

WHITE, BLACK, AND RED ALONG FERRY ROAD

HISTORY AND FUTURE OF OUR UUFR LAND

by Lois Williams and Tom Kinney

Presented to Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Rappahannock

May 13, 2018

READING: from *Homo Deus* by Yuval Noah Harari, you might have also read his book, *Sapiens*, an excellent overview if you wish to know more about why you and I are like we are, our success and challenges.

“Studying history aims to loosen the grip of the past. It enables us to turn our head this way and that, and begin to notice possibilities that our ancestors could not imagine. Or didn’t want us to imagine. By observing the accidental chain of events that led us here, we realize how our very thoughts and dreams took shape—and we can begin to think and dream differently. Studying history will not tell us what to choose, but at least it gives us more options.

Movements seeking to change the world often begin by rewriting history, thereby enabling people to re-imagine the future. Whether you want workers to go on a general strike, women to take possession of their bodies, or oppressed minorities to demand political rights—the first step is to retell history. The new history will explain that our present situation is neither natural nor eternal. Things were different once. Only a string of chance events created the unjust world we know today. If we act wisely, we can change that world, and create a much better one. This is why Marxists recount the history of capitalism; why feminists study the formation of patriarchal societies; and why African Americans commemorate the horrors of slave trade. The aim is not to perpetuate the past, but rather to be liberated from it.”

A recent contribution to Bob’s Weekley's collection of quotes, a collection that I do hope he publishes one day, is a simple realization that leads to great progress:

“It don’t have to be like this.”

Main Talk:

Part 1 by Lois Williams 1600 – 1900’s

We’re here to consider the land on which our building stands. Thanks to Tom Kinney, we have a map in the Order of Service for reference. Turn it side-ways, with Rappahannock River at the bottom and Carters Creek to the left. Note James Wharf Road and its hockey-stick curve, with a star that is UUFR. Look for the star on each map that follows. Note also that there was no Route 3.

This is a story of Epaphroditus Lawson, and his five patents for land on the Rappahannock River in 1650 – 700 acres on Carters Creek, an adjacent 1,000 acres, and three more, for a total of 5,500 acres. Epaphroditus and his wife, and then his widow and her second husband, lived on the 700-acre patent, and sold it in 1660. So this is the story of the 1,000-acre patent and how the planter elite held on to land, generation after generation, until impoverished by the Civil War.

Before the war, 60 percent of Lancaster County's population was black, with 57 percent of its population enslaved. Fifteen years after the war, inheritors of Lee family land started selling off small parcels to blacks born into slavery. Soon, southwest of White Stone, there were the black enclaves of New Town, Old Town and Mahonesville, very much segregated from the whites in White Stone – separate and not at all equal. The current White Stone town boundaries still exclude this area of land purchased by blacks a century ago.

It's also the story of how I've spent the last 16 months. There's a short version, which I'm telling in the next 10 minutes. And there's the 50-page version, with copies in the UUFR Library and a library card for signing out.

Tom Kinney said in December 2016, "Can you help me trace the prior owners of the land on which our building stands? And something about those who lived there?" Tom was part of UUFR's land acquisition process in 2004 and he had already traced ownership back to two parcels purchased by William Self – four acres on the other side of James Wharf Road sold by Susan Sanders in 1898, now the site of our drain field, and two acres on this side of the road sold by Catherine Payne in 1904.

Tom said, "I'll do the maps and you do the writing." "Sure," I said. Knowing that RW-C's library has a copy of *Landholders & Landholdings, Christ Church Parish, Lancaster County, Virginia*, a compilation of the 1750 landholdings, I figured, "Easy-peasy!" It wasn't.

Displayed is the fold-out map from the *Landholders* book. One can see that the UUFR site was within "the Thomas Lee Estate" of 900 acres, with the text saying only, "Thomas Lee, a little-known grandson of the first Richard Lee, inherited this land from his father, Charles Lee." For the locals, Charles Lee owned Cobbs Hall, and his brother, Hancock Lee, owned Ditchley.

This left out the first 26 years, but I got a copy of the researchers' files for the Thomas Lee Estate from the Historic Christ Church Research Room, and I came across the name, Epaphroditus Lawson.

You can see from the Order of Service map that James Wharf Road has two sharp turns and goes to Carters Creek, but until 1888, it was Ferry Road, and it went to the ferry landing on the Rappahannock River.

