Richard Ratcliffe: The Founder

by William Page Johnson, II

One of the most influential and often overlooked figures in the early history of Fairfax is Richard Ratcliffe. Born in Fairfax County, Virginia about 1751, Richard was the son of John Ratcliffe and Ann (Smith) Moxley, the widow of Thomas Moxley. John Ratcliffe, was a contemporary of both George Mason and George Washington. In fact, Washington recorded the Ratcliffe’s in his diary: “Mrs. Ratcliffe and her son came to dinner.”

From 1771 until his death in 1825 Richard Ratcliffe served variously as the Fairfax County sheriff, coroner, justice, patrolman, overseer of the poor, constable, commissioner of the revenue, jail inspector, superintendent of elections, candidate for the Virginia General Assembly and developer of Providence, the town that we now call the City of Fairfax.

By the 1750s Virginia colonial culture was becoming distinctly different from that of Great Britain. Political and religious dissent was increasing. Large crowds would gather in cities, towns, and rural areas to hear stirring sermons by preachers such as Jeremiah Moore, a Baptist, and George Whitefield, a Presbyterian. Both men advocated religious freedom. The seeds of revolution were being sown. At about the same time a young surveyor and militia officer named George Washington was busy surveying the Virginia frontier and, while so engaged accidentally touched off an international incident – The French and Indian War.

It was in this environment Richard Ratcliffe came of age. Richard was an educated man. He was, most likely, instructed at home by his father. He enjoyed a middle-class lifestyle by 18th c. standards and was undoubtedly exposed to a variety of cultural activities when he accompanied his father on business to Alexandria. As a young man Richard was ambitious. In 1771, at the age 21, he was appointed a deputy sheriff for Fairfax County, the beginning of a public service career that would span fifty-four years.

Little is known of Richard’s activities during the Revolution. In 1770, his father signed a Non-Importation Broadside against British goods. Richard did not serve in the Continental Army or militia, but he did supply them with provisions. By 1777 Richard had met and married Louisiana “Locian” Bolling the daughter of Gerrard and
Martha (Moxley) Boling. The couple raised a sizeable family of nine children: Robert, Samuel, John, Charles, Patsy, Penelope, Locian, Nancy, and Jane.

Richard began acquiring land near the headwaters of Accotink Creek in 1786. Also located here at the intersection of Payne’s Church Road (now Rt. 123) and the Falls Church Road (now Rt. 237) was a store operated by Caleb Earp. The area was known as Earps Corner, or Earps Ordinary. By the mid-1790s Richard Ratcliffe owned nearly 3000 acres of land in this vicinity including all of the present Downtown Historic District of the City of Fairfax. He called his plantation Mount Vineyard. He could not have imagined then the changes that were to come, but he would benefit greatly from them.

In 1789, the fledgling United States Congress created our federal capital – the District of Columbia. At George Washington’s suggestion the Town of Alexandria was included in the new federal capital. Unfortunately, the Fairfax County Courthouse, which had been located in Alexandria since 1752, was now outside of the legal boundaries of Fairfax county. The General Assembly acted and ordered the Fairfax County Courthouse to find a new location near “Price's Tavern.” (present day Backlick and Braddock Roads). Citizen opposition to moving the courthouse from Alexandria was very vocal and nothing further was done for a decade.

In 1794, Richard was appointed as a Fairfax County Court justice. Such appointments were made by the Governor and were very prestigious. Justices, who were appointed for life, had immense power in the 18th century – all but the power of life and death. With the exception of slaves, capital crimes were heard in General Court in Williamsburg and later in Richmond.

In 1798, the General Assembly adjusted the boundary between Fairfax and Loudoun giving Fairfax nearly forty additional square miles of land. The Virginia General Assembly once again directed the Fairfax County Court to find a new location for the Courthouse near the center of the county.

Richard Ratcliffe offered four acres to the county for one dollar. The county accepted his offer and the property transferred in June 1799. Construction of the new courthouse buildings began immediately. The new buildings were completed by January 27, 1800 and the county accepted the building.

