Alexander died in 1677, and all but 500 acres of the

<sup>1</sup> A copy of the patent is to be found in “Fairfax Land Records of Long Standing” in the Fairfax Court House, introduced as evidence in a suit between Sibyl West and John Spinks. It is dated October 21, 1669.



**ARLINGTON COUNTY**  
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Drawn by W. Bell and B. Sims

patent came into the hands of his son Robert.<sup>2</sup> Robert, who died in 1704, left it to his sons Robert and Charles. Charles died intestate and without issue so that Robert became sole owner. This Robert, known as Major Alexander, born in 1688, died in 1735 leaving a number of children. Two of them are important for Arlington history: John (1711-1764) and Gerrard (? - 1761). John had several sons, among them Charles (1737-1806) and John Jr. (1739 - ?).

Major Robert Alexander had never lived in what is now Arlington, remaining on family lands in then Stafford County (now King George), but his sons John and Gerrard did move into the area. John settled below Four Mile Run, and Gerrard eventually built a house on the site of what came to be known as Abingdon. At the time of his father's death, however, he was living on Holmes Island, later known as Alexander's. In the suit with which we are concerned between Carlyle and Alexander it is Charles (the son of John) who was the defendant while John Jr. (his brother) was named "Tenant in possession."

As was not unusual in that day, the suit dragged on for months. Papers were served on John Alexander on May 23, 1766, and the court heard the first motions on October 21, 1766. At that time Charles Alexander by his attorney Francis Dade "prayed to be admitted defendant in the room of the said Timothy Dreadnaught," a prayer which was granted. The Sheriff, Robert Adam, was directed to summon a jury. In the meantime, Francis Dade "moved to relinquish his appearance" and Charles Alexander substituted his cousin Philip Alexander as his attorney. William Ellzey, the original attorney for the Plaintiff, was replaced by Benjamin Sebastian. On January 19, 1767, the Court ordered the Surveyor of the County, George West, "to go upon the Land in controversy on the 23rd day of February next if fair and if not the next fair day" and make a survey. The Surveyor apparently did not heed the direction to wait for a fair day since one of the witnesses who had gone along on the survey testifies "that he well remembers that when Mr. West run the Course down to the river that it was a very bad Day and he likewise remembers that he heard the surveyor say his compass would not Traverse well."

The survey was completed and two copies of a plat turned into the Court by March 24.<sup>3</sup> The case was continued, however,

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed account of the Alexander family and its land transactions, see Stetson: *Four Mile Run Land Grants*.

<sup>3</sup> This was at least the seventh survey of this property of which a record exists.

until June 20, 1767, when a jury was sworn. The members of the jury were: Edward Payne, James Lain, William Linton, Samuel Tillit, Edward Dulin, Charles Brent, Robert Lindsay, William Halley, Jr., Daniel Talbott, Abednego Adams, Gilbert Simpson, Sr., and William Brummel. They were directed to "adjourn to the house of Richard Arrell and be Entertained at the Expense of Both parties and the Sheriff is ordered to attend them untill they agree on a Verdict." The Court House for Fairfax County was in the town of Alexandria at that time and Arrell's house was nearby on Pitt Street between Queen and Cameron Streets.

On June 24 "for certain Reasons exciting as well the said Justices as the said parties the said E.P. one of the above mentioned Jury is withdrawn from the panel" and the jury was discharged. This was a form to remove the case without a decision. The parties at issue agreed to have the case transferred to the General Court and be joined with another suit then before that Court.<sup>4</sup> It was June 1768 before all the depositions had been taken.

Much of the testimony sent to the General Court concerns whether trees were old or young, or whether they had been marked as line or corner trees, and with what sort of instrument - a "howell", a large ax, or a small one - or, indeed, if any edged tool at all had been used. The dependence on marking trees to define property lines was not peculiar to the 18th Century, of course, but in reading this testimony one is struck by the amount of confusion which could arise from this practice. It is futile, of course, at this distance in time to try to follow the evidence about the actual survey. What is of interest, however, is the picture which emerges of the people and surroundings of that day.

