Family of James Patton Preston, his children, and their children

Parents: William Preston (1729–1783) m. Susanna Smith (1740–1823) in 1760

James Patton Preston (1774–1843) m. Ann Nancy Barraud Taylor (1778–1861) in 1801

Children:

1. Sarah Barraud Preston (1804–1804)
2. **William Ballard Preston** (1805–1862) m. Lucy Staples Redd (1819–1891) in 1839
    1. Waller Redd Preston (1841–1872) m. Harriett Jane Milling Means (1846-1869) in 1866
    2. Ann Taylor Preston (1843-1868) m. Walter Coles (1839-1892) in 1864
    3. James Patton Preston (1845–1920)
    4. Lucy Redd Preston (1848–1928) m. William Radford Beale (1839–1917) in 1866
    5. Jane Grace Preston (1849–1930) m. Aubin Lee Boulware (1843–1897) in 1878
    6. Keziah [Mary Rezin] Preston (1853-1861)
3. **Robert Taylor Preston** (1809–1880) m. Mary Hart (1810–1881) in 1833
    1. Virginia Ann Emily Preston (1834–1898) m. Robert Stark Means (1833–1874) in 1856
    2. Benjamin Hart Preston (1836–1851)
    3. James Patton Preston (1838–1901)
4. **James Francis Preston** (1813–1862) m. Sarah Ann Caperton (1826–1908) in 1855
    1. Hugh Caperton Preston (1856–1935) m. Caroline [Cary] Marx Baldwin (1858–1935) in 1878
    2. William Ballard Preston (1858–1901) m. Elizabeth Blackford Scott (1864–1920) in 1888
    3. James Francis Preston (1860–1862)
5. Virginia Ann Preston (1816–1833)
6. Susan Edmonia Preston (1818–1823)
7. Catharine Jane Preston (1821-1852) m. George Gilmer (1810–1875) in 1845
    1. James Preston Gilmer (1851–1852)
8. Susan Preston (1824–1835)

A Summary of 19th-Century Smithfield
Part I
The Years Before the Civil War

Laura Jones Wedin

Introduction

Much has been written about Colonel William Preston and the earliest years of Smithfield. Certain segments of the history of this significant plantation have been chronicled, but no one piece has provided a summary of its history through the death of the last Preston to live at Smithfield in 1891. This is the first in a series of three articles that will create a chronology of events and people who carried Smithfield from the new United States until past the Civil War years, through Reconstruction, and into the 20th century.

A Summary of the Early Years

During the first six decades of the 19th century, Smithfield Plantation in Southwest Virginia and its family, the Prestons, were an entity of power, prestige, and service. The settlement of the land was coaxed by a persistent Colonel William Preston (1729–1783), an immigrant Scots-Irishman who understood that he was at the frontier's edge. Preston was nearby on the day of the Drapers Meadows Massacre on July 30, 1755, when he, by chance, escaped the attack of the Shawnee but lost his uncle and mentor, Colonel James Patton, in the raid.[1] A year later, Colonel Preston would guide the future President George Washington on a tour of the western forts guarding the very western rim of the colonies.[2]

The ambitious Preston was a land surveyor who accumulated his wealth through land acquisition, with the distinct advantage of knowing the location of the most valuable parcels. Just before marrying Susanna Smith (1740–1823) in 1760, he purchased land in Botetourt County for their first home and named it Greenfield. Knowledge of the soon-to-be-formed Fincastle County in 1772 enabled him to purchase additional property within the new county's boundaries, which provided him with a prime opportunity for political office.[3] He also purchased the tract of land in the vicinity of where the massacre occurred as well as other parcels in 1773. Colonel Preston eventually named his new plantation Smithfield in honor of his wife.

Years of hard work, education, intermarriage with Virginia's best families, and political savvy brought the Preston family to the forefront of social standing in the southeastern states. Colonel William Preston had astutely recognized that education would be a critical aspect of the future success of his children and his community. His will stipulated that his wife, Susanna, "superintend" the education of their children.

The First Generation

William Preston's eighth child and fourth son was named James Patton Preston, in honor of the uncle who had been killed by the Shawnee 19 years before. He was the first of their children to be born at Smithfield, in 1774, very likely in a simple log cabin inhabited by the family before the manor house was completed.[4] James was an unlikely survivor. Susanna was so ill with typhus that James was nursed and cared for by a local woman until his mother recovered.[5] Colonel Preston died in 1783, when James was 9 years old. He was probably part of the funeral procession that carried his father to rest in the family cemetery located on a knoll southeast of the manor house.

