

PICTURES OF A VISIT TO BUSH LAND, VIRGINIA*

by HARRY G. ENOCH

In June 2015, my wife Clare and I took a five-day journey through Virginia visiting four of the five counties where John Bush—grandfather of Captain Billy Bush—once lived. Part research trip and part vacation, our time was not spent pouring through courthouse records and dusty library tomes. Instead, we went to get a first-hand view, on the ground, of the actual places where John lived. We have a special interest in these places, as Clare is a John Bush descendant, and we live in the Bush Settlement founded by Captain Billy Bush in Clark County, Kentucky. Since John migrated, generally, from east to west and we traveled west to east, we encountered the sites in the reverse order in which John inhabited them. First up was Madison County, Virginia.

MADISON COUNTY

After spending the night in Orange, we started out early on a sunny Tuesday morning for Madison County. We headed north, crossed the Rapidan River and turned northwest into the heart of Madison on surprisingly good secondary roads. The quality of Virginia's secondary roads continued to impress us. And all roads were well marked with route numbers, so wayfinding using our *Virginia Atlas & Gazetteer* was a breeze.

For a county with almost no presence in the tourist brochure stands, we found Madison to be an appealing mix of well-tended upland farms, compact villages, and magnificent panoramic views of the Blue Ridge Mountains. John moved here in about 1734 and died here in 1746, when the area was still part of Orange County. Madison County would not be formed until 1793.

Our destination was Garth Run, the site of John's last homestead. We passed through Wolfstown then re-crossed the Rapidan, now much reduced in size, and turned onto Garth Run Road. The road paralleled the run upstream into more and more rugged hill country, until it finally came to a dead end in the woods of the Rapidan Wildlife Management Area. There we turned around and retraced our route.

There are not sufficient land records to pinpoint the location of John's land here. Garth Run is not a long stream—less than 10 miles in length—but it traverses a diverse topography from gently rolling open pasture at its lower end to steeply-sloped forest near the headwaters. With 400 acres straddling Garth Run, John could have lived anywhere along the stream. The conditions he faced farming his tract would have varied enormously depending on how far up the run he was situated.



* A version of this article appears in *Captain Billy Bush and the Bush Settlement, Clark County, Kentucky: A Family History* (2015) published by the Lower Howard's Creek Nature & Heritage Preserve.



On Garth Run Road looking east. Garth Run flows from right to left.



Foothills of the Blue Ridge.



A picturesque horse farm on lower Garth Run.



An ancient farmhouse and stone fence on upper Garth Run.



Nearing the headwaters of Garth Run.



Forested hillside near the headwaters of Garth Run.

SPOTSYLVANIA COUNTY

After leaving Garth Run, we returned to Orange then headed east on Route 20 to Verdierville, where we turned southeast following a series of small roads into Spotsylvania County. The countryside here was relatively flat and heavily wooded.

A satellite view of John's land shows that the area remains fairly isolated to this day. The property is forested except for tracts that have been timbered (clear cut), and while crisscrossed by unpaved roads, there is no highway access. There is little evidence of habitation or agricultural activity except in the far western end along Glady Run.

John's land on Glady Run lay in the V formed by Pamunkey Road (Route 612) and Post Oak Road (Route 606). There was no highway access to his 800 acres here. We tried approaching it by way of Babe Boy Schooler Drive, a gravel road that turned out to be on private property. After driving about 2 miles through the woods, the road ended, and we reached a cleared area that left us on the south side of Glady Run—John's land lay on the north side. We met a father and son who were installing new fencing and kindly let us walk around and take pictures. A few hundred yards into the clearing was a fenced in area where an old house had stood and recently burned. Clare got an up-close picture of the chimney which appeared to be of very early construction. This could have been the home of one of John's neighbors.

Back out on Post Oak Road, we drove through continuous woods, until we came to a farm on the north side of the road, about 2 miles from the junction with Pamunkey Road. Here we got a distant view of Glady Run and our only view of John's land. We pulled into the farm driveway and stopped to take pictures. Looking north we could see two ponds, both formed by impoundments on Garth Run. Beyond the ponds, the view was again all forest. Interestingly, the farm driveway appeared to be a deeply sunken road, quite likely of a very early use. This could have been the road from John's land to the headwaters of East Northeast Creek or perhaps the remnants of John Bush's Mill Road. Finding no other way to access John's property, we turned onto Pamunkey Road and headed to Fredericksburg, where we spent the night.