Richard’s offer was not entirely philanthropic. He owned all the land around the four-acre courthouse lot and he hoped to benefit from the commercial development that would follow. Evidence supporting Richard’s commercial hopes is apparent in the following advertisement which appeared in the Alexandria Gazette just weeks after the new Courthouse was completed:

### Happy Birthday Fairfax!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1805 – 2005</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catch Our Spirit Feel Our Pride</td>
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On January 14, 2005, Fairfax will celebrate it’s 200th birthday! On that date in 1805, the Virginia General Assembly granted a charter for the Town of Providence to Richard Ratcliffe. The name of the village, which was commonly known as Fairfax Court House, was officially changed in 1874 from Providence to Fairfax. The Town of Fairfax became the City of Fairfax in 1961.

Join us and help celebrate the 200th anniversary of Fairfax.

HISTORIC FAIRFAX CITY, INC.

Do you want to know more about the history of where you live?

JOIN HISTORIC FAIRFAX CITY, INC.

Just what is available to you as a member of HFCI?

A newsletter, 4 times a year announcing what is happening with all HFCI projects and events

2 general meetings a year, affording you an opportunity to meet and speak with people behind the scenes working to maintain interest in the history of Fairfax.

We are looking forward to having you be a part of the City’s bi-centennial in 2005. We need and value your support. Together we will preserve the heritage that has been left to us.

The Board of Directors of Historic Fairfax City, Inc.

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### HFCI MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

HISTORIC FAIRFAX CITY, INC. is a non-profit corporation (501(c)(3) organization)

Membership Classifications:
- Class A Individual ...........................................$25.00
- Class A-1 Additional Household Member .........................$10.00
- Class B-1 Non-profit Organizations ..........................$35.00
- Class B-2 For profit Organizations ............................$50.00

Enclosed is my tax-deductible membership application and check made out to Historic Fairfax City Inc. for: $___________

**Name or Organization:**

**Telephone #:**

**Contact name:**

**e-mail:**

**Address:**

Return to: Historic Fairfax City, Inc., 10209 Main Street, Fairfax, VA 22030
OPEN MEETING
THE BLENHEIM
MASTER PLAN

7:30 p.m.
January 18, 2005
Fairfax High School Cafeteria
Mayor and City Council
Historic Fairfax City

- The City of Fairfax designed and approved a Master Plan for the development of Blenheim in October 2003.
- The plan includes preservation of the house and grounds, an interpretive center, facilities for visitors, and landscaped screening of the site. Construction of the complete Master Plan will make Blenheim’s unique and dramatic historic and cultural value available to more citizens of the City, visitors, and students on a more accessible and regular basis.
- The complete master plan provides visitors the chance to experience an introduction to Blenheim in the same way as visitors to other significant historic resources such as Gunston Hall first experience those sites.
- In addition to its primary, education purpose, the interpretive center can be used as a rental facility bringing in a diverse audience, many of whom would not come to the site normally.
- Once developed according to the Master Plan, Blenheim will assist HFCI to communicate the City’s historical value to more people, more quickly, in a more focused way. The site will enhance HFCI’s fundraising to support Blenheim and ALL THE HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES OF THE CITY.

COME TO THE MEETING
VIEW A MODEL OF THE BLENHEIM MASTER PLAN
EXPRESS YOUR SUPPORT

In October 1800, Richard’s vision grew more ambitious. With the probable assistance of his son Robert, who was then the deputy county surveyor, Richard began to lay out a town around the new courthouse. He once again advertised his intentions in the Alexandria Gazette (see opposite page).

The new courthouse was centrally located within the county but only two roads, the Payne’s Church Road (Rt. 123) and the Falls Church Road (Rt. 237), connected it to the rest of the county. Before construction of the new courthouse, farmers to the west had tried for years to establish a more direct route from their farms to markets in Alexandria. In 1802, the Little River Turnpike Co. was established to connect these areas with Alexandria. The route of the new turnpike was established by the fall of 1803 and was to be from Alexandria, through central Fairfax county and the courthouse, to the Little River (Aldie) in Loudoun County. The Falls Church Road (Rt. 237), connected it to the rest of the county. Before construction of the new courthouse, farmers to the west had tried for years to establish a more direct route from their farms to markets in Alexandria. In 1802, the Little River Turnpike Co. was established to connect these areas with Alexandria. The route of the new turnpike was established by the fall of 1803 and was to be from Alexandria, through central Fairfax county and the courthouse, to the Little River (Aldie) in Loudoun County.
Richard Ratcliffe, who was still a Fairfax County justice and probably a stockholder of the Little River Company, may have influenced the route, but it is more likely that the new courthouse location dictated the route. In either case fortune again smiled on Richard Ratcliffe.

