

## TOUR OF WICOMICO VIEW

My husband, Charles Ransdell and I were conducted on a tour of Wicomico View in May, 1984. Admiral Robert A. Chewning (Ret.) purchased the home in October, 1983 from Betsy Hudnall, wife of the late Howard (Yankee) Hudnall. Yankee died about four years ago.

It had been pretty well established that the house was built in 1834. Napoleon Hudnall, Route 3 Box 132, Beaufort, N. C. 28516, indicates his mother had him shoot the date "1834" from the structure of the house, since she had a historian inspect the home and an opinion was given that the home was built in the 1700s. John Hudnall, Napoleon Hudnall's ancestor, in 1656 received land from William Settle. In August, 1658, according to Nell M. Nugent, author of Cavaliers and Pioneers Volume 1, John Hudnall was granted 250 acres on the south side of the Great Wicomico River. In 1662 he acquired 500 more acres on the north side of the Great Wicomico and eventually his holdings totaled a thousand acres, including nine prime fish "lots" to the north on the Potomac River. "Lots" were particular shore points where the holders could set and haul nets.

The first mention of any building on the property is when a will passed title to land and buildings in 1834 and materials for a building on the property at the time. In addition to the main house, other buildings on the property at one time consisted of: kitchen, smoke house, ice house, farm foundry, slave quarters, etc. Now all buildings are gone except for the house.

The family grave yard is located to one side of the house. Napoleon Hudnall, who fought in the Civil War, is buried there. There are several other grave markers.

All materials for the house were made on the property. The design of the home is fairly classical for the area and is considered to be Federal architectural plans, somewhat along the lines of Cobbs Hall, i.e. the major hallway leads through the center of each floor with four rooms off the hall, two on either side. The walls are brick, two feet thick at the foundation and decreasing by one brick at each upper floor. The stairway is rather unique in that it is cantilevered off the brick wall and supports itself, spiraling from the first floor to the third. Admiral Chewning indicates he was told by Napoleon that he and his brother Yankee in younger years used to slide down the stair rail.

Originally the pantry, wine cellar, and formal dining room were in the basement. The kitchen was external of the house and there is an entry from the outside which provided access from the former kitchen to the dining room located in the basement.

The parlor and ladies dressing room (also corset room) were on one side of the first floor main hall, with the plantation office on the other side. Howard (Yankee) Hudnall fixed over the former office into a kitchen and dining area.

At each end of the house, virtually windowless, openings were left in for bee hives. The openings went through to the interior walls, one in the ladies corset room, where glass doors were installed. A curtain covered the glass door and could be pulled back for viewing the bees at work or for opening the door to harvest the honey. Admiral Chewning plans to retain this feature of the home and to restore it to its original architectural plan and furnish it to correspond to the historic periods it has seen.

The foundation of the home is of cobblestone, probably hauled in by ship because as late as 1930 most transport was by steamship service, as there were few roads in the area. The minister in the past traveled on horseback and conducted services at the home. He was given an attic bedroom to sleep in, as were all guests except for family, who slept on the second floor.

Partitions for rooms are of brick and in the attic bedrooms at either end of the house, there are planks that can be removed. This opens into a space at the top of the closets below and provides storage space for valuable items. This space was used during the various wars. The house was vacant for five years during the Civil War. The family silver was lost during the Civil War and never found. There is an agreement between the present owner, Admiral Chewning, and Betsy Hudnall that if the silver is located in the next 80 years it will be returned to the Hudnall family.

The roof was originally of cedar shingles. Howard's grandfather was afraid of fire and put on a tin roof. There was a hurricane in the 1930s and water from the river came up onto part of the property. Howard's mother opened a door during the storm, and in trying to find an outlet the wind blew out some windows, depositing them over in the garden area unbroken. The roof blew off. Another tin roof was installed and eventually was replaced with asbestos.

There was an epidemic of Tuberculosis in the house, and it was thought the germ was from dampness. The outside and inside walls were whitewashed. This has disappeared from the outside of the home. The outside walls were covered with ivy at one time. Black snakes crawled up the vines and into the home. The ivy was removed.