When the property and considerable land holdings of William Preston were divided among the 11 living children, James inherited the Smithfield property, about 1,800 acres.[6] The other children inherited land elsewhere, some as far as Kentucky. James was mentored by his older brothers, John, Francis, and William, and surely was encouraged by his mother, Susanna, who ran the plantation until James came of age. He was first educated at a school set up at Smithfield. Later as a young man, James attended the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg and then spent a year in Philadelphia with his older brother Francis, who was serving his final year with the U.S. Congress. When the town of Blacksburg was established in 1798, James was one of the trustees. Though wounded in the War of 1812 with an injury that crippled his leg for life, he served in the Virginia House of Delegates representing Montgomery County and then served three terms as the 20th governor of Virginia from 1816 to 1819. The establishment, approval of funding, and location of a Central College in Charlottesville (University of Virginia) occurred during his term as governor.[7] By virtue of a special appointment from President James Monroe, he also focused on Indian affairs and then served as postmaster of Richmond from 1824 to 1837, so he was in Richmond much of the time between 1816 and the late 1830s.[8]

Governor Preston's wife, Ann Barraud Taylor (1778–1861), was originally from the town of Smithfield in Isle of Wight County, Virginia.[9] Her father, Robert Taylor, was a judge, and her mother's family was one of the oldest white families in Virginia and Maryland.[10] Ann and James married in

1801 in Norfolk. He brought his bride to Smithfield in Montgomery County, and from age 24 to 47, Ann bore eight children (three sons and five daughters).

Their first child, a daughter born in 1804, lived just a few months. The three sons, William Ballard (1805–1862), Robert Taylor (1809–1880), and James Francis (1813–1862) thrived, but they experienced the deaths of three sisters: Susan Edmonia in 1823 at age 5, Virginia Ann in 1833 at age 16, and Susan (born after the death of Susan Edmonia) in the spring of 1835 in Lexington. James Patton wrote to his nephew, James McDowell, that Susan's remains were returned to Smithfield in a mournful procession and that a "deeply afflicted circle of friends gave our Susan to the consecrated spot which she while living asked her mother to select for her remains."[11]

In her book, *A Girl's Life in Virginia before the War,* a glorified, nostalgic view of antebellum life at Virginia plantations, Letitia M. Burwell (1810–1905), who grew up at Avenel House Plantation in Bedford, Virginia, wrote of the time before the Civil War. Of her visit to Smithfield, she wrote of Ann Taylor Preston:

> When I first visited this place, the old grandmother, then eighty years of age, was living. She...had been a belle in eastern Virginia in her youth. When she married the owner of Smithfield sixty years before, she made the bridal jaunt from Norfolk to this place on horseback, two hundred miles. Still exceedingly intelligent and interesting, she entertained us with various incidents of her early life, and wished to hear all the old songs which she had then heard and sung herself.
>
> "When I was married," said she, "and first came to Smithfield, my husband's sisters met me in the porch, and were shocked at my pale and delicate appearance. One of them, whispering to her brother, asked: 'Why did you bring that ghost up here?' And now," continued the old lady, "I have outlived all who were in the house that day, and all my own and my husband's family."
>
> This was certainly an evidence of the health-restoring properties of the water and climate in this region.[12]

With James's public service and time spent in Richmond, his sons were introduced to a worldliness beyond the mountains surrounding Smithfield and also to a mindset of service to their new country through the military and through governmental leadership. James's three sons undoubtedly also knew their grandmother, Susanna, who continued to live at Smithfield until her death in 1823 at age 83.

The 1840 U.S. Census, which recorded far less specific information than later census records, listed James, 65, as head of household. We know only that there were four other white residents in his household: a woman between 50 and 60, presumably his wife, Ann; a woman less than 20, probably his daughter, Catharine; a man between 20 and 30, who could have been his youngest son, James Francis; and a man between 50 and 60 years old. One resident had a "learned profession," probably James Patton; one was involved with manufacture and trade, possibly his son, James Francis; and one was listed as "insane and idiot at private charge," who could have been the man between 50 and 60 years old. The census reported that James Patton Preston had 89 slaves, 34 of them under the age of 10. His oldest son, William Ballard, was listed as head of his own household and had 20 slaves. Robert headed his own household with no slaves.[13]

When James Patton Preston died at age 68 in 1843, he left substantial property, including about 3,000 acres of land, homes valued at $34,845, and 91 slaves valued at $26,650. His property included the Smithfield mill, the ruins still visible, built north of the manor house sometime after 1816.[14] The miller's log home, which is still in use today, was built just to the east of the mill around 1840.[15] His sons were adults in their 30s when the former governor died at Smithfield. Ballard was 38; Robert, 34; and James, 31. Their one surviving sister, Catharine Jane Grace, was 22 and not yet married.