There is old John Summers, for instance, "aged upwards of Seventy years" which means that he had been born about 1697. He apparently made a profession of testifying in land suits since his depositions are to be found in a number of case records. Indeed, when he was 92 years old he was still testifying! Summers relates that he had settled on land near where the "present Town of Alexandria is now" about 52 years before, or in 1715. We know from other evidence that this was on land

<sup>4</sup> It is not clear what other suit is meant. *Ramsay vs. Alexander* had been decided in 1758; *Alexander vs. Birch* did not begin until 1782. *Carlyle vs. Alexander* was decided in favor of Carlyle in 1771.

owned by the West family near Oronoco and Queen Streets.<sup>3</sup> He had "never lived above seven or eight miles from the place ever since." Summers' age had not impaired his memory for conversations and events of many years before but apparently it made him somewhat crochety since at the end of his testimony, in response to a question, he replies that "he does not remember whether the Chops on the north line were closed up with the Bark when Jinnings [Daniel Jennings who surveyed the Howson patent three times between 1746 and 1750] made his survey the Deponent not Expecting now to be asked such a Question nor half the other Questions that have this day been asked him."

A contemporary of John Summers, Charles Griffith, also born about 1697, relates that about 43 years before (1724) he had been overseer for Phillip Noland when Major Robert Alexander "Grandfather to the present Charles Alexander" had come up from "Boyeshole" (Boyd's Hole, then in Stafford County, now King George) to inspect his property above Hunting Creek. When Noland told Alexander that "one Robertson, the Goings, and several others" were surveying and taking up land within his boundaries, Major Alexander became angry and "swore he would make them Suffer." The Goings apparently were Alexander tenants since the choleric Major told Noland "that he had a great mind to turn the Rascals off his Land and that he would when he had a little time Survey his Land and Shew them how his Land run." Charles Griffith also had a remarkable memory. Not only did he recall this 43 year old conversation but he tells of one between Noland and Francis Awbrey relating to Alexander land that took place about the same time.

Griffith also relates how about 42 years before (1725) he and "old Hugh West" rode "up to the inhabitants a little below the Lower Falls of Potomack." They crossed Four Mile Run "at the upper horse path" calling in at a tenant of Alexander's who lived on the side of a hill. The house "was then entirely surrounded with Trees except about three or four thousand Corn holes that were cleared round the house." Evidently plowing was not then practiced in Arlington, any more than elsewhere in Virginia, but the old Indian method of planting corn on newly cleared land was followed by some. Griffith and West then took a horsepath northwesterly "which went by the

<sup>3</sup> Although in 1716 he was a tenant of "old Hugh West" he must have owned land in the 1760's because in another case he was one of a jury of "ancient freeholders."

place John Alexander Junior lives” and from thence “over several Branches to the said Inhabitants.” As he and West rode along they talked about who owned what land and whether there was any vacant land which could be taken up. When they returned “they came down on the said Alexanders River side Tenants to four mile Run at the Lowermost horse ford from which place they rode up four mile run by a mill to a house where one old Chubb and Lilliard Lived.” When they left Chubb and Lilliard they returned by “crossing the Lower ford of four Mile run by the Fishing Stops.”

Evidently there were two established crossings of Four Mile Run as far back as the first quarter of the 18th Century, and a well-defined path led from Hunting Creek to people who were then living near Little Falls. It is not altogether clear from the testimony just where these crossings were nor how the path ran although the West survey shows a road along Long Branch, the precursor of Army-Navy Drive, which may follow the line of this path. Further up apparently it crossed Breckin’s Branch a small stream which was the South Fork of Spout Run and ran under what is now Virginia Square to Kirkwood Road. In recent times this was known as Ball’s Branch.

Another witness speaks of trying to go to the ferry to Rock Creek and getting off the road by going along the path to the Falls instead. Here he met “one Richard Wheeler and asked him if he was in the right Road to Rock Creek who answered no, but said he could put the Deponent in the way on his return and the Deponent went with him along as the Fall’s Road now goes.” This happened about 19 or 20 years before (1747 or

<sup>4</sup> According to another witness, William Boylstone, this was the plantation on which Whitford had lived, which explains why he was named “Tenant in possession”. John Alexander Jr. married Elizabeth Barnes and later moved to Kentucky. His son Richard was born in Virginia in 1771.

