200 Years of Richmond History

The following text is a historical overview of Richmond, Virginia, highlighting its significant events and milestones.

In 1803, Richmond became the capital of the newly formed Commonwealth of Virginia. It has since grown into one of the largest cities in the United States.

The city was founded on the James River and has a long history of rich cultural and architectural heritage.

Today, Richmond is known for its vibrant arts scene, museums, and historical sites. It continues to attract visitors from around the world.

Richmond has a diverse population and offers a variety of dining, shopping, and entertainment options.

The city is home to several universities, including Virginia Commonwealth University and the University of Richmond.

Richmond's rich history and dynamic present make it a fascinating place to visit or call home.
The first permanent settlers in what would later become Wayne County were three teenagers and a young man left to fend for themselves during a bitter 1806 winter.

The leaders of the Kentucky settlement had gone back to Kentucky to fetch their families and promised to return.

The young people had to survive on their own against unrelenting nature... and hostile Indians.

In the absence of seasoned pioneer adults, young newlyweds Joseph and Mary Cox, and two teenaged boys ages 16 and 17 — Joseph and William Holman — tried to survive. They had few weapons, some tools and a dog.

Young Cox explored and named several streams, including Elk Horn where a pair of elk horns had been found, and Lick Creek, where a deer lick was seen. Survival was never-ending toil and a more permanent cabin seemed imperative when Mary told Joseph she was pregnant.

Joseph and Mary were the first area pioneers who were expectant parents.

One day an Indian with trinkets approached the newlyweds' cooking fire. He wanted to force barter for the settlement's mongrel watchdog.

Joseph declined, and stirred a kettle.

The Indian increased the offer, and Joseph again refused to part with the dog.

The angry brave slapped the breech of his gun and exclaimed, "Shall swap!"

Joseph eased toward the stump concealing his rifle, and leveled his gaze on the warrior. He snatched the weapon and ordered, "Puck-a-chee!" which meant "go home!" and cocked the flintlock.

The Indian left.

The young settlers eventually ingratiated themselves to their Native American neighbors. When logs were cut for the first permanent cabin, an encampment of Shawnees and Delawares helped drag the logs up a slope and lift the timbers to Cox and Joseph Holman to set and notch in place.

But Indian hostility would eventually return and threaten the young people's survival.

(More about the settlers’ struggles Sunday.)
Irvin Hinton was burned alive at the stake during several hours and scalped for trying to escape. Now it was 16-year-old Richard Rue and 19-year-old George Holman's turn to die.

The Indians wanted the presence of other chiefs and warriors to watch the spectacle, so the young captives were marched for three days to another destination in order to be burned at the stake that night.

Dry brush and sticks were collected and piled around two ground-driven stakes. The faces of the two youths were blackened, and that evening they watched the setting sun for the last time.

One noble-looking chief approached the prisoners and took Holman by the hand, cut his cords, wiped the black pitch from his face and placed his hand upon the young man's head, announcing, "I adopt you as my son, to fill the place of the one I lately lost. I loved that brother well; I will love this one, too. My old mother will be glad when I tell her I have brought her a son, in place of the dear departed one."

On Feb. 14, 1781, Rue and Holman were spared by acts of kindness. Later they would find the first settlement in what was to become Wayne County.

Continued Monday's entry:

But the preparations for the burning of Richard Rue continued. Holman embraced Rue, who was tied to one of the stakes. A flame was applied to small brush. A young Shawnee sprang into the ring to cut the cords and led Rue out. Some of the crowd applauded, others did not.

The Shawnee said, "I take this young man to be my brother, in place of the one I lately lost. I loved that brother well; I will love this one, too. My old mother will be glad when I tell her I have brought her a son, in place of the dear departed one."

The first court held in Wayne County was on Feb. 25, 1811, at the house of Richard Rue, three miles south of Richmond. At this first court session, the county was divided into two townships. At the second court session the following month, a decision was made that would cause bitter derision.