James Patton Preston's property was divided among the four living children, with his wife retaining the dower tract of 270 acres, which included the Smithfield manor house and other structures. Governor James Patton Preston's children kept their property share in their father's estate throughout the antebellum period and did not officially divide it.[16] In the period after their father's death, the sons William Ballard, Robert Taylor, and James Francis farmed their sections of the larger plantation and became leaders in the community as well as in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Setting the Stage: Antebellum Smithfield Plantation

Smithfield is located on the western outskirts of Blacksburg, Virginia, a town positioned on a plateau between the Alleghanies and the Blue Ridge Mountains. The area was described by Letitia Burwell in the late-19th century:

> I must add a few words to my previous mention of Smithfield, in Montgomery County, the county which flows with healing waters. Smithfield, like Greenfield, is owned by the descendants of the first white family who settled there after the Indians, and its verdant pastures, noble forests, and mountain streams and springs, form a prospect wondrously beautiful.

This splendid estate descended to three brothers of the Preston family, who equally divided it, the eldest keeping the homestead, and the others building attractive homes on their separate plantations.[17]

Blacksburg remained a small village of unpaved roads, endowed with plentiful springs. Nearby Christiansburg was the larger community, near the Great Road.[18] Blacksburg was sometimes a stopping place for wagons and coaches bound to and from the various springs in the area: White Sulphur Springs, Yellow Sulphur Springs, Eggleston Springs, and those further north in today's West Virginia.

Wealth came from land and slave holdings, as well as the crop yield, primarily from the labor of slaves. In the decade prior to the Civil War, Smithfield Plantation experienced a time of prosperity and modest growth. Modes of transportation improved. By 1848, the Southwest Turnpike (the Great Road) was finally finished through Montgomery County. It was known as the "macadamized road," a road with a finish of crushed rock over well-drained subsoil.[19] Moreover, the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad extended its reach through Montgomery County between Blacksburg and Christiansburg by 1854, thus furnishing agricultural production a less expensive outlet to distant markets.[20] Tobacco was a principal crop for Virginia but more suited for the river bottomlands and valleys than the plateau areas such as Smithfield. Crops included wheat, Indian corn, and oats; in addition, farmers raised livestock such as cattle, sheep, and pigs.[21]

The Sons of James Patton Preston

William Ballard Preston

James Preston's oldest son, William Ballard, known as Ballard, assumed all of the desired attributes of an eldest son, shouldering the responsibility to continue his family's honor and good name. Of the three sons, he probably had access to the most time and influence of his father. After his father's death, Ballard lived in the original Smithfield manor home, sharing it with his widowed mother, Ann.

That home, as it appeared in the 1850s, was described by Letitia Burwell:

> The old homestead was quite antique in appearance. Inside, the high mantelpieces reaching nearly to the ceiling, which was also high, and the high wainscoting, together with the old furniture, made a picture of the olden time.[22]

Figure 1. William Ballard Preston (1805-1862). Daguerreotype by Mathew Brady, c. 1849, while Preston was secretary of the Navy. Source: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-USZ62-110164]

Figure 2. Smithfield manor home and office of William Ballard Preston (structure to right), Photograph, ca. 1910, files of Historic Smithfield plantation.

Another writer—and member of the Preston family—Janie Preston Boulware Lamb (1891–1964), later described the approach to the old house:

> Driving from Blacksburg in my Grandmother's [Lucy Staples Redd Preston] day, one passed beside a whitewashed, plank fence, to the white front gate. Entering the yard, the carriage swung round a circular drive, between double rows of cedar trees, to the square front porch. The horses feet and the carriage wheels made no noise,—the roadway in the circle was inches deep in tan bark. [23]

Ballard attended Hampden-Sydney College in Prince Edward County from 1821 to his graduation in 1824 and then, in 1825, studied law for a time at the University of Virginia. He continued his study of law with his cousin William Campbell Preston (son of Francis Preston) in Columbia, South Carolina, and was admitted to the bar in 1828. Following in his father's footsteps, Ballard ventured into politics soon after completing his studies, representing Montgomery County in the Virginia General Assembly in the 1830–1832 term. In 1832, he wrestled with "the great question of the age," slavery, as he spoke on the floor of the Virginia House of Delegates in support of a measure designed to bring an eventual end to slavery in Virginia. In November 1839 he married Lucinda "Lucy" Staples Redd (1819–1891) at the Patrick County courthouse.[24]

After serving terms in each house of the Virginia Assembly, Ballard was elected to the U.S. Congress as a Whig in 1846 and served from 1847 to 1849. Zachary Taylor, elected as the Whig Party presidential nominee in 1848, appointed William Ballard secretary of the U.S. Navy in March 1849. Ballard served until Taylor's untimely death in 1850, then returned to Smithfield and the practice of law.[25]

At some point in the 1850s, Ballard built a separate office structure just east of the Smithfield manor house, possibly to support his law practice. It had an English bond base and chimney of local brick, and a wood frame structure.[26] His law practice included the talents of young Waller Redd Staples (1826–1897), who would later become a well-known judge.[27]