<sup>5</sup> James Breckin or Brickin (there are ten different versions of the name in the record of this case alone) was a clergyman of Cople Parish, Westmoreland County. He took out a patent for 795 acres in 1713 and gave his name to the stream but seems never to have lived on this land. According to *Wills of Westmoreland* (p. 77) his will drawn October 19, 1721, was probated on April 6, 1722. He left his “land at the falls of Potomac” to his sons William and James. One of them must have come to live in Arlington as Breckin’s Garden was a landmark in deeds of the mid-nineteenth century.

<sup>6</sup> The “Road to the Falls” in Arlington followed the general line of present Glebe Road. It began at Cameron Ford on Hunting Creek where it connected with the Kings highway. The road to the ferry to Rock Creek was what became the Alexandria-Georgetown Road; Awbrey’s road ran from the ferry up to join the “Road to the Falls” in Ballston, in part along the general line of present Wilson Boulevard.

1748) when the witness, Osborn Talbot, lived in Maryland. He had come over to Virginia to work at Henry Brent's (below Hunting Creek) and was returning home. It was 12 or 14 years later before he came to Virginia to live and in the meantime he never lost his way again but used the direct road to Rock Creek. He relates that all about Breckin's Branch at that time was woods with no cleared land.

Richard Wheeler lived on the river front near what is now Memorial Bridge. He was one of the "old Standards" as the early settlers were called. They were also referred to as "old Standers" or "old neighbors." The house where he lived as a tenant of the Alexanders is one of those shown on the Berry plat and also in the Jennings survey of 1746.

William Boylstone "aged Sixty six or thereabouts", was another old timer. He relates that "upward of forty years ago he lived upon the Lands of Majr. Robert Alexander Deceased being the Tract now in Dispute, with his, the Deponent's father." After he married he moved away and became a tenant of Alexander's in his own right, sharing a holding with one Richard Middleton "at the plantation where the present Robert Alexander now lives." He paid annual rent of 524 pounds of tobacco - for "a single lot of 100 acres." Lots were bigger in those days than they are now! He does not remember what year this was but remembers that "the year following the inspection Law was in force"<sup>9</sup> He tells about how when Joseph Berry made his survey he went over Four Mile Run and "along where James Green now lives" and stopt upon a Levell near Awbrey's Road leaving the place where James Green now lives to the left hand." He, too, states that the road from Alexandria to the Falls of the Potomac crosses Breckin's Branch but that "there was no path leading as the Road from Alexandria to the Falls of Potomack now goes till within this twelve or thirteen years past; that people before that time when they came down towards Hunting

<sup>9</sup> Son of Gerrard and cousin of Charles. This probably was Abingdon.

<sup>10</sup> It must have been 1729 since the Inspection Act was passed in 1730. His testimony about the rent is confirmed by Benjamin Sebastian.

<sup>11</sup> There is a possibility that this was in Green Valley and suggests the possible origin of the name. Shirley Highway now runs down what was formerly called Green Valley along the Army-Navy Country Club grounds; the name is now applied to the area on the other side of the hill.

Creek they came round near a place called the hoe or hoehill.”<sup>12</sup> Either Charles Griffith and Hugh West were better acquainted with the woods’ paths than William Boylstone or the memory of one or the other was at fault.

On this point it is interesting to read what Benjamin Sebastian has to say: “There never was any path from the upper side of Four mile run to the Falls of Potomack as the Road now goes till within fourteen or fifteen years last past and that there was a plain Road from the said four mile Run to the Ferry opposite to George Town ever since this Deponent can Remember and this Deponent can’t be mistaken about this Road and path because he was so well acquainted with the woods and used to hunt through them so often.” By the time of the suit to which these records relate these roads certainly were well-defined but we are left in some uncertainty about their status in the first quarter of the 18th Century.