The law came into Wayne County in the wake of the first few settlers who penetrated the wilderness. The first administrator was one of the founders of Wayne County. Territorial governor General William Harrison appointed Richard Rue Justice of the Peace in 1806.

The territorial legislature dictated, "until the establishment of the county seat, the house of Richard Rue shall be the legal place for holding courts in and for said county until a suitable courthouse is completed."

Rue was without legal training but possessed of hardy common sense developed in the rigorous life of a frontiersman. His home three miles south of Richmond no longer stands; it was in this log structure that the first county court was held on Feb. 25, 1811.

At the first session, the county was divided into two townships. Two Overseers of the Poor were selected, and three men selected as official Fence Viewers.

The court seal was made of a wafer and a piece of paper turned over with the letters "Wayne County" written over it.

The second court term was at the same place the next month. A grand jury was impaneled. Seats consisted of roughly hewn chairs and logs. When jurymen retired for further deliberation, logs were placed a suitable distance apart.

What they determined to do was to set the county seat near its geographic center, and they did so, stating, "the town in Wayne, or the seat of justice, shall be called Salisbury."

This decision would later all but destroy Salisbury when the seat was removed to Centerville and create contention between Richmond and Centerville for the county seat when it moved to Richmond.
In April 1805, Richard Rue, George Holman and Joseph Woodkirk and their families were hacking their way through blaze trails along the dim, rugged boundary trace of the Indiana Territory, making their way from Kentucky back to the upper reaches of the Whitewater River.

Their trail had been obscured by lush spring growth. After traveling it two months before, more importantly, they did not know how the 21-year-old youth and three teenagers they had left behind had fared during the winter.

The previous February, Richard Rue, George Holman, Holman’s sons, Joseph and William, ages 16 and 17, and newlyweds Joseph and Mary Cox, had crossed the Ohio River near the mouth of the Kentucky River; bringing horses and the necessary tools for building.

Traveling a great distance through unbroken, unsettled wilderness under severe conditions, they arrived in early winter at the upper Whitewater area. Rue and Holman had selected, and set up camp in a bend of the river below Rue’s chosen bluff. After days of hard work, rudimentary cabins were started on the banks of the Whitewater.

Rue and Holman left the boys and the newlyweds to fend for themselves and went back to Kentucky to fetch their families and possessions. The Kentucky settlement on the Whitewater River had been entrusted to 21-year-old Joseph Cox, and three teenagers, aged 16, 17 and 19. This entrenchment continued for two long months in the dead of winter. During that time, the four were forever changed.

In April 1805, when Richard Rue and George Holman returned with their families, they arrived at the scene of the Kentucky settlement, hoping that the young people were safe. Their hopes were fulfilled.

Richard Rue and his wife were proud to see the progress their daughter and son-in-law had made on the cabin, and joy surged in them upon the discovery that she was pregnant. But what they were proudest of was that the four young people were now seasoned pioneers who had finished two open-faced cabins and a more permanent shelter for Mary.

They had survived a brutal winter and secured for themselves a piece of the wilderness to call their own; they had explored the hills and glades, and named the rivers; they had stared certain death in the face, and offered their hands in friendship to the Indians, all the while keeping their flintlocks cocked.

This was the stuff these young pioneers were made of... in a place just south of what would later be Richmond, in a county that someday would be named Wayne.

Celebrate the bicentennial of Richmond.
The winter of 1805, 21-year-old Joseph Cox and his expectant young wife Mary, and two teenage brothers, Joseph and William Holman, settled in for a harsh winter in an area that would later become Wayne County. It was the young pioneers' custom that no hungry person was turned down at their settlement. As their hospitality was accepted, Indian friendships grew... but that soon changed.

One morning an old Indian came to them and sadly explained he dared not stay long for fear of his life. He said young bravoes were determined to start hostilities. After pleading to Cox that his young wife and the two Holmans should return to Kentucky if they wanted to live, he slipped into the forest.

