

The Importance of William West, His Fruit Hill Ordinary, and His Family in the Development of Loudoun County

by Jim Bish

George Washington first visited West's Ordinary at Fruit Hill overnight as a 16-year-old boy on return from his first visit in the Virginia wilderness with George Fairfax in 1748. Six years later Washington used West's Ordinary often as a place for recruiting Virginians and gathering supplies to defend Virginia against the French in the French and Indian War. Forty years after his first visit and just months before assuming his duties as the first President of the United States, Washington again came to West's Ordinary. During those 40 years, he visited and stayed overnight at Fruit Hill often, probably stopping off on his many trips west toward Winchester from Mount Vernon, especially during the 1750s and the 1760s while Washington led the Virginia effort in the French and Indian War and during his early political service as Burgess for Frederick County. Washington's stops at the ordinary are well documented, but for every time he visited West's Ordinary probably hundreds of other westward-bound persons stopped for a rest and renewal on their journey.

West's Ordinary at Fruit Hill Plantation is the only man-made location in what became Loudoun County in 1757 that was identified on every major map produced of Virginia in the 18th century. Fruit Hill was the probable location where the boundaries and organization of Loudoun County were formed in 1756. Fruit Hill's owner, William West, served as an original Loudoun County Justice in 1757, as Captain of the Loudoun County Militia in 1758, and that same year served as an original founder, trustee, and lot owner of Leesburg. In 1761, West

served Loudoun County as Sheriff. William West and his home, Fruit Hill, played a most important role in the founding and development of Loudoun County.¹

William West was born about 1708 in Stafford County (now Fairfax County) to Lieutenant John and Ann (Harris) West.² William was born into a frontier society where those who assembled landholdings built significant economic and social foundations for their family. William was fortunate in that his grandfather, Major John West, took the first step, acquiring over two thousand acres of some of the best land in the region. West descendants also intermarried among some of the other influential families in the area including the Pearson, Harrison, Owsley and Broadwater families, relationships that aided their growing influence.³

1. See Fairfax Harrison, *Landmarks of Old Prince William*, Vol. 18 & 2, (Gateway Press, Inc, 1987), pp. 138-140, 494-496, 516-517; John Walter Wayland, *Historic homes of northern Virginia and the eastern panhandle of West Virginia*, (Staunton, Va.: McClure Company, 1937), pp. 446, 452, and John T. Phillips, *The Historian's Guide To Loudoun County, Virginia: Colonial Laws of Virginia and County Court Orders, 1757-1766*, (Leesburg: Goose Creek Productions, 1996), pp. 93, 137-138, 238-239.
2. Much of this information can be found in the West family Bible of Hugh's son, Reverend William West 1737-1791, owned by Miss Jean Rumsey and copied by Miss Victoria Gittings in October 1931 and a copy placed in the Maryland Historical Society Library in Baltimore (hereafter cited as West Bible); also see Julius H. Sorenson, *Minor- West*, (hereafter cited as *Minor-West*) November 1991, page 185 for a copy of the bible page. For information showing Lt. John as a son of Major John West, see, *Stafford County, Virginia Court Order Book, 1689-1690* (hereafter cited as SCCOB 1689-1690), p. 51; *Stafford County, Virginia Court Order Book, 1691-1692* (hereafter cited as SCCOB 1691-1692), p. 200, 231; *Stafford County, Virginia Court Order Book, 1692-1693* (hereafter cited as SCCOB 1692-1693), page 276. Purchase of a 300-acre tract in 1686 from the William Green grant by John West can be found in *Prince William County, Virginia Deed Book A, 1731-1732* (hereafter cited as PWCOB-A), pp. 77-78.
3. Although each of these works documenting the West Family has its errors, the most reliable is that of *Minor-West*, although Mr. Sorenson continues to assume that Ann West was a brother of Hugh West, who married Thomas Owsley and virtually all of the works on the West Family disregard a relationship between Hugh and that of William and Thomas West, who grew up as contemporaries in Prince William and Fairfax County. Other works on this West family include Letta Brock Stone, *The West Family Register: Important Lines Traced 1326-1928*, (Washington D. C., 1928), pp. 317-340 (hereafter cited as *West Family Register*); Melvin L. Steadman, *Falls Church by Fence and Fireside*, (Falls Church, Virginia, 1964), pp.??? (hereafter cited as *Falls Church*); The will of Major John West can be found in *Fairfax County, Virginia Land Records of Long Standing, 1742-1770* (hereafter cited as