Much of the testimony deals with who was the first to settle up Four Mile Run and just where they lived. William Gossom, “aged sixty-nine or thereabouts,” states that between thirty and forty years before (or about 1727), Evan Thomas moved up and settled his land on Four Mile Run. He “built a small house for the reception of his family and dyed.” His family, however, came up (where from it is never stated) and lived in the house. His widow, William Gossom’s sister, married “one Rigbey” who was a shoemaker and they lived there for several years. From other testimony we learn that the house that Thomas built was a small log house and that when Mr. and Mrs. Rigbey had built a better one they used the old one for a shop. Hugh Rigbey was apparently Arlington’s first shoemaker since the Thomas property was above Four Mile Run and covered what is now Nauck and Fort Barnard Heights. It had first been patented by Thomas and Todd in 1719.

Thomas’ partner, John Todd, apparently never lived on his land and eventually sold his interest in it. Todd seems to have lived below Hunting Creek and was reported by Gerrard Trammell (or Trammell) to have been alive some 13 or 14 years before the time of the trial as Trammell stated that he had had a letter

<sup>12</sup> As nearly as can be determined this was the promontory along South Arlington Ridge Road on which the Little Tea House and “Prospect Hill” stand. James Roach, who acquired this property in 1838, refers to his “Hoe Hill tract.” Those who are familiar with the appearance of this hill toward the north before the construction of the Pentagon network of roads will recognize that it fitted the description of a “hoe” meaning a height as in Plymouth Hoe.



from Colonel Mason (i.e. George Mason of Gunston Hall) informing him that Todd had then recently had some dealings in land in Stafford County. Todd's importance to Arlington lies in the fact that he had made some kind of arrangement with a Doctor Michael Dunghill (as the name is consistently spelled in the records; nowadays it is generally given as "Dangill") who came up and lived on his property for a short time "and then absconded." He stayed long enough to have his title put on the map because the place where he lived is to this day known as Doctors Branch - now a small stream which runs through Barcroft and into Four Mile Run about Vermont Street.

Evan Thomas left a son William who stayed on for some time since Thomas Grafforth (or Graford) mentions that 33 or 34 years before (1733 or 1734) Gossom and this son were making improvements (apparently building a tobacco house) on a plantation on Four Mile Run. Grafforth says that Rigbey "run away" but that Mrs. Rigbey stayed on. There were also two Thomas daughters, one of whom married a Thomas Whitford and the other a Robert King. Just where they lived is marked on the Berry plat. We do not learn much about Robert King but from Charles Griffith we learn that Whitford sold him three beeves about 1743. Shortly after that "Whitford came down to Belvoir to cut stone and in conversation told this Deponent he was afraid he should lose his Land but this Deponent understood or Suspected it was for Debt" - and not because, as had been intimated, that it might conflict with the Alexander's title. According to Jennings' survey notes Whitford and King moved away between 1746 and 1748.

Even before Doctor Dunghill or Evan Thomas and his family came up Four Mile Run, there was another settler. A man by the name of Lilliard went up and built a mill, no longer standing in 1767. The location of that mill was very important to the outcome of the suit, and there are many references to it. John Summers says "Chubbs Mill was built by one Lilliard who died and Chubb married his widow and then the Mill was called Chubbs Mill." It is shown as such on the surveys, located by the Surveyor, apparently, according to the testimony of the "Old Standards." The widow Lilliard had a son, John Lilliard, who moved out when his mother married Edward Chubb, and before 1728 had built himself a house nearby, according to Summers on the upper west side of the Long Branch, "but cleared no land Except room for the House, and the said Lilliard lived there but a very short time." It would seem that

in those days people were forever moving about - probably because the County was getting too crowded.<sup>13</sup>