The next day an aged squaw tearfully and sincerely made the same urgent plea. They must flee or face death.

The pioneers were frightened, and huddled to make a decision. The three teenagers — Mary and the Holman brothers — left the decision to Joseph because he was 21. He decided to stay. Shortly, the dire warnings panned out.

Joseph and Mary were in a clearing some distance from the cabin. Mary had taken her sewing and knitting to be near her husband.

The Holman brothers were deep in the forest.

Suddenly war whoops echoed through the countryside, and 12 warriors appeared at the edge of the clearing wearing war paint.

Joseph told Mary to return to the cabin, but not to bolt the door so he could enter quickly. He told her to prime the flintlocks, run the backshot, and keep the settlement dog close.

He affected a brave posture and approached the Indians. He offered his hand to each. They declined. He persisted, and in fact grasped one by the hand. They reluctantly accepted.

Not a word of English was passed. The 12 men scowled coldly. Joseph set down his rifle and began to admire theirs. He looked at each weapon, flipping the priming or sabotaging the flints, gazing each in the eyes as he passed, totally at their mercy.

Long moments passed. The warriors were impressive. They stared at Cox with no feeling. Finally one shook his head and laughed. The others laughed, too. One patted Cox on the back and handed him his rifle.

"Good brave man! Brave Squaw," he said, pointing to the cabin where Mary had retreated. Ironically, she was inside loading flintlocks to kill them if need be, and to protect her husband and unborn child.

Joseph invited the Indians to his home. There were too many of them to fight but he and his wife would try if it came to that—and die—he was sure.

Mary was shaken when her husband entered with the warriors. She composed herself — and prepared dinner. After the meal, Joseph and the Indians spent the day target shooting Joseph's gun was double triggered enabling him to outshoot them. He showed one warrior how to shoot it and the Indian was pleased with his prowess with the superior weapon.

Joseph and Mary Cox had stared certain death in the face and offered their hands in friendship. Several distinguished chiefs eventually visited the little cabin at Elk Horn, including Tecumseh, the Prophet, Blue Jack and Little Turtle.

Thereafter, "Young Kentucke" and his "Brave Squaw" were great favorites with the Indians.

(Tuesday, the Rue and Holman families return.)

---

Rudimentary open-faced cabins had been built in 1805 for 21-year-old Joseph Cox and his 19-year-old bride, and for two teenage brothers, Joseph and William Holman. The young people settled in for a harsh winter, awaiting the arrival of the rest of the Kentucky settlement.

But a more permanent cabin was needed because Mary was pregnant.

With the help of Shawnee and Delaware Indians, logs were dragged up a slope and hefted to Cox and Joseph Holman. Young Cox and the three teenagers built the rest. A roof comprised of ribs, clapboards and weight poles was added, and the interior was enclosed. A door opening was made and a log was cut to make a window. A punchdown floor of split logs was laid, and a log chimney was daubed with clay as crude firelining.

The first permanent home was situated on a knoll near a creek named Short Creek, and was completed by a twenty-one year-old youth, his expectant wife, and two teenage brothers, ages 15 and 17.

One night Cox returned home and saw an Indian on top of a shed by the cabin. Pregnant Mary was inside.

Cox thought it an ambush and slipped behind a tree. He took careful aim with his flintlock as the flustered warrior slid down the side of the shed, crying, "Get out, dog! Get out!"

The settlement's mongrel dog had trapped the brave.

Cox was glad he hadn't bartered the animal away a month before when a hostile warrior had wanted to force a trade.

Cox called to the frustrated Indian and invited him in for dinner. It became their custom that no hungry human was turned down at their door.

The young settlers' fears eased as their hospitality was accepted, and Indian friendships grew. But that soon changed with the worst threat yet.

(Read about that threat in Monday's Palladium Item.)