With a tip of the hat to Tom's title, "Red, White and Black on Ferry Road," I'll begin the 10-minute version with the Cuttatawomen Indians, one of the Algonquin-speaking Virginia tribe that John Smith saw and mapped on his exploration of Virginia rivers in 1608-9. The map showed the Cuttatawomen on this side of Carters Creek, with four named villages. **Indian village sites map.**

Epaphroditus Lawson was in Virginia by 1635 and began patenting land using "headrights" – 50 acres for each person whose transportation costs from England he paid. Between 1635 and 1643 Epaphroditus acquired eight pieces of land on the Nansamond River south of the lower James River. His neighbors were "men of the greatest importance in that day" – Richard Bennett, a leader of area Puritans, Simon Overzee, a Dutch tobacco trader, and John Carter, whose early Rappahannock patents were the beginning of the Carter's Corotoman plantation and the family wealth that built Christ Church.

But only a lower-grade of tobacco grew below the James River, and Nansamond River people kept hearing that the good tobacco thrived on the Rappahannock River. They brought pressure on the Virginia government to allow settlement, which soon relented and removed the Cuttatawomen from their land and sent them to the Indian Creek area off Fleets Bay, where they disappeared from the written record, except as the name of the Corotoman River.

Epaphroditus took out his five Rappahannock River patents in 1650. **Epaphroditus patent map.** He wound up his affairs and disposed of his Nansamond River land, probably at a loss. He likely hired transport for himself, his workforce, and his animals – 40 miles up the Chesapeake Bay to the Rappahannock, and then 12 miles upstream to his 700-acre patent, arriving in March 1651. Epaphroditus married Elizabeth Madestard, who had just come to Virginia with her brother, Thomas Madestard.

Epaphroditus was in debt to Simon Overzee, but almost immediately, he recorded a deed of mortgage to Richard Bennett for “40,000 pounds of tobacco.” The agreement assigned the Mosquito Creek patent to Epaphroditus’ brother, Rowland Lawson, and two other patents to Richard Bennett as well as half of Epaphroditus’ workforce and most of his cattle and goats. Bennett would soon be Governor of Virginia.

Epaphroditus and Elizabeth lived on his Rappahannock River land just a little over a year. He died in June 1652, with debt exceeding the value of his estate. His will made “ye Childe that my Wife now goeth with my heir.” Elizabeth immediately married William Clapham, Jr., who, through marriage, acquired the 700-acre patent and the 1,000-acre patent. And baby Elizabeth Lawson was born.

Governor Richard Bennett returned Epaphroditus’ workforce and animals to Clapham. Clapham took over the mortgage, paid it off, sold the 700-acre patent, and then he died – at 27 years old.

Clapham’s widow remarried and moved away. Little Elizabeth Lawson grew up and married at 14. Her husband went to court to have her confirmed as Epaphroditus’ heir to the 1,000-acre patent. They succeeded, and immediately sold the land to her uncle, Thomas Madestard.

When Thomas Madestard died, he left the 1,000 acres to his daughter, Elizabeth Madestard, who would marry Charles Lee in 1676, bringing the 1,000 acres into the Lee family.

Early on, Charles and Elizabeth Lee sold off 100 acres along Carters Creek, that, 100 years later, was owned by John Thomson for 20 years and became known as Old Tom’s Tract – important to our story only because “Old Toms” much later gave its name to part of the Lee land, and it appears on the deed for our building’s land. The remaining Charles Lee land, which still had 1,000 acres because of the vague acreage estimates of the time, was willed to Thomas Lee, Charles and Elizabeth’s older son, while their younger son inherited Cobbs Hall. **Thomas Lee estate map.** The Lee’s 1,000 acres remained intact for almost a century.

Thomas Lee died, owning 11 slaves, leaving his land to three of his sons – this was the Thomas Lee Estate of 1750 described in the *Landholders* book. **Thomas Lee Estate division map.** The estate was later divided, with Richard Lee and Thomas Lee II each receiving 330 acres below Ferry Road and fronting on the river and Charles Lee receiving 330 acres above Ferry Road, that includes the land on which our building stands.

Richard Lee and Thomas Lee II had each died by 1760. Thomas Lee II's young daughter Mary inherited their land, and with her husband, sold it around 1780. No longer Lee land, this lower two-thirds passed through a number of owners before becoming Sanders land. It was Susan Sanders who, in the 1880s and 90s, sold off parcels that became the Mount Vernon Baptist Church and the church cemetery.

Charles Lee died in 1793, owning 81 slaves, with his land going to his son, Thomas Lee III. Thomas III died in 1809, willing one-half of his land to his daughter, Margaret Lee, already married to Henry Chinn Lawson. **Henry C. Lawson division map.**

Henry Chinn Lawson, a sixth-generation descendant of the Rowland Lawson who took over Epaphroditus' patent, inherited 250 acres on Mosquito Point Road (the line farthest to the right going down to Lawson's Bay), working it with 31 slaves. After his wife inherited part of the Thomas Lee land, a couple of miles distant from Mosquito Creek, Henry Chinn Lawson bought John Thomson's adjacent 100 acres. Henry Chinn Lawson and his wife died, willing the Mosquito Creek plantation to their older sons and "the Carters Creek land" to their youngest son, Charles N. Lawson, who was 14 in 1837.