Michael Reagan<sup>14</sup>, "aged near Sixty seven years or thereabouts" says that Lilliard, "son in law"<sup>15</sup> to Chubb built a house "on the upper side of Chubbs cornfield." He agrees that Lilliard was there only a short time but insists that his house stood some distance above Chubbs Mill up Four Mile Run. On the other hand, Frances Ballenger, aged fifty years or thereabouts, who had been born on the land of the Alexanders and had lived in the County ever since, "well Remembers where one Chubb and Lilliard lived and that they were tenants to the said Robert Alexander. He further saith that Chubb lived on the Lower side and Lilliard on the upper side of the Long Branch." Whether or not Chubb and Lilliard acknowledged themselves tenants of the Alexanders, and just where they were settled, was of critical importance as indicating adverse possession. Thomas Coulter, "aged Sixty five years or thereabouts," agrees with Ballenger that Chubb and Lilliard were tenants of Robert Alexander, and that they lived on the lower side of the mouth of Long Branch. Moses Ball<sup>16</sup> is cagey: he says he saw Chubb in a house on the west (upper) side of the Long Branch but does not know whether or not he lived there. David Thomas and Jeremiah Hampton, however, insist that Lilliard lived on the west side of Long Branch.

The trip that Charles Griffith took with Major Hugh West included a visit to Chubb and Lilliard but beyond saying that the house was on the side of a hill Griffith does not locate it more exactly. He says that he, John Summers, and Charritee Nooson had shown its location to George West.<sup>17</sup> Jeremiah Hampton, who had "carried the chain" when Jennings made his survey, says there was a house "Westward of the mouth of the long

<sup>13</sup> It is interesting that four of the witnesses came from Loudoun to testify. One of them was Francis Awbrey whose father had turned his back on Arlington and taken up land in Loudoun as early as 1725. Noland also moved to Loudoun.

<sup>14</sup> In 1748 Reagan owned land below Hunting Creek near John Ball. The Falls Church stands on land patented by Reagan.

<sup>15</sup> In the usage of the time a stepson was referred to as a "son-in-law."

<sup>16</sup> For much information about Moses Ball, one of the first settlers in Glencarlyn, see Stetson: *Four Mile Run Land Grants*.

<sup>17</sup> The plat of this survey locates it about where the VEPCO Building is on Old Glebe Road now in Alexandria.

branch that empties itself in Four Mile Run near Chubb's Mill." According to his account, he stood around there one day with William Thomas son of Evan Thomas and gossiped about who owned what and who was tenant to whom. David Thomas "aged Seventy odd" (but apparently not a relative of Evan or William) also places the Lilliard house west of the mouth of the Long Branch, "that Empties itself in Four Mile Run near Chubbs Mill."<sup>18</sup> Thomas brings a new character into the picture, reporting that on the side of a hill to the westward of Lilliard was a house "in which one Vines lived forty odd years ago." This is the only time we hear of Vines unless he is the shadowy figure referred to by Benjamin Talbert "aged Sixty-five or thereabouts" as "a man who lived over the Branch in the old Fields near Chubb's Mill."

Chubb's mill may not have been the first up Four Mile Run, although it is mentioned in the Thomas and Todd patent of 1719. There are a number of references in *Carlyle vs. Alexander* to "Mastersons Mill." Apparently it was not standing in 1767 but had been when Jennings made his survey in 1750. His survey notes also mention a deposition taken from Edward Masterson. Thomas Grafford says that "where Mastersons Mill stood is within about one hundred yards of the two poplars on four mile run."<sup>19</sup> Gerrard Trammell says that after the survey by Jennings "Edward Mastersons mill was Recovered by John and Gerrard Alexander." John Frizzell (a mere youngster in this cloud of witnesses - he was only 41 years old) who was a chain carrier when John Mauzzey made a survey for John Alexander, father of Charles, says Mauzzey ran a course which went "about a quarter of a mile above where Mastersons Mill stood." This survey was made "Eighteen Years ago this Fall coming" - or in 1749. Along on the survey, we hear, were Joe Bowling and "one Savin."

One of the fascinating things about this mass of testimony is the number of people who flit in and out, leaving little behind but their names. We have the Charritee Nooson mentioned above. Now it is "one Savin" who had been an overseer for John Alexander, father of Charles, and Joe Bowling, although Joe may be the same as "Gerrard Bolling" to whom Frances

<sup>18</sup> This description was necessary because Doctors Branch also seems to have been called the Upper Long Branch. There are today two Long Branches of Four Mile Run but the upper one is above Doctors Branch coming in from the south at 7th Road South while the lower one comes in from the north near South Meade Street and Glebe Road.

<sup>19</sup> This would place it in Jennie Dean Park near Shirlington.