A plot of John's 800 acres placed on an aerial photograph in the V formed by Post Oak Road running southeast and Pamunkey Road running northeast. The squiggly black line is Glady Run. (Imagery ©2015 Google, Map data ©2015 Google)



The woods along Babe Boy Schooler Drive.



Open area at the end of Babe Boy Schooler Drive—south of Gladly Run. The old chimney is barely visible in the center of the picture.



The old chimney up close.



One of the ponds on Gladly Run (right) and the sunken road (left).



The sunken road (farm driveway).

CAROLINE COUNTY

We spent Wednesday morning exploring Fredericksburg, including historic sites associated with the famous Civil War battle that took place here in December 1862. We enjoyed riverside views of the beautiful Rappahannock and were reminded that George Washington grew up on Ferry Farm just across the river.

We skipped visiting John's Stafford County property, which now lay in the middle of suburban Alexandria, Virginia. So before midday, we left Fredericksburg and the Fall Line behind, heading east on Route 17, the Tidewater Trail. Upon getting into the lowlands of the Tidewater region, the landscape changed dramatically, from mostly woods to mostly farms. We went by mile after mile of cornfields—this is truly corn country now. We did see some soybeans and a little wheat, but predominantly corn, much of which was very tall and nearly ripe at the end of June.

What we did not see was tobacco, not a stalk. What an amazing change from the colonial period that was based on a tobacco economy. The discovery that cigarettes cause cancer changed Americans' smoking habits. Tobacco production in Virginia decreased by more than ninety percent over the last century, from a peak of 240,000 acres planted around 1920 to less than 20,000 acres in 2007. Most of the state's tobacco is now grown in the Southside and Southwest Virginia counties. We saw no trace of the sot-weed in counties along the Rappahannock River.

We soon came to the old river town of Port Royal in Caroline County, which was part of Essex County in John's day. Two and a half miles beyond lay Peumansend Creek. John owned land on the creek about 2 miles in from the river. Unfortunately, we could not access the actual ground of his plantation, because the area is totally fenced off and enclosed the Fort A. P. Hill Military Reservation. From a highway overpass, we got a good

view of Peumansend Creek—not an inviting sight. The water was a kind of orange-brownish color and the land around looked swampy. In fact, John’s deed to the property described his tract as lying in “Pumansend Swamp.” It must not have been totally desolate, however, as John’s sojourn here lasted about ten years (1706 to 1716). From here he went to Stafford County, which we did not visit, knowing the urbanized area south of Alexandria, Virginia, would reveal little of the character it had in John’s time.



The first entryway to John’s land, at the Fort A. P. Hill Army Reserve Center, was fenced and the access gates blocked and locked.



Every access point for 7 miles was similarly blocked.



The murky waters of Peumansend Creek within a mile of John's land.



Swampy land adjoining Peumansend Creek.

LANCASTER COUNTY

From Peumansend Creek, we continued down Route 17 to another old river town, Tappahannock, the county seat of Essex, which appears to be a thriving community. Here we crossed the Rappahannock, nearly 2 miles wide at this point.

We traveled southeast on Mary Washington Road (Route 3) until we crossed Lancaster Creek—which John knew as Morattico Creek—and entered Lancaster County. We turned east on a gravel path called Field Trial Road (Route 602), dead ending on Lara Road (Route 600). There we turned north for a little less than 2 miles, back to the county line separating Lancaster and Richmond. Lara Road forms the boundary with Northumberland, so we were at the junction of three counties and very near John’s land. In contrast to the many fine agricultural areas of the county, this section was mostly forested with a few clearings opened for productive farms.

The only places where we could get closer to John’s land were private driveways that did not go far from the road. We were able to get off the highway just across the Richmond County line, however. There a gravel road called Dunaway Lane (Route 654) went back to the west, in the direction of John’s land, about 2 miles before it ended in a large cornfield. The road itself was deeply sunken and could easily have been in use since the late 1600s. Along the way, we passed swamps, woods and cleared cropland.



Endless cornfields on both sides of Field Trial Road.



Part woodland and part swampland looking toward Lancaster Creek—very close to John’s land.