Robert Taylor Preston

James Patton Preston's second son, Robert Taylor, was four years younger than Ballard and also attended Hampden-Sydney. He served as captain of the 75th Regiment for Montgomery County in the 1830s.[28] While he received a college education like his brothers, he seemed to prefer farming life in pastoral Blacksburg. He was the first of the three brothers to marry; in 1833 at the age of 24, he wed Mary Hart (1810–1881) of South Carolina. He and Mary lived in Solitude, a home situated east of the Smithfield manor house, that had modest beginnings as a log cabin built in 1801.[29] Its humble core was later sheathed and then several major additions were constructed: in 1834, soon after Robert was married; again in 1851; and probably later in the decade, when his younger brother, James, built a new home. Much of Robert's land and Solitude house itself are now part of the Virginia Tech campus. Of the three brothers, Robert's primary occupation was farming throughout most of his life.[30]

Figured 3: Robert Taylor Preston (1809-1880). Photo taken during his time as colonel and regimental commander of the 28th Virginia Infantry, 1861–1862. Courtesy of Historic Smithfield Plantation.

Figure 4: Solitude home, showing original 1830s main entrance. *McEver Collection,* Ms93-024, [Photograph 03SOL0092, undated] VT ImageBase, Digital Library and Archives, University Libraries, Virginia Tech.

Letitia Burwell wrote of Robert's wife, Mary Hart Preston:

> One of these brothers, Colonel Robert Preston, had married a lovely lady from South Carolina, whose perfection of character and disposition endeared her to everyone who knew her. Everybody loved her at sight, and the better she was known the more she was beloved. Her warm heart was ever full of other people's troubles or joys, never thinking of herself. In her house many an invalid was cheered by her tender care, and many a drooping heart revived by her bright Christian spirit. She never omitted an opportunity of pointing the way to heaven; and although surrounded by all the allurements which gay society and wealth could bring, she did not swerve an instant from the quiet path along which she directed others. In the midst of bright and happy surroundings her thoughts and hopes were constantly centered upon the life above; and her conversation—which was the reflex of her heart—reverted ever to this theme, which she made attractive to old and young.[31]

James Francis Preston

James Francis was the youngest of James Patton Preston's three sons, eight years younger than Ballard. He had a restless, "wayward" early adult life, perhaps, receiving less time and influence from his busy governor father.[32] James attended school at Washington College in 1831–1832 and then in 1833 became a cadet at West Point but did not graduate. He later studied law and became the Commonwealth's Attorney for Montgomery County. Serving in the U.S. military, he raised a company of grenadiers, and served as captain of the 1st Regiment of Virginia Volunteers in Mexico in 1847 and 1848. In 1850, James was living in Christiansburg with Waller R. Staples (1826–1897), also a lawyer who was practicing law with James's brother, Ballard.[33] James Francis represented Montgomery County in the Virginia House of Delegates in the 1852–1853 term. He was the last of the three brothers to marry; in 1855 at age 42, James married Sarah Ann Caperton (1826–1908), age 29, of "Elmwood," Union, (West) Virginia.[34] In 1856, he began construction of a fine home in the Greek Revival style, which still stands on the property west of Smithfield. His granddaughter, Cary Preston Gary, recalled the stories of its construction and how White Thorn received its name:

> [I]t took a little over a year to build the house.... [O]nly the best material and best workmanship was allowed to go into that house. The old family servants used to tell us tales of the building of White Thorn: "Marse James would ride down from Smithfield <u>every</u> day to see that

Figure 5: James Francis Preston (1813-1862). Copy of hand-colored photograph, family files of Edwin Paige Preston, courtesy of Peggy Preston Fanney.