Ballenger says he showed the Lilliard and Chubb houses. Joseph Bolling was a chain carrier on the Jennings survey of 1750. Thomas Coulter mentions "one old Thomas Clapham" who gave him some information relative to the beginning point of the Alexander land. Clapham, it appears, was an "Old Standard". Peter Guinn was another "Old Standard" and so was John Musgrove. Mark Thomas was Chapman's overseer, and Nicholas Elam had been John Awbrey's.

About some of the people mentioned we learn a little more. Watson kept a store where Richard Wheeler (who had died before 1767) had lived as a tenant to Alexander. Richard Steerman was a Deputy Sheriff when William Payne was Sheriff. Edward Emms<sup>20</sup> was "an excellent woodsman." John George Boucher (the only person to be mentioned with a middle name) in 1767 lived in a house above Breckin's Branch into which before old Robert Alexander's death he (Alexander) had put James Ball as tenant. William Butsfield had a plantation on Alexander's back line and Charles Story lived on it. James Simmons "served his time" (i.e., had been an indentured servant) and then was settled as a tenant to Alexander. William Griffin was an overseer for Major Alexander and seated a place a little below the mouth of the Wampakan Branch (this is shown on the plat of the survey) some time after he was overseer, about thirty or forty years ago.

Then there is John Wilcoxon who came over into Virginia "forty Six years or forty Seven years ago" (1720 or 1721) with Benjamin Talbert to look for land which he might take up. Captain Simon Pearson "carried them" along the Alexander's back line and advised them that there was no land to be taken up there. Talbert says he has lived in the neighborhood only about eight years but "has been acquainted in the Neighbourhood fifty Odd years and Lived about a Mile and a half from the disputed Land on the Maryland Side and opposite to the land of the Alexanders. He further says being asked by the Plaintiff that he Frequently came over from Maryland to Virginia before he was Married and not so often Since." It is an interesting commentary on transportation in those days - easier by water than by land - that someone living on the other side of the Potomac was considered to be in the neighborhood of Four Mile Run above Long Branch. Talbert's business in Virginia may have been to come courting since David Thomas says he used to be often at Captain Pearson's and came less often after he was married.

<sup>20</sup> He was a member of the Truro Parish vestry in 1744 but could not read or write.

Benjamin Sebastian, however, discredits Talbert's testimony saying he had never heard of him until recently although he (Sebastian) had lived in the neighborhood for 38 years.

Sometimes the picture which is drawn of these early Arlingtonians is not very flattering. For instance, there is the tale of Robert Boggess, Sr. He was a member of the Truro vestry and a substantial citizen owning land below Hunting Creek near Pohick on which he operated a race course. At the time of the *Carlyle vs. Alexander* suit he was sixty-one. He says that when John Awbrey (brother of Francis) was on his death bed (1743) he sent for Boggess and asked him to take care of his daughter and his estate. He asked him to spare no money or pains to prosecute the suit between him and the Alexanders then going on.<sup>21</sup> Boggess says "in finding the wife of Awbrey" aforesaid a bad Woman he declined being concerned with the Estate." A curious kind of compunction because he has another tale to tell which indicates that he was not always so scrupulous.

"In the time of William Payne was Sheriff, Gerrard Alexander offered him [Boggess] to procure a writ of adquoddamnum to Dock the intail of the said Alexander's Land.<sup>22</sup> The writ was procured, and this Deponent attended and a Jury was Summoned... and Gerrard Alexander gave the Deponent a double loon for his trouble... He further says that he told the Jury after they had valued the Land that they had valued it too Low for that he had land about that place and Should get little for it but what he said then was out of a joke for he had no title to any land near that place or any dispute about any. This Deponent says he was not imployed by Alexander to deceive or impose upon the Jury as to the Value of the Land but he understood that Mr. Sebastian was to plot the Jury." When it is his turn to testify, Benjamin Sebastian confirms the account of the action but disregards the charge that he was to tamper with the Jury. In fact, he calls Boggess himself a "bad man" and states that he has "forsworn himself" on a number of occasions, implying that his testimony in this instance is perjured.