In the fall of 1804 construction of the new turnpike neared the courthouse. Richard asked his friend, Virginia Delegate Richard Bland Lee of nearby Sully Plantation, to introduce legislation to the General Assembly establishing a town at Fairfax Court House. The legislation was approved and the Town of Providence was created on January 14, 1805. According to the plan of the town streets, fifty feet wide were to be established. North, Fairfax, and Court Streets, were to run east-west, while West, Payne, Mechanic, and East Streets were to be oriented roughly north-south. Fairfax Street, now known as Main Street, was to be aligned with the Little River Turnpike. Mechanic Street is now University Drive, Payne Street, is now Chain Bridge Road, and Court Street is now Sager Avenue. There were to be 19 lots of a half-acre each. All lots were to be sold at public auction except the lot No. 1, the Tavern Lot, which was retained by Richard Ratcliffe.

Providence lacked a political body, or council for governing, that existed in other Virginia towns. But this was apparently intentional. Trustees were established for the town, but it is not clear what their function was. Presumably they had legal responsibility over the town lots that were to be sold at auction. The trustees were Charles Little, William Payne, Richard Bland Lee, John Jackson, John C. Hunter, Richard Coleman, Daniel McCarty Chichester, Henry Gunnell, Jr., Marmaduke B. Beckwith, Daniel Lewis, Francis Coffier, David Stuart, William Middleton, and Richard Fitzhugh. Apparently, Richard Ratcliffe desired that the Fairfax County Court, of which he a justice, administer the political affairs of the town. Incredibly, Providence and subsequently Fairfax were administered in this manner until the late 19th century when a board of supervisors and later a town council were established.

By the mid-19th century Providence had come to be known as Fairfax Court House. The name was officially changed in 1874 to the Town of Fairfax. Fairfax became and independent city in 1961.

As he grew older Richard Ratcliffe continued to promote his town. As late as 1819 he advertised building lots for sale or rent in the Alexandria Gazette.

Richard Ratcliffe died in 1825. He, and his wife Locian, are probably buried in the Ratcliffe Family Cemetery. The old cemetery is located on Moore Street not far from the Ratcliffe home, Mount Vineyard.

While it is not known for certain why Richard chose the name for his town, all should agree that Providence did shine on Richard Ratcliffe.

(Endnotes)
2 Ibid 2.
3 Piggly Wiggly Co. website: www.pigglywiggly.com

Plan of Town of Providence, Fx. Co. DB M2, p.137.
he came up with the name while traveling on a train and watching three little pigs struggling to get under a fence.²

Piggly Wiggly Stores were innovative and featured many retail firsts. After entering through a trademark turnstile a Piggly Wiggly customer was offered self-service aisles and shelves within easy reach; a full line of nationally advertised brands; all store items purchase marked; patented uniform fixtures and equipment, including shopping baskets; refrigerated cases; employees in uniform; cash-only checkout stands at the store exit; and low prices. The store was a huge success and within a year Saunders was selling Piggly Wiggly franchises to independent grocers all across the United States.³⁴

In September 1919, Piggly Wiggly Stores expanded into Washington, DC.³ The first of 38 stores opened in May 1920.³ In 1921, the Washington Post actually featured a full page pictorial on how to shop at a Piggly Wiggly with an article titled “A Trip Through Piggly Wiggly.”³ That same year the company expanded into Northern Virginia with stores in Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Fredericksburg and Vienna.³

The first Virginia store was in Alexandria followed by stores in Fairfax, Falls Church and Vienna. It is thought that Fairfax attorney, Fairfax Shield McCandlish (1881-1934), purchased the Fairfax Piggly Wiggly franchise which was located on Main Street across from the Fairfax County Jail and adjacent to the Wilcoxen Tavern (now site of Bank America).³² The store was constructed in 1921 by Alfred Biddle McClure (1881-1961), a Fairfax Contractor who lived on Main Street, and was opened just before Christmas that year.³²

By 1923, the Piggly Wiggly chain included 1,268 stores and was the third largest retail grocery in the country. Early that year several New York brokerage houses attempted to drive the price of Piggly Wiggly stock down by advising their clients to sell. Saunders responded by acquiring 98% of the Piggly Wiggly shares. The New York Stock Exchange declared Saunders had illegally cornered the market to manipulate the price of the stock. Saunders had to sell his stock at a tremendous loss along with several stores in an attempt to raise cash. He thus lost control of his company and was forced into personal bankruptcy.³³