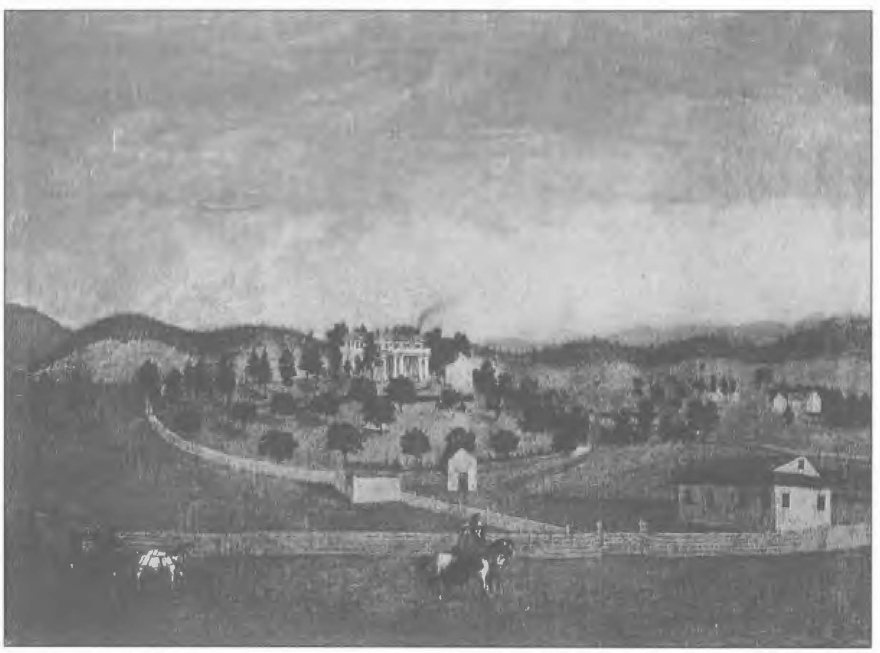

Figure 6: White Thorn Plantation, 1866, from an oil painting made by M. O'Conner.

every brick went in the right place, and Miss Sarah chose the spot for every tree and flower to be planted 'cept dat old wild cherry tree, and one ole wild apple tree 'cause de flowers was so sweet she wouldn't let 'em cut it down, and all dem white thorn bushes." __When everything was finished and in order, there was a "house-warming" and among the many guests was one of my grand-father's West Point friends, the

man who was few years later General Beauregard. He proposed a toast to Grandma and suggested "Caperton" as a name for the new home, in her honor but she wouldn't have it so, and chose the name "White Thorn" because so much of that shrub grew wild around the place, much of what she cultivated. She [Sarah Ann] was famous for her gardens, in fact all the grounds.[35]

Defining a New United States

As second-generation Americans, with an immigrant grandfather, the Preston sons came of age during a heady time for the United States, which was reshaping itself from rough-and-ready into a more defined and unified country. In the time between 1790 and 1840, the American people, with the establishment of a new national government, created a distinctive party system and culture of democratic politics.[36] No doubt, the sons felt that they were a part of that redefinition and growth of America. The land wealth of the family, the ownership and labor of slaves, and the ability to produce ample crops had allowed them a college education and further studies and opportunities not available to many others. The heritage of their grandfather, Colonel William Preston, along with their father who had dedicated most of his life to civil service, instilled in them a responsibility of service to Virginia and their young country, with civil service or the military, or sometimes both.

All three brothers farmed their sections of Smithfield and kept their father's estate intact. In the 1850 agricultural census, Ballard listed 1,300 acres, Robert 800 acres, and James 850. Of the three brothers, Robert was the dedicated farmer, listed in the 1850 census as such, with $21,500 of personal property. He consistently had higher values for livestock, machinery, and grain crops such as wheat, Indian corn, and oats.[37] In contrast, Ballard and James were both attorneys and divided their time, managing their farms and their respective law practices.[38] They depended more heavily on their overseers and perhaps slave foremen than Robert did. Ballard employed a 25-year-old farm manager, William Linkous, who had a wife and two children. The miller, John Davis, his wife, and two grown daughters lived in a home near the Smithfield Mill, north of the manor house, probably the two-story log house that stands today.[39] Overseer Anderson Ledgerwood was linked with White Thorn in 1861 and probably had been working for the family since the home was built in the late 1850's, and possibly earlier.[40]

In the 1850 census, Ballard was listed with $60,000 of personal property. A great share of the brothers' wealth and success was due in part to their ownership of and the labor of their large enslaved community. In the same census, Ballard listed 49 slaves. Robert Taylor, who had reported

no slaves in the 1840 census, had 24, and James Francis had 19. Most of the slaves came from the original property of their father, James, who had 91 inventoried slaves upon his death in 1843. The three brothers were among the largest slave owners in Montgomery County.[41]

The three Preston brothers enjoyed a mutual society and competitive building programs on their interconnecting properties. In the 1850s, visitors found the three plantation homes gracious and welcoming. Letitia Burwell described them:

> The houses of these three brothers were filled with company winter and summer, making within themselves a delightful society. The visitors at one house were equally visitors at the others, and the succession of dinner and evening parties from one to the other made it difficult for a visitor to decide at whose particular house he was staying.[42]

Plantation life revolved around families: those of the white masters and those of the enslaved African-Americans. The brothers' families grew. Robert and Mary had their first child, Virginia, in early 1834, named for the brothers' sister, Virginia Ann, who had passed away just the year before at age 17. Their son Benjamin Hart was born in early 1836 and died in June 1851 at age 15. Their last child, named James Patton after his grandfather, was born before his uncle Ballard was married. After Ballard and Lucy wed in 1839, they had six children, with a child born about every two years. Their youngest daughter and last child, Keziah, named for Lucy's mother, was born in April 1853.[43]