<sup>21</sup> The date of what is known as the Alexander-Awbrey suit was 1742 but this was against Henry Awbrey, infant son of Thomas Awbrey and related to land at the north end of the Howson patent. John Awbrey had bought John Todd's interest in the Thomas and Todd patent.

<sup>22</sup> Named on Jennings' 1746 survey as Mary and then living on the north end of the Howson patent where John Wooldridge "lately did live."

<sup>23</sup> The legal procedure and significance of this action are described by Stetson in *Four Mile Run Land Grants*.

Sebastian has something to say about another of the witnesses, also. He says that about 20 years before Ferdinando Oneal had confessed to him that he had been convicted of perjury and transported to America for this offense. In 1742 Oneal had been living with Whitford but at the time of *Carlyle vs. Alexander* he had to come from Loudoun to testify.

Francis Awbrey apparently did not think Boggess very reliable either because he testifies that "he does not recollect to have heard any body mention that Alexander's corner stood above Brechins Branch but Robert Boggess and that not till he the said Robert Boggess was sworn in the present dispute." Perhaps Awbrey was prejudiced because of what Boggess had said about his sister-in-law.

There is some indication in the testimony that the Goings of that day were generally considered the rascals Major Alexander called them. Charles Griffith tells how he was at a race about 43 years before (1724) where the "Goings (who then had running horses) were and that the old people were talking about the Goings taking up Alexanders Land and Selling it to Thomas and Todd"<sup>21</sup> ... the Deponent Saith the people was laughing and said if it were not for the Alexander land the Goings had Sold to Thomas and Todd they the said Goings would not be so lavish of their money of which they seemed to have a great plenty at that time."

Benjamin Talbert reports a long conversation between Simon Pearson and James and Tom Going at the time that Pearson was showing him and Wilcoxon the Alexander back line. It appears to lend some color to Charles Griffith's story - that the Goings sold land not actually theirs. Talbert also tells about looking for line and corner trees with Stephen Gray<sup>22</sup> "who is dead" and that he went to Thomas Going the "day after

<sup>21</sup> Since the Thomas and Todd patent was a grant from the Proprietor, Lord Fairfax, it may be that the Goings had taken out a warrant for this land prior to the grant and had sold their interest in the warrant to Thomas and Todd. It is difficult to understand how they could have sold the land. The timing is also obscure: Griffith is talking of 1724; the Thomas and Todd patent was dated 1719. Had the Goings held onto this money for more than five years?

<sup>22</sup> Gray did take up land in 1724 on Four Mile Run which later came into the hands of George Washington and was known as "Washington Forest." See Stetson: *Four Mile Run Land Grants*. Not much is known about Gray except that he left a widow whose first husband had been named Parker. Gray may have been a tenant of the Alexanders on the Abingdon estate before he took up land on his own.

Gray and he had been looking for the said bound Tree which bound Tree the Deponent Says Gray and he could not find and upon his describing the place where they had Looked for the said bound Tree, Going told him he had come Damnable near to it and that he was Surprised Gray and he did not find it and that if Gray would give him a Black Horse he possessed he would shew him the said bound Tree." Going is reported by Talbert to have gone on and said that he could find this tree "the Darkest Night that was." Talbert seems to have thought him something of a braggart as well as an extortionist.

Considerable furor was raised by the claim that "one Samuel Vaughdry," an overseer of Simon Pearson's, had cut down a corner tree on Alexander's line. Henry Collum is supposed to have testified to this in the suit between Ramsay and Alexander.<sup>26</sup> Gerrard Trammell brings this up when he testifies the first time, apparently in the spring of 1767. (There is a page missing from the record containing the last part of Trammell's first deposition and all but the final sentence of Guy Broadwater's.) He was recalled in April 1768 when he says that he does not know of his own knowledge whether Vaughdry felled the tree or not but that Henry Collum had told him about it. This testimony was objected to by Philip Alexander, attorney for the defendent, since it appears that Henry Collum was alive (Trammell had said his son Gerrard had talked with Collum the past fall after he first testified) and should have been present in person.