In 1924, the Virginia Piggly Wiggly locations filed for bankruptcy. The stores continued to operate however, until 1927 when they were purchased by the Sanitary Grocery Company, which was organized in Washington, D.C. in 1907.³³³⁴ The arrival of the Piggly Wiggly in Fairfax was undoubtedly not a welcome sight for Hugh Sauls. However, Sauls continued to operate his business until he retired in 1926.³³ In 1927 the Sanitary Grocery moved into the former Sauls Brothers Grocery. Shortly afterward they moved to a new building located 10409 Main Street (now The Christmas Gallery). The company changed its name in 1941 to Safeway Food Stores.³³ Safeway operated at this location from 1927 until 1963 when they moved again to 10320 Main Street (now Harris Teeter). Safeway moved a final time to 10350 Willard Way in the late 1970’s.

Today, nothing remains of the Fairfax Piggly Wiggly. Its former location now serves as a parking lot for the Bank America on the corner of Main Street and Chain Bridge Road. My own personal memory of Piggly Wiggly is of the store located in Fredericksburg which continued to operate until the late 1960s. It was located east of town on Rt. 3 and was a usual stop for my family on our way to the beach. My grandfather would jokingly refer to it as the “Hoggy Woggly”.³³

Some joke! Nearly every retailer in the world today employs the self-service methods a poor Virginia farm boy instituted in his Piggly Wiggly less than a century ago.

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To Market, To Market...
by William Page Johnson, II

Today, we take our trip to the local grocery store for granted. We shop in large, well-lit stores with clean, tidy aisles that are lined with nearly everything you could want. In addition to aisle after aisle of every type of food product imaginable, most of these stores have their own bakery, meat counter, and deli, as well as freezer and refrigerated sections for perishable foods. Today you also have at least five different stores to choose from in Fairfax: Giant Food (two in fact), Safeway, Harris Teeter, Shoppers Food Warehouse, Trader Joes, plus an assortment of convenience and ethnic markets. But it wasn’t always like this. Before 1921, a trip to the grocery store in Fairfax meant a trip to the local General Store. In fact, it may have meant several trips to acquire everything you needed—a trip to the general store; a trip to the dry goods store; a trip to the butcher.

If you were a resident of Fairfax in 1905 that meant a trip, every couple of days, to Sauls Brothers Grocery located at 10389 Main Street (now home to The Second Yard) on the corner of Main Street and Mechanic Street (now University Drive).

Sauls Grocery was operated by Hugh Gardner Sauls (1876-1948) and his brother Charles William Sauls (1880-1936) from 1903 to 1926. The Sauls brothers setup their business in the Mercantile Store and Post Office previously occupied by Joseph N. Whitehead (1869-1930). Apparently, the entire family was involved in the business, including Hugh and Charles mother, Mary C. (Litchfield) Sauls (1852-1910), who baked fresh bread for the business “daily”. Charles Sauls left the business about 1914 when a disastrous fire destroyed the store. Hugh rebuilt the store on the same site. This is the same building standing today. In 1923 he constructed a shed addition to the east and moved the Post Office to this location. This structure was demolished in 1982.

Think of Ike Godseys Store from the 1970’s television series The Waltons and you’ll get an idea of what Sauls Grocery may have looked like inside. The experience would be very different than today.

Because most homes still lacked refrigeration people used the general store as their pantry, buying only what they intended to use immediately. Upon arriving at Sauls, a member of the Sauls family would greet you personally. The greeting may have gone something like this, “Good morning, Mrs. Farr! I’ll be right with you as soon as I finish with Mrs. Richardson.” While you were waiting you could peruse Mr. Sauls merchandise, which was arranged on floor to ceiling shelves behind a counter. The counter itself was a glass case where other items were stored and could be retrieved for you. When it was your turn to be waited on you would tell Mr. Sauls what you wanted and he would get it for you. If you wanted flour or sugar Mr. Sauls would measure out the requested amount. Most often your order would be small enough for the items to be placed in your shopping bag. If your order were large enough, Mr. Sauls would box your items and arrange for their delivery to your home. As Mr. Sauls was filling your order, perhaps he would converse with you about the weather, the news of the day, or inquire on the health of your family. But sooner or later he would probably suggest that you try this new baking powder, or the latest expensive perfume he had just received all the way from Paris! With your order filled and your purchases properly tallied and charged to your monthly account, you were done and you would be on your way to your next stop!