Originally there were porches outside with the roof coming from the top, one porch upstairs and one down, with double columns each. The door upstairs has been bricked in but the porches will be rebuilt and the door reopened.

The slave quarters housed about 200 people at one time but were a casualty of erosion from the river.

Howard (Yankee) Hudnall is buried on the grounds in the family cemetery, and there is an agreement with Admiral Chewning that the remainder of Yankee's family will be buried there.

To sum up our impressions of the home, the privilege of the tour conducted by Admiral Chewning and his daughter, the opportunity of being in an area that was probably inhabited by my ancestors, I can only say it was an emotional experience. Although I have not documented that my ancestors are in fact related to this very early Hudnall there is the feeling of kinship and belonging.

The tour of Wicomico View coincided with a 12,000 mile trip my husband and I enjoyed, and the trip itself was not without surprising developments. We became involved in genealogical research for both the Ransdell and Hudnall families. My husband is from California and I am from South Carolina. We stopped for what we thought would be a routine tour of the museum at Montross, Virginia. There we learned that Ransdells and Hudnalls fought together from the same company from Virginia in the French Indian War and belonged to the same Church in Virginia in the 1760s. Indeed it is a small world.

Monday, October 31, 1983 Morehead-City-Beaufort, N.C. 1B



Ruth Barbour

## Goin' home...to Virginia

NAPOLEON HUDNALL, Beaufort, went home again early this month, perhaps for the last time, to the tidewater Virginia house where he was born. The modified Georgian four-floor brick home, built in the early 1800s on the Great Wicomico River, will soon pass from family ownership.

Betsy Hudnall, wife of the late Howard Snow Hudnall, has sold the homestead and some of the surrounding acreage to Adm. Robert Chewning (USN, ret) and Mrs. Chewning, who plan to return it to its original architectural plan and furnish it in keeping with the historic periods it has seen.

John Hudnall, Napoleon Hudnall's ancestor, was granted 250 acres on the south side of the Great Wicomico River Aug. 24, 1658, according to Nell M. Nugent, author of *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, Volume I, a record of early land grants from the Crown. In 1656, two years prior, this same John Hudnall had received a neighboring tract from one William Settle. In 1662, he acquired 500 more acres on the north side of the Great Wicomico. His holdings eventually totaled a thousand acres, including nine prime fish "lots" to the north on the Potomac River. "Lots" were specified shore points where the holders could set and haul nets.

Napoleon Hudnall, husband of the former Bertha Barbour, Beaufort, was born there in 1912. He was named for his paternal grandfather, Napoleon Bonaparte Hudnall, and his maternal grandfather, Robert E. Lee Snow. After his brother, Howard Snow Hudnall, died in 1980, the family decided to sell the house rather than cope with the tremendous cost of upkeep. Mrs. Hudnall has retained some of the land and is building a home nearby. Parting with "Wicomico View" was not easy, for it is one of the few original patent properties in the country that had not passed from the family of the original owner.

IN THE 1933 hurricane, the roof blew off and windows blew out, but the original builder intended the walls to stand against fire, flood, storm and assault. They are 24 inches wide at the foundation, and one brick narrower at each floor. Partitions are brick. Six by 10-inch timbers are visible on the ground floor (basement) where the dining room, pantry, wine and herb cellars were located.

On the first floor, single boards six

inches wide and 40 feet long, run from the front door to the back. Imagine how tall the trees must have been from which those boards were hewn.

The smokehouse and kitchen, located away from the house, no longer stand, and the slave quarters, built of brick, have succumbed to river bank erosion. In the house itself are nine fireplaces. Each end of the house is virtually windowless, but one opening was left in the brickwork for honeybees to build hives. The opening went through to the interior wall which was glassed. Over this a curtain was hung that was pulled aside when visitors or youngsters wanted to watch the bees at work.

A spectacular architectural feature of the house is a partially free-standing elliptical spiral staircase that rises from the first floor hall to the top floor of the house.

Beaufort's Mr. Hudnall, who last lived in the house in 1940, is semi-retired. One of his sons, John, who lives at Atlantic, bears the name of the first John Hudnall, a 17th century colonist who helped settle the region that cradled the First Families of Virginia.