Charles N. Lawson grew up on the Mosquito Creek plantation, and later came to own most of it. He married, had eight children, and always lived at Mosquito Creek. He was probably working the Carters Creek land as a "quarter," and he bought an additional 60 acres there, for a total Carters Creek acreage of about 330 acres.

In the earliest days of the Civil War, Lawson raised an infantry regiment, and enlisted the same week as Virginia's secession from the Union. As Captain Lawson, he and his regiment fought under Stonewall Jackson, and, as Major Lawson, they went on to fight at Gettysburg and the Wilderness. Then, in August 1864, the early days of the Siege of Petersburg, Major Lawson was killed when a cannon he was lighting exploded.

Major Charles N. Lawson was a local hero – his name tops one side of the Lancaster County Confederate monument, and the local group of Civil War veterans and their descendants that met from 1912 into the 1970s was called the Lawson-Ball Camp.

The Charles N. Lawson estate was not settled until 1878, almost 14 years after his death, when, in a Partition of Land, his three oldest daughters divided his Carter Creek land, all of which was now being called "Old Tom's." Catherine, the first-born, received the eastern portion, 120 acres bounded by "the main road."

Almost immediately, Catherine, now Catherine Payne, and her husband were selling parcels of their land to blacks, selling 15 parcels in the two years before he died – usually three acres for \$60, sometimes one acre or two acres. An early sale was to six men who paid \$12 for one-half acre across the way from us that became the black Masonic Hall.

Over the next seven years, the widowed Catherine sold 20 or so more parcels, with six of the buyers borrowing money from George W. Sanders. **William Self / UUFR neighborhood map.** One was William Henry Self, who in 1889 purchased two acres for \$50, taking out a loan for \$30. Then, in 1904, Catherine sold another two acres to William Self that, like his first lot, was "bounded by the piece on which the Hall was built," but this time costing \$100. This is the land on which our building stands.

Part II by Tom Kinney 1904 to The Present and into the Future

We people who are fascinated by history recognize that not all share the interest to the same extent. To quote Steven Pinker from *The Better Angels of our Nature* subtitled *Why violence has Declined*, "In this era of rationalizations, a real historian is about as welcome as a skunk at a garden party." We hope those of you not interested in history will tolerate this little whiff and will gain some insight into the roots of how and why we of UUFR are right HERE, at the star this morning. We won't be touching on the violence of slavery that likely happened on or near our property, but only briefly comment on the result. As Lois explained, the large plantations were sold off into smaller parcels late in the 1800's, many to former slaves in plots large enough for subsistence gardens with small woodlots for heat and cooking as shown on this plat map. As Lois said, William Self bought the property along James Wharf road in two parts, about six acres in all. William died in 1934 with no will. In 1941, Lancaster County began numbering the parcels by section. In 1980, attorney Mat Terry (who now 38 years later is UUFR's attorney) took steps to quiet the deed with the property going to Victor Lawyer of Lively who divided the property into the parcel where our church sits and the woods across the street. **UUFR land owned and desired map.** As parcels were further divided after 1941, they were labeled A, B, C, etc. of the 1941 original parcel numbers. So the number of individual parcels bloomed tremendously. For example, today this parcel has been subdivided into 26 lots and this one into 16. But we will now focus on our spot.

Five of us met in Ina Fuller's living room 20 years ago this year to talk about a possible UU future in this area. By 2002, our 10 year vision and 5 year plan could see clearly that UUFR's best path forward was to acquire a "Home of Our Own" as a foundation, a sound point of reference, within our four-county community. It was obvious we could not be the church that

met in the White Stone Women's Club forever and have the positive impact on the community to which we aspired from that rental base. Bob Weekley led the hunt for a building or land somewhere reasonably accessible to our four counties. He and Adele Failmetzger, another founder and early president, were also seemingly baptized with that career-based appreciation of vision, planning, and what makes organizations succeed beyond all expectations or fail abysmally, discovered that this parcel might be available. **UUFR and Mt. Vernon Baptist map.**

The owner and occupant of the rundown house and frequently flooding land was Mike Stephens who purchase the property from Victor Lawyer. One day Mike decided to walk down to his neighborhood convenience store next to Lambreth's and hold it up. Needless to say, he shortly found himself in prison and unable to make mortgage payments so the land reverted to Adele's son as the attorney of record and had to be sold shortly. **Old house photo.** Since the poorly planned robbery removed Mike from the site, the place had further deteriorated and was used as a dumping ground for trees and stumps from Hurricane Isabel. It took significant imagination, I mean a really lot of imagination on the part of our members, but we could see the potential of this relatively central location. It is close to the bridge so reasonably convenient to our four counties. A big factor was its appeal to our anti-racism UU's as being in a bifurcated black community called Newtown and Oldtown, across the street from a major black church whose history went back to the 19th century, and adjacent to the location of the historic A.T. Wright high school that provided the basis for the advancement of so many black youngsters from the area.