Not a bad experience all in all, but very inefficient. What if you didn’t want to wait in line at the general store to be served? What if you wanted pick out your own items from store shelves that were accessible to you? What if you didn’t want to make additional trips to the butcher, baker, etc…? Amazingly, before 1916 this was simply not possible.

In 1916, a man named Clarence Saunders single-handedly changed the way we shop and launched a retail revolution in America—a revolution that touched Fairfax too. While not exactly a household name like Ford, or Rockefeller, Saunders contribution is no less important as he is credited with selling the concept of self-service retail to a public still accustomed to being waited on in stores.

Clarence Saunders was born in Bedford, Virginia in 1881. He left school at an early age to clerk in a general store. He then became a traveling salesman for a wholesale grocery, which sold for cash only—a more efficient and cost effective business practice.7 In 1916, he expanded on this idea of efficiency by opening his own grocery store in downtown Memphis, TN, with the unusual name Piggly Wiggly—the first self-service grocery store in the country! It is believed that...
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In 1916, he expanded on this idea of efficiency by opening his own grocery store in downtown Memphis, TN, with the unusual name Piggly Wiggly—the first self-service grocery store in the country! It is believed that
he came up with the name while traveling on a train and watching three little pigs struggling to get under a fence. 2

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By 1923, the Piggly Wiggly chain included 1,268 stores and was the third largest retail grocery in the country. Early that year several New York brokerage houses attempted to drive the price of Piggly Wiggly stock down by advising their clients to sell. Saunders responded by acquiring 98% of the Piggly Wiggly shares. The New York Stock Exchange declared Saunders had illegally cornered the market to manipulate the price of the stock. Saunders had to sell his stock at a tremendous loss along with several stores in an attempt to raise cash. He thus lost control of his company and was forced into personal bankruptcy. 10

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The celebration will continue on January 15th with a Bicentennial Ball at Old Town Hall. Proceeds from this event will support HFCI’s capital campaign. Board members will be informing you of how you can help us raise money so that we can continue our work of preservation in the City. Come have fun dining and dancing and support our cause. For more information about the capital campaign call Bill Jayne at 703 352 1534.

Greetings from the President--

At our December meeting I was nominated to continue my presidency of Historic Fairfax City Inc for the year 2005. I am honored to accept this post and thank the Board and all our members for their continued confidence. The Vice-president Ann Adams and Secretary Karen Stevenson will also continue serving and we welcome our newly elected Treasurer John Petersen.

Farewell to our “acting” Treasurer Pat Cummins. Pat has been an extremely active and valuable member and will be missed sorely. We are happy to be able to immediately fill that Board vacancy with Sidney Williams who will begin his term February 1st. We welcome him to this active board – and if any of you are interested in serving on our Board please call our Nominating Chair Ellen Wigren at 703 273 4950 – and read more about her in our “getting to know you” article.

What an exciting year we are about to begin! Our City’s 200th birthday will be celebrated all year long. The Board of Historic Fairfax City, Inc. (HFCI) would like to extend an invitation to all of you to attend our various celebrations throughout the year. (See the City’s 2005 calendar for details.)

HFCI is proud to be sponsoring the ceremony and the dedication of a marker honoring the founder of our City on January 14th at 2PM. There will be an unveiling of the marker dedicated to Richard Ratcliffe, the founder of the City, at the corner of Main and Oak streets. We are proud to say that about 20 of the direct descendants of Richard Ratcliffe will be attending from all over the United States. Come and meet “Richard Ratcliffe” and; his descendants at the dedication – and join us at 5PM for the grand opening of the newly renovated “upstairs” room at the Museum and enjoy the exhibit about our City’s progress throughout these 200 years.

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Christmas Greetings

Piggly Wiggly Store

All Over the World.

Fairfax, Virginia

BIGGER AND BETTER

Fairfax Herald December 23, 1921, p. 2.