The brothers' only surviving sister, Catharine Jane, born in 1821, married George Henry Gilmer (1810–1875) of Henry County, Virginia, in 1845. They had a son, James Preston, born December 31, 1851, who died the next day. Catharine soon died as well, on January 31, 1852, and was laid to rest in the Preston cemetery. George Gilmer, who would later remarry and become a judge in Pittsylvania County, deeded her property share to her brothers.[44] He remained close to the Preston family and owned slaves who worked in Montgomery County.[45]

The first child of James Francis and Sarah Ann was born at Sarah's family home in Union, (West) Virginia, in 1856, and named for Sarah's father, Hugh. In 1858, another son was born, William Ballard, named after his uncle.[46]

The Division Begins

Like his grandfather William Preston, Ballard understood the importance of education and its link to prosperity in the area. He served as a trustee of the New Montgomery Female Institute in Christiansburg.[47] Likewise, Ballard became associated with the Olin and Preston Institute, a

Methodist school for boys, established in Blacksburg in 1851 and named for Stephen Olin, a Methodist minister, and for Ballard Preston. Both Ballard and his brother Robert were named as trustees for the new school that eventually became the land-grant college that is now known as Virginia Tech. After a successful start to the school, its organizing body constructed a three-story brick structure, named the Olin and Preston Building, which was completed in 1855.[48]

Preston joined an effort to bring direct shipping via commercial steamers between western Europe [Le Havre] and Virginia's port city of Norfolk. Francis Deane, a member of the General Assembly from Campbell County, wrote to Ballard in June 1857 about the possibility of the state raising capital for a line of steamships, and expressed hope that Ballard would "secure the cooperation of Mr. Hunter's friends in the Legislature," referring to U.S. Senator Robert Mercer Taliaferro Hunter. To further the efforts, Ballard left Smithfield for London, England, in August 1857, as a commissioner of the project and then continued to Paris, France. The mission to France seemed to make progress, and the project appeared to be promising.[49]

The direct shipping project fell to the side as the specter of war loomed. In 1858, Ballard Preston returned to Smithfield, his private law practice, and a southern United States at the peak of its antebellum glory and in its last years of peace. Events at the close of the decade began to set the stage for the years of war ahead. In October 1859, a white northern abolitionist named John Brown and his followers raided the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in an attempt to provoke a slave rebellion. [50]

Barely a year later, in November 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected president of the United States. Scarcely any Virginia voters, even in the far western part of the state, cast ballots for Lincoln's Republican policy of excluding slavery from the territories. South Carolina left the Union on December 20, and in the winter of 1860–1861, six other Deep South states followed.[51] In February 1861, these states formed the Confederate States of America and established the capital at Montgomery, Alabama. When Virginia's voters, too, elected a convention to consider secession, Ballard was elected as a delegate. Only weeks after he and Lucy had lost their youngest child, 6-year-old Keziah, he traveled to Richmond opposed to Virginia's secession if it could be avoided. Weeks of speeches, debate, recommendations, and proposed resolutions ensued amidst an emotionally charged, volatile atmosphere. In a vote on April 4, a proposal to secede was soundly defeated 45–88.[52]

Ballard Preston had emerged as leader of the moderates and now proposed a conference with Lincoln. He and Lincoln had been freshmen

congressmen together in the late 1840s and worked together to have Zachary Taylor elected in 1848.[53] The convention appointed a delegation composed of William Ballard Preston together with Alexander H. H. Stuart and George Wythe Randolph. On April 13, they met with President Lincoln in Washington, D.C., to discuss his policy regarding the Confederacy. Finding the President committed to holding onto the remaining federal forts in the Confederacy, Preston and his fellow delegates returned to Richmond empty-handed. Meanwhile, the telegraph lines brought news that Confederate troops had fired on Fort Sumter in South Carolina, and many Richmond citizens responded to the news with large public demonstrations in support of the Confederacy. More than that, Lincoln responded on April 15 to firing on Fort Sumter by calling for volunteers to put down the rebellion, and Virginia was expected to supply a share of those soldiers.[54]

On a rainy April 16, committed at last to secession, Ballard Preston took the convention floor, and speaking in a measured manner, he submitted a formal ordinance of secession, basing it on the report of the visit to Washington and the call for volunteers by Lincoln. On April 17, the convention reversed its earlier decision and voted in favor of the secession ordinance, 88–55. Preston's secession resolution passed, and with that action, ratified by the voters the next month, the "Mother State" Virginia officially left the United States of America and joined the Confederate States of America. By nightfall, Virginia militia units were moving to seize the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry and the Gosport Navy Yard at Norfolk. By early May, in recognition of Virginia's strategic importance, the Confederate capital was moved to Richmond.[55]

Ballard Preston began his service in the Confederacy's Provisional Congress soon after, fully aware that a full-scale war would soon come to Virginia. His younger brothers, Robert and James Francis, prepared for leadership as officers in the Confederate military. Ballard's 19-year-old son, Waller, and Robert's 22-year-old son, Patton, prepared to enlist. For their families and community, it was a time of pride and support but also deep concern and anxiety.