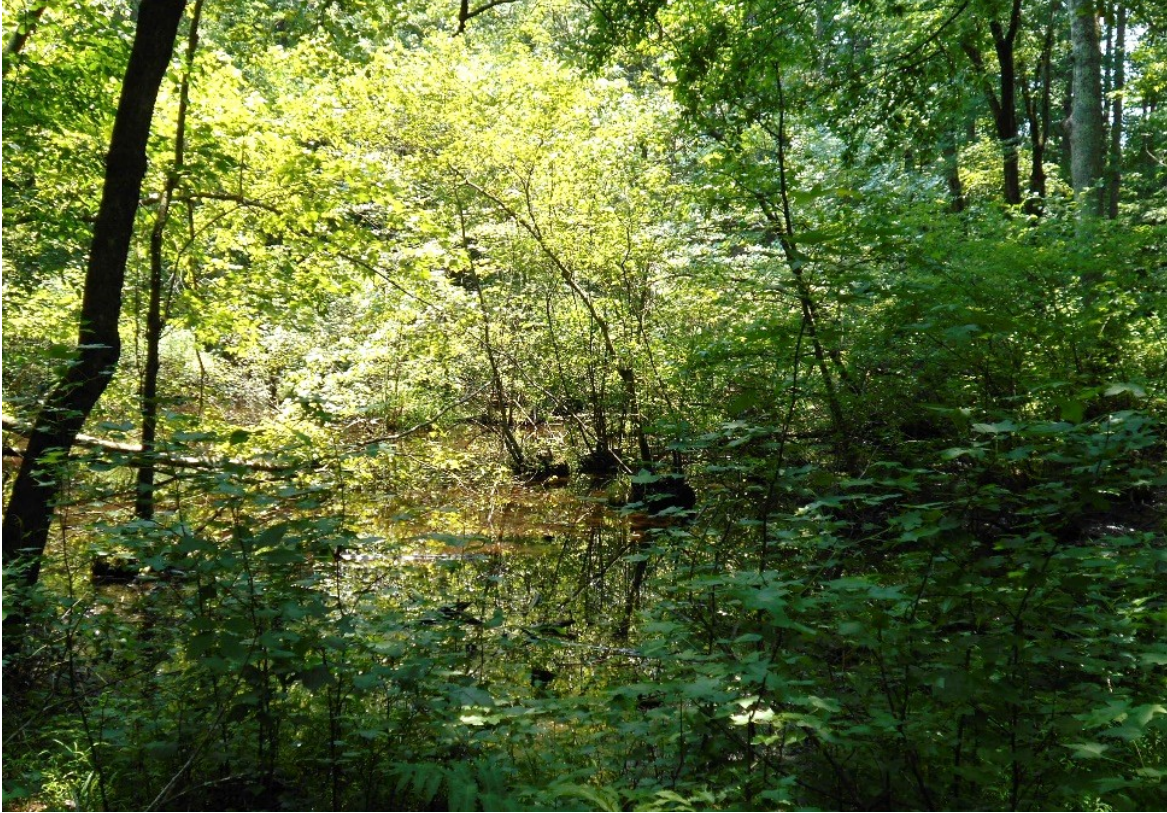
Satellite view of John Bush’s Lancaster County land. Lancaster Creek separates Richmond County to the north and Lancaster County to the south. Lara Road (Route 600) is the dividing line for Northumberland County. Here forest and swamp are interspersed with cleared cropland. Dunaway Lane (Route 654) is a deeply sunken road that ends in a cornfield (upper left). (Imagery ©2015 Google, Map data ©2015 Google)



The sunken road.



Woods along the sunken road.



Swamp along the sunken road.

Satisfied that we had gotten as close to John's land as we were going to get, we set off back to civilization. Returning to Mary Washington Road and proceeding southeast again, we passed through the tiny county seat of Lancaster, stopped for crab cakes in Kilmarnock, then crossed the Rappahannock again, this time on the Robert O. Norris Jr. Bridge, which was well over 3 miles long.



Norris Bridge over the Rappahannock

After crossing the Rappahannock, we headed to Richmond where we made a brief stop at the Library of Virginia and then made our way back to Kentucky, and our home in the Bush Settlement.

One thing we did not find was the remnants of a home where John lived during his years of moving across Virginia. It would have been very surprising if we had. The poignant description below on the fate of early homesites is taken from a history of Madison County, the location of John last residence.

On most of the mountains of Madison may be seen today the remains of old colonial cabins and signs of clearings that have now grown up into forests. The descendants of these early settlers have now forsaken their old homes and have moved [far away]. These early forefathers of ours have been forgotten; only a few piles of stone mark where their cabins once stood; even their graves are unmarked; yet, they performed their task in the great chain of events and made it possible that we may live a better life. We may say with one accord that their lives were not lived in vain. (Claude L. Yowell, *History of Madison County, Virginia* (Strasburg, VA, 1926), p. 45)