(Endnotes continued from pg. 9)

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2 Washington Post, December 25, 1921, p. 58.
5 Washington Post, April 17, 1907, p. 3.
6 Fairfax Herald, 1921-1923 various issues.
8 Washington Post, August 30, 1927, p. 18.
9 Washington Post, April 17, 1907, p. 3.
10 Safeway operated at this location from 1927 until 1963 when they moved again to 10320 Main Street (now Harris Teeter). Safeway moved a final time to 10350 Willard Way in the late 1970’s.
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14 Farewell to our “acting” Treasurer Pat Cummins. Pat has been an extremely active and valuable member and will be missed sorely. We are happy to be able to immediately fill that Board vacancy with Sidney Williams who will begin his term February 1st. We welcome him to this active board – and if any of you are interested in serving on our Board please call our Nominating Chair Ellen Wigren at 703 273 4950 – and read more about her in our “getting to know you” article.
15 What an exciting year we are about to begin! Our City’s 200th birthday will be celebrated all year long. The Board of Historic Fairfax City, Inc. (HFCI) would like to extend an invitation to all of you to attend our various celebrations throughout the year. (See the City’s 2005 calendar for details.)
16 HFCI is proud to be sponsoring the ceremony and the dedication of a marker honoring the founder of our City on January 14th at 2PM. There will be an unveiling of the marker dedicated to Richard Ratcliffe, the founder of the City, at the corner of Main and Oak streets. We are proud to say that about 20 of the direct descendants of Richard Ratcliffe will be attending from all over the United States. Come and meet “Richard Ratcliffe”; and; his descendants at the dedication – and join us at 5PM for the grand opening of the newly renovated “upstairs” room at the Museum and enjoy the exhibit about our City’s progress throughout these 200 years.
17 The celebration will continue on January 15th with a Bicentennial Ball at Old Town Hall. Proceeds from this event will support HFCI’s capital campaign. Board members will be informing you of how you can help us raise money so that we can continue our work of preservation in the City. Come have fun dining and dancing and support our cause. For more information about the capital campaign call Bill Jayne at 703 352 1534.
Providence lacked a political body, or council for governing, that existed in other Virginia towns. But this was apparently intentional. Trustees were established for the town, but it is not clear what their function was. Presumably they had legal responsibility over the town lots that were to be sold at auction. The trustees were Charles Little, William Payne, Richard Bland Lee, John Jackson, John C. Hunter, Richard Coleman, Daniel McCarty Chichester, Henry Gunnell, Jr., Marmaduke B. Beckwith, Daniel Lewis, Francis Coffier, David Stuart, William Middleton, and Richard Fitzhugh. Apparently, Richard Ratcliffe desired that the Fairfax County Court, of which he a justice, administer the political affairs of the town. Incredibly, Providence and subsequently Fairfax were administered in this manner until the late 19th century when a board of supervisors and later a town council were established.

By the mid-19th century Providence had come to be known as Fairfax Court House. The name was officially changed in 1874 to the Town of Fairfax. Fairfax became and independent city in 1961.

As he grew older Richard Ratcliffe continued to promote his town. As late as 1819 he advertised building lots for sale or rent in the Alexandria Gazette.

Richard Ratcliffe died in 1825. He, and his wife Locian, are probably buried in the Ratcliffe Family Cemetery. The old cemetery is located on Moore Street not far from the Ratcliffe home, Mount Vineyard.

While it is not known for certain why Richard chose the name for his town, all should agree that Providence did shine on Richard Ratcliffe.

Ellen has been on the HFCI Board since 1995 – making her one of the longest standing Board members. She is also a volunteer for Historic Resources Museum and Visitors Center, so her dual role keeps her active and involved in all historic issues. Ellen is currently Chair of the HFCI Collections Acquisitions and Nominating Committees as well as participating in other projects such as Civil War Days, Historic Homes Tours and working at the Fall Festival and as a docent at the Ratcliffe-Allison House.

Ellen’s interest in history began when she was very young. As a native of Botetourt Co., VA she is a member of a family that settled there in the 1700’s. Her paternal grandparents lived with her family and her grandmother exposed her to not only family history butpeeked her interest in all history. Ellen inherited many of the hand made family furniture items and donated much of it to the American Frontier Culture Museum in Stantton, VA. A special item was her cord bed which was made by her great-grandfather. Ellen enjoys going back to the Museum to see her bed and is proud that others can enjoy seeing it also.