As spring bloomed, Virginia took center stage in the war. The following years tested the wealth, power, and resources of the plantation system in Virginia and the new Confederacy. For the Preston family, the War Between the States, and its aftermath, forever changed their way of life.

(To be continued in Part 2: The War Years, and Part 3: Reconstruction Era)

Endnotes

1. Ellen Apperson Brown, "What Really Happened at Drapers Meadows? The Evolution of a Frontier Legend, " Smithfield Review, 7 (2003), 9.
2. George Washington to Governor Robert Dinwiddie, October 10, 1756, John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., The Writings of George Washington (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931–1944), 1: 478; Douglas Southall Freeman, George Washington (New York: Scribner, 1948–1957), 2: 214; John Frederick Dorman, The Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield in Virginia: Descendants of John and Elizabeth (Patton) Preston through Five Generations (Louisville, Ky.: Filson Club, 1982), 15.
3. Jim Glanville, "The Siting of Smithfield in Relation to the Fincastle/Botetourt County Line," Smithfield Review, 15 (2011), 98.
4. Dendrochronology studies revealed that the manor house was likely constructed after the 1775 growing season: Herman John Heikkenen, "Tree-Ring Patterns: A Key-Year Technique for Crossdating," Journal of Forestry, 82.5 (1984), 302–5; Gibson Worsham, Smithfield Historic Structure Report (Christiansburg, Va.: G. Worsham, 2000), 16.
5. Patricia Givens Johnson, *William Preston and the Alleghany Patriots* (Blacksburg: Walpa Publishing, 1976), 130.
6. Montgomery County Circuit Court Records, Montgomery County Will Book B, 55–61.
7. J. W. Randolph, ed., *Early History of the University of Virginia as Contained in the Letters of Thomas Jefferson and Joseph C. Cabell* (Richmond, Va.: G.H. Wynne, 1856).
8. Dorman, *Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield*, 64.
9. No relation between this town of Smithfield and the plantation home in Montgomery County.
10. Dorman, *Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield*, 63.
11. Smithfield–Preston Foundation Papers, Ms97–002, Flatbox, Folder 2, Special Collections, Virginia Tech.
12. Letitia M. Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1895), 114–15. Previously written similar memoir under pseudonym Page Thatcher titled *Plantation Reminiscences*, 1878.
13. Federal Census of 1850, Schedule of Slaves.
14. James Patton Preston had petitioned the county court in 1815 and was awarded permission to construct a water grist mill, dam, and ditch on his property. Montgomery County Will Book 2, 360.
15. Mill was probaby powered seasonally by the waters of Stroubles creek and perhaps a spring. Worsham, *Smithfield Historic Structure Report*, 28, 32.
16. Worsham, *Smithfield Historic Structure Report*, 31; Montgomery County Will Book 7, 130–37.
17. Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War*, 113–14. The Prestons were not the very first white settlers in the Montgomery County area.
18. Jim Glanville, "Southwest Virginia: A Thoroughfare of Nation-Building," *Smithfield Review*, 16 (2012), 78.
19. Charles W. Crush, ed., *The Montgomery County Story, 1776–1957* (Christiansburg, Va.: Montgomery County (Jamestown) Festival Committee, 1957, reprinted by Montgomery Museum and Lewis Miller Regional Art Center, 2000), 102.
20. Peter Wallenstein, "William Ballard Preston and the Politics of Slavery, 1832–1862," *Smithfield Review*, 1 (1997), 91.
21. Carol C. Yagow, "Solitude: Identification of Its Furnishings from 1830 to 1880" (M.S. thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1985), 22.
22. Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War*, 114.
23. Janie P. B. Lamb, "'Smithfield,' Home of the Prestons, in Montgomery County," *Virginia Historical Society*, 1939, 125.
24. Dorman, *Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield*, 260–61; Wallenstein, "Preston and the Politics of Slavery," 63.
25. Wallenstein, "Preston and the Politics of Slavery," 89.