Most of the information about Benjamin Sebastian comes from his own testimony. It stands out as that of an educated man, and it is significant that he is the only witness to be styled "Gent", a title not given lightly in those days. What is more, his age is given exactly as 62 - no "or thereabouts" for him. This means he was born in 1706. He states that in 1731 he was employed by Major Robert Alexander, Grandfather to the Defendent, to live on his island as his overseer. This island is identified (at the time of the testimony) as the one now held by Mr. Phillip Alexander and was therefore Alexander's Island.<sup>27</sup> Sebastian lived there a year and was employed during that time

<sup>26</sup> This testimony is missing from the Record book. Henry Collum is identified elsewhere as having been a servant of Simon Pearson's in the 1740's. He was a sworn chain carrier in the Jennings survey of 1750. Trammell was a chain carrier in Jennings survey in 1748.

<sup>27</sup> This no longer appears on the map. See *A History of the Boundaries of Arlington County, Virginia*.

to collect the Alexander rents. The names of the tenants from whom he collected are given as Judith Ballenger (wife of William and mother of Frances?), James Going, Sarah Young, (wife of Jonathan Young) Sarah Amos - all below Four Mile Run, and Edward Chubb, Richard Middleton, William Boylstone, John Straughan, Adam Straughan, Edward Earpe, and Richard Wheeler above the Run.

The next year, Sebastian says he lived with John Straughan, and the year after he himself became a tenant of Alexander's. He says he was promised a lease but that Robert Alexander never gave it to him. However, Gerrard Alexander, who inherited this part of the estate, did give him a lease and he has lived on that plantation ever since.<sup>28</sup> In fact, he says he has lived in the neighborhood consistently for 38 years.

Sebastian was called upon, apparently, to confirm or refute testimony given by other witnesses. Reference to this has been made earlier. He branded Boggess and Oneal perjurers, indicated that Talbert had at the very least a vivid imagination, sustained William Boylstone. It is clear that his opinion was considered of value by the court.

The story of Sebastian deserves further search to bring it to light. There is a legend that he had been a pirate. He began his career in Arlington, by his own account, as an employee of the Alexander's. Yet when he died, only two years after giving his testimony in the *Carlyle vs. Alexander* case, he left a very substantial estate which is inventoried in Fairfax Will Book "C". He left a life interest to his "beloved wife" Priscilla, making his two daughters, Elizabeth and Behethliam, his heirs. Although in his will he styles himself "Sr." there is no mention of a son.

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This closes the testimony in the case between Aminidab Seekright and Timonhy Dreadnaught.

What have we been able to learn about Arlington from this peek into the 18th Century?

During the first quarter of the Century, although the big

<sup>28</sup> An Arlington subdivision is known as Sebastian Spring. The spring is at the foot of the hill on which stands "Prospect Hill," the house built by James Roach in the 1840's. There is a possibility that Roach built on the site of the Sebastian house. Sebastian called his home "Montpelier" which would imply that it had been built on a height.



landowners were still absentee, they had tenants working their land. More important, perhaps, yeomen were coming in to take up and farm smaller holdings on their own. We see the process whereby indentured servants were transformed into respected members of the community. And as the Century progressed, the large landowners themselves began to live here.

Tobacco was still the cash crop during the first half of the Century, but corn and cattle also were raised. There were mills, indicating the beginnings of the cultivation of wheat - which was to supplant tobacco as the cash crop in this area and make Alexandria an important port.

Settlement was scattered but even so there were the beginnings of trade - Watson's store - and commercial enterprise - Rigbey's shoemaking shop.

Communication by water was easier than by land where people moved about only on foot or horseback. By the middle of the Century roads were beginning to replace the woods' paths but "across the Potomac" still was "in the neighborhood."

Social life not only included visiting the neighbors but as early as 1724 it was possible to attend races. The militia played a part in social life - military titles were important - and musters were a social occasion.

We know the names of some of our earliest settlers and have thumb nail sketches of many of them. Some of them seem to become old friends as they are mentioned again and again.

We even know something of the weather. The Berry survey of 1741 was made in the "Spring after the hard winter."

Of course there is much that we do not know about Arlington more than 200 years ago. But thanks to Mr. Carlyle and Mr. Alexander we now know a good deal more than we did before.