Adele, Bob and Elaine Weekley, Ralph and Audrey Brainard, and Shirley and I bought the property and gave it to UUFR. The fire department helped us light our first chalice on this spot **House on fire photo.**, the piles of trees and stumps fueled further chalice lightings, and Matt Shiflett and I shot grades with my transit to figure out how in the world to stop the flooding. And the rest is the history that many of you already know and that now surrounds you. **UUFR land owned and desired map.** It's fun to learn this history, but that history can gives us meaning for our future as well. Just as Mt. Vernon Baptist acquired parcels of land for their unknown future generations, our church has done the same. Members and friends have purchased the parcels noted in green benefiting from the tax advantage to them in the process. Over the decades to come, we would like to acquire those marked in red.

As mentioned, we foresaw this location as a base for our future anti-racism efforts. In our four-county community, racism, without a doubt, impacts more people daily than all our other discrimination concerns, violence, etc. combined. That makes racism our largest opportunity and biggest target for change for the better within this four-county community in which we live. And it ties nicely into UUA's recent major turn toward an anti-racism theme from 2017 going forward.

A shared understanding of local history is helpful. We are at the 100th anniversary of the last lynching in the area. It was August 16, 1917 when William Page was lynched in Northumberland County the same day he was accused of inappropriate advances toward a white girl. On July 16, 1944, Irene Morgan, on her way from Gloucester to Baltimore was forcefully dragged off a Greyhound bus in Saluda by the Sheriff of Middlesex County because

she refused to move to the colored section of that interstate bus. In *Irene Morgan vs. Virginia*, the Supreme Court finally ruled racial discrimination in interstate commerce to be illegal, a landmark step forward in anti-racism that began RIGHT HERE!. Whereas Prince Edward County shut down their public schools for five years when segregated schools were outlawed nationally, Lancaster County reactivated Chesapeake Academy and Middlesex gave new life to Christ Church School for those who could afford it. Just to focus even more locally on the neighborhood of our church, it was Dr. Morgan Norris who led the black community to become more independent of the local racism. His home was the three story white house on the left as you approach Kilmarnock, next to the historic marker sign in his honor. The elementary school he organized the African-American community to build is the hilltop building, visible behind a line of houses, on the left a ½ mile south of Dr. Norris home that was most recently used as Jehovah Witness' church. The first school principal there was Rev. Russell who was also the pastor of the church across the street from us. If you look at the shape of both Kilmarnock and White Stone, you will notice they are rough squares with the southwest quadrant eliminated. The reason is that the southwest quadrant was where the "colored folks" lived. When those villages began to add infrastructure services, the city fathers refused to invest in the black portion of their village but did extend the first taxes for the services for the rest of the villages into those areas. Dr. Morgan successfully appealed to the Commonwealth of Virginia under an ordinance that allowed a portion of a town to vote to withdraw from the town if the town was not serving their needs. Your Vision and Planning Committee has put four copies of "Fight On, My Soul" by Dr. Norris' son, Dr. James Norris, in our library if you wish to understand more about what is in the recent memory of many of our neighbors. One could go on with the county fair for whites only followed by an even more successful county fair run by the African American folks and many other points of history to help us relative newcomers better understand the roots of the racial attitudes in the area.

Our land is indeed a portion of the slave plantations at various times belonging to the famous Lees of Virginia. If among UUFR's future, it is decided to see what can be done to help bridge the racial divide and quell at least some of the racism rooted so deeply here, we might want to ask ourselves "can we justify marching and displaying banners telling other people how we think THEY should think if we don't first build a 100 foot-long bridge across James Wharf Road to Mt. Vernon, to our African-American church neighbors? Can't we do some things in our neighborhood together with them for the betterment of all?" Our members getting to know their members--one on one. Walking the streets and chanting on the legislature's steps is easy, maybe even fun with the camaraderie and all. Walking the 100 feet across the street might be harder. And if we can make that dedicated effort and be successful in extending our Beloved Community across the street, that says something about our commitment to anti-racism.