26. Worsham, *Smithfield Historic Structure Report*, 36. Office structure was struck by lightning and burned July 3, 1920: James Otey Hoge Jr., ed., *The Diaries of James Armistead Otey* (Blacksburg: Pocahontas Press, 2003), 683. Archaeology work done at the site of the office: J. D. Lahendro and K. R. Bennett, "Smithfield Plantation House," *Archeological Society of Virginia*, 30.3 (March 1976), 139.
27. Staples was a first cousin of Lucy Staples Redd, Ballard's wife. Their grandfather was Samuel Staples. Ballard and Lucy named their oldest son, Waller Redd Preston, after Lucy's father. *http: familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/s/h/o/English-Showalter/WEBSITE-0001/UHP-0065.html.* He later served on the board of visitors for Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College: Duncan Lyle Kinnear, *The First 100 Years: A History of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University* (Blacksburg: Virginia Polytechnic Institute Education Foundation, 1972), 119.
28. Dorman, *Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield*, 265.
29. Herman J. Heikkenen, *Final Report: The Last Year of Tree Growth for Selected Timbers Within Solitude Dependency as Derived by Key-Year Dendrochronology* (Blacksburg: Dendrochronology, Inc., 1999), 7.
30. Yagow, "Solitude," 19–20.
31. Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War*, 115–16.
32. Laura Katz Smith, "James Patton Preston's Wayward Son: Letters from the Smithfield–Preston Foundation Collection at Virginia Tech," *Smithfield Review*, 3 (1999), 28–36.
33. Federal Census of 1850, Montgomery County, Virginia.
34. Dorman, *Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield*, 266–67.
35. Cary Baldwin Preston Gary (1883–1960) to Jeannette Heth, June 21, 1947, copy of letter from Heth family private papers.
36. Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790–1840* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988), xiv.
37. Yagow, "Solitude," 22.
38. Federal Census of 1850, Montgomery County, Virginia.
39. Federal Census of 1850, Montgomery County, Virginia.
40. Mary Eliza Caperton to George Henry Caperton, May 20 and 27, 1861, Caperton Family Papers, Ms 91–034, Special Collections, Virginia Tech.
41. Federal Census of 1850, Schedule of Slaves, Mongomery County, Virginia; inventory of estate of James Patton Preston, Montgomery County Will Book 7, 130–37. Only James Kent and John Radford owned more slaves.
42. Worsham, *Smithfield Historic Structure Report*, 31; Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War*, 115.
43. Dorman, *Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield*, 265–66; Wavie Harman Lucas and Devota Parrish Pack, comps., *Births in Court Records of Montgomery County, Virginia, 1853–1871* (DAR William Christian Chapter, 1972), 2, #34.
44. Dorman, *Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield*, 269; John Gilmer Speed, *The Gilmers in America* (New York: n.p., 1897), 153; Mary B. Kegley and Frederick B. Kegley, *Early Adventurers on the Western Waters* (Orange, Va.: Green Publishers, 1980), 1: 255.
45. Census Returns of Black Population of Montgomery, Grayson, Smyth, Giles, Roanoke, Craig, and Floyd Counties, 1865 (497), and Census Returns of Blacks in Montgomery County, undated (137), *Records of the Field Offices for the State of Virginia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872*, M1913 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2006).
46. Dorman, *Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield*, 266–67.
47. Wallenstein, "Preston and the Politics of Slavery," 92.
48. Kinnear, *The First 100 Years*, 11. Olin and Preston Institute, later renamed Preston and Olin Institute, was a precursor to Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, founded in 1872 as a Virginia land-grant institution now known as Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, or Virginia Tech. Jenkins Mikell Robertson, comp. and ed., *Virginia Polytechnic Institute and*

State University Historical Data Book, Centennial Edition (Blacksburg: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1972), 8.

49. Francis B. Deane Jr. to William Ballard Preston, June 28, 1857, Ms92–006, Special Collections, Virginia Tech; Naval History and Heritage Command, Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships, W8, "William B. Preston," *http://www.history.navy.mil/danfs/w8/william_b_preston.htm.*
50. Wallenstein, "Preston and the Politics of Slavery," 92; James I. Robertson Jr., *Civil War! America Becomes One Nation* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 170
51. James I. Robertson Jr., "The Virginia State Convention of 1861," in William C. Davis and James I. Robertson Jr., eds., *Virginia at War, 1861* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 2–3.
52. Robertson, *Civil War! America Becomes One Nation*, 170; Dorman, *Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield*, 264; Wallenstein, "Preston and the Politics of Slavery," 92; George Hanson, *Old Kent: The Eastern Shore of Maryland* (Baltimore: J. P. Des Forges, 1876), 170. Daughter Mary Rezin died January 12, 1861. This appears to be their daughter Keziah.
53. "You and I were almost sweating blood to have General [Zachary] Taylor nominated"; Lincoln had appealed to Ballard and the Whigs "to secure the [presidential] election of Gen. Taylor." Lincoln Letter to William B. Preston, May 16, 1849, in Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 2: 48.
54. Wallenstein, "Preston and the Politics of Slavery," 95; Robertson, "The Virginia State Convention of 1861," 14–15.
55. Robertson, "The Virginia State Convention of 1861," 18–19; Robertson, *Civil War! America Becomes One Nation*, 171.