Ellen has been in the area since the 1940’s, teaching in the Arlington County school system. After her marriage to Lee Wigren in 1952 they moved to Fairfax. They both began to get involved in Community affairs. Lee’s interest in historical matters began while he served, first, on the Planning Commission and later as a Councilperson. He was one of the first HFCI Board members. "Preservation was uppermost in his actions – and he was most instrumental in the founding of the City’s Museum," says Ellen of her husband. Ellen continued his work after his death in 1993.

In her spare time she is active in the Methodist Church, belongs to several organizations: Fairfax Antique Arts, Virginia Association of Museums, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Fairfax Court House, Botetourt Co. Historic Society, and the American Frontier Culture Museum. Ellen is our advocate at the many meetings and conventions around the State on historic issues. Ellen also enjoys reading (usually history related) and doing needlework and baking.

Ellen and Lee have 2 sons, Chris who inherited his parent’s love of history and is the Deputy Director of the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation in New Haven. Eric lives close by in Lorton and is a Branch Manager of a mortgage company. They have blessed her with 2 grandsons and Ellen continues the legacy by spending time with her eleven year old grandson teaching him about family history and visiting Museums and historic spots in the area.

“I have always been interested in history – beginning in my childhood learning all about my family’s history. My husband and I spend many hours touring and visiting historic sites up and down the East Coast,” says Ellen. Her interest in history and her participation on the Board is invaluable to our cause of preservation. Thanks for all your good work Ellen.
To establish a more direct route from their farms to markets in Alexandria. In 1802, the Little River Turnpike Co. was established to connect these areas with Alexandria. The courthouse was completed the Fairfax County Court justices deemed the size of the courthouse lot too small to accommodate a clerk's office, jail, pillory, stocks and stable and all other buildings that would be required. Accordingly, in March 1800, the Court ordered the acquisition of an additional six acres. That same month the Alexandria Gazette printed the following notice:


In October 1800, Richard's vision grew more ambitious. With the probable assistance of his son Robert, who was then the deputy county surveyor, Richard began to lay out a town around the new courthouse. He once again advertised his intentions in the Alexandria Gazette (see opposite page).

The new courthouse was centrally located within the county but only two roads, the Payne’s Church Road (Rt. 123) and the Falls Church Road (Rt. 237), connected it to the rest of the county. Before construction of the new courthouse, farmers to the west had tried for years to establish a more direct route from their farms to markets in Alexandria. In 1802, the Little River Turnpike Co. was established to connect these areas with Alexandria. The route of the new turnpike was established by the fall of 1803 and was to be from Alexandria, through central Fairfax county and the courthouse, to the Little River (Aldie) in Loudoun...
Ratcliffe... - continued from pg. 1

Martha (Moxley) Boling. The couple raised a sizeable family of nine children: Robert, Samuel, John, Charles, Patsy, Penelope, Locian, Nancy, and Jane.

Richard began acquiring land near the headwaters of Accotink Creek in 1786. Also located here at the intersection of Payne’s Church Road (now Rt. 123) and the Falls Church Road (now Rt. 237) was a store operated by Caleb Earp. The area was known as Earps Corner, or Earps Ordinary. By the mid-1790s Richard Ratcliffe owned nearly 3000 acres of land in this vicinity including all of the present Downtown Historic District of the City of Fairfax. He called his plantation Mount Vineyard. He could not have imagined then the changes that were to come, but he would benefit greatly from them.

In 1789, the fledgling United States Congress created our federal capital - the District of Columbia. At George Washington’s suggestion the Town of Alexandria was included in the new federal capital. Unfortunately, the Fairfax County Courthouse, which had been located in Alexandria since 1752, was now outside of the legal boundaries of Fairfax county. The General Assembly acted and ordered the Fairfax County Court to find a new courthouse location near “Price’s Tavern.” (present day Backlick and Braddock Roads). Citizen opposition to moving the courthouse from Alexandria was very vocal and nothing further was done for a decade.

In 1794, Richard was appointed as a Fairfax County Court justice. Such appointments were made by the Governor and were very prestigious. Justices, who were appointed for life, had immense power in the 18th century— all but the power of life and death. With the exception of slaves, capital crimes were heard in General Court in Williamsburg and later in Richmond.

In 1798, the General Assembly adjusted the boundary between Fairfax and Loudoun giving Fairfax nearly forty additional square miles of land. The Virginia General Assembly once again directed the Fairfax County Court to find a new location for the Courthouse near the center of the county.

Richard Ratcliffe offered four acres to the county for one dollar. The county accepted his offer and the property transferred in June 1799. Construction of the new courthouse buildings began immediately. The new buildings were completed by January 27, 1800 and the county accepted the building.

Richard’s offer was not entirely philanthropic. He owned all the land around the four-acre courthouse lot and he hoped to benefit from the commercial development that would follow. Evidence supporting Richard’s commercial hopes is apparent in the following advertisement which appeared in the Alexandria Gazette just weeks after the new Court House was completed:

Happy Birthday Fairfax!

On January 14, 2005, Fairfax will celebrate it’s 200th birthday! On that date in 1805, the Virginia General Assembly granted a charter for the Town of Providence to Richard Ratcliffe. The name of the village, which was commonly known as Fairfax Court House, was officially changed in 1874 from Providence to Fairfax. The Town of Fairfax became the City of Fairfax in 1961.

Join us and help celebrate the 200th anniversary of Fairfax.

HISTORIC FAIRFAX CITY, INC.

Do you want to know more about the history of where you live?

JOIN HISTORIC FAIRFAX CITY, INC.

Just what is available to you as a member of HFCI?

A newsletter, 4 times a year announcing what is happening with all HFCI projects and events

2 general meetings a year, affording you an opportunity to meet and speak with people behind the scenes working to maintain interest in the history of Fairfax.

We are looking forward to having you be a part of the City’s bi-centennial in 2005. We need and value your support. Together we will preserve the heritage that has been left to us.

The Board of Directors of Historic Fairfax City, Inc.

HFCI MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/ RENEWAL

HISTORIC FAIRFAX CITY, INC. is a non-profit corporation (501©(3) organization)

Membership Classifications:

- Class A  Individual ...........................................$25.00
- Class A-1 Additional Household Member .....................$10.00
- Class B-1 Non-profit Organizations .................................$35.00
- Class B-2 For profit Organizations ...............................$50.00

Enclosed is my tax-deductible membership application and check made out to Historic Fairfax City Inc. for: $

Name or Organization: ________________________________
Telephone #: ________________________________
Contact name: ________________________________
e-mail: ________________________________
Address: ________________________________

Return to: Historic Fairfax City, Inc.,
Attention: Membership Committee
10209 Main Street
Fairfax, VA 22030

City of Fairfax – Celebrating 200 Years
1805 – 2005
Catch Our Spirit Feel Our Pride
Richard Ratcliffe: The Founder

by William Page Johnson, II

One of the most influential and often overlooked figures in the early history of Fairfax is Richard Ratcliffe. Born in Fairfax County, Virginia about 1751, Richard was the son of John Ratcliffe and Ann (Smith) Moxley, the widow of Thomas Moxley. John Ratcliffe was a contemporary of both George Mason and George Washington. In fact, Washington recorded the Ratcliffe’s in his diary: “Mrs. Ratcliffe and her son came to dinner.”

From 1771 until his death in 1825 Richard Ratcliffe served variously as the Fairfax County sheriff, coroner, justice, patrolman, overseer of the poor, constable, commissioner of the revenue, jail inspector, superintendent of elections, and candidate for the Virginia General Assembly and designer and developer of Providence, the town that we now call the City of Fairfax.

By the 1750s Virginia colonial culture was becoming distinctly different from that of Great Britain. Political and religious dissent was increasing. Large crowds would gather in cities, towns, and rural areas to hear stirring sermons by preachers such as Jeremiah Moore, a Baptist, and George Whitefield, a Presbyterian. Both men advocated religious freedom. The seeds of revolution were being sown. At about the same time a young surveyor and militia officer named George Washington was busy surveying the Virginia frontier and, while so engaged accidentally touched off an international incident – The French and Indian War.

It was in this environment Richard Ratcliffe came of age. Richard was an educated man. He was, most likely, instructed at home by his father. He enjoyed a middle-class lifestyle by 18th c. standards and was undoubtedly exposed to a variety of cultural activities when he accompanied his father on business to Alexandria. As a young man Richard was ambitious. In 1771, at the age 21, he was appointed a deputy sheriff for Fairfax County, the beginning of a public service career that would span fifty-four years.

Little is known of Richard’s activities during the Revolution. In 1770, his father signed a Non-Importation Broadside against British goods. Richard did not serve in the Continental Army or militia, but he did supply them with provisions. By 1777 Richard had met and married Louisiana “Locian” Bolling the daughter of Gerrard