William's father, Lt. John West, appears to have followed in his father's footsteps in building a future for his family. He rose to the rank of lieutenant in the local Stafford County militia, mostly to protect against the possibility of Native American uprisings.⁴ John West married Ann Herris, daughter of William Herris, about 1703 and William seems to have been one of at least four children: Hugh, John, Thomas and William, born to the couple over the next seven years.⁵ About the

FCLROLS 1742-1770), page 208; the will is also found in "Extant Wills from Counties Whose Records Have Been Destroyed," *Genealogies of Virginia Families*, Volume IV, pp. 615-617; also see *Stafford County Deeds, 1699-1709*. (hereafter cited as SCD 1699-1709), p. 202, 204-205. For information showing Sarah as the wife of John West, see SCD 1709, p. 327, and for information showing Pearson West as a son of John West, see SCD 1699-1709, p. 248.

4. On April 7, 1690, the Stafford County Court ordered that Abram Beckington give John West jr., son of John West, one two-year old heifer. *Stafford County Order Abstract Book 1*, page 86; on December 9, 1691, Ensign John West, son of John West, meeting of militia officers in county, *Stafford County Order Abstract Book 2*, page 66; on February 12, 1692 Ensign John West, son of John West given court orders, *Stafford County Order Abstract Book 2*, page 3; and on May 13, 1692 Lt. John West, son of John West, listing of militia officers, *Stafford County Order Abstract Book 3*, page 18.
5. Ann Harris was the daughter of William and Mary Harris. She was first married to Major Thomas Owsley and after his death in 1700, she married Lieutenant John West. Earlier, there had been a long misunderstanding about her relationship with the West family but that has convincingly been cleared up by Thomas Spalding in "The West Family of Stafford County, Virginia - The Final Chapter: Being an Account of the Three Husbands of Anne Harris," *Owsley Family Historical Society Newsletter*, (March 1996) (hereafter cited as Spalding, *West Family of Stafford*); Those three other children of Lt. John and Ann (Harris) [Owsley] West seem to be John West, Thomas West and Hugh West. General John West (who died about 1720 before reaching adulthood, see October 13, 1786, *General Court Ejectment Case of "Ashton v. West"* in *Papers of John Marshall (Chapel Hill, NC)*, Volume 1, pages 174-180; and *Fairfax County Deed book C-1*, page 136; See Major John West will in *Records of Long Standing*, page 208. Thomas West is mentioned in his grandfather's will, although the relationship is not given. This will was transcribed from Stafford County records for Fairfax County records, probably in the 18th century and the original no longer exists. Possibly in the transcription the Major John West relationship to Thomas West was inadvertently left off, probably because Thomas did not receive any real estate. In 1734, both Thomas West and Hugh West received possessions from the estate of William Harrison, *Stafford County Will Book M*, pp. 140-143; Thomas West and his brother William voted in the 1741 *Prince William County Burgess Elections*, *Prince William Deed Book E*, 1740-1741, p. 524; Thomas West, along with his brother Hugh, and uncle John West Sr. voted in the 1744 *Fairfax County Burgess elections*, *Fairfax County Deed Book A*, Part 1, pp. 237-241. The three brothers obtained six Northern Neck Land Grants between 1740 and 1743 accounting for almost 1,500 acres. William West secured over 500 acres in

time of William's birth, his grandmother, Sarah (Pearson) West, died.⁶ By 1710, William's grandfather, Major John West, had married again, this time to Elizabeth (Semmes) Turley.⁷ She was the widow of John Turley and had young children.

When William was about two years of age, his father, Lt. John West, died and his mother, Ann (Herris) West, married John Wheeler and possibly moved to land that Wheeler received as a land grant farther north on Pohick Creek.⁸ It was probably at that location near Pohick Creek where William grew to adulthood.

1740, see Northern Neck Grants E, 1736-1742, pp. 144, 147, and Hugh West secured over 700 acres in 1742, see Northern Neck Grants F, 1742-1754, pp. 14, 15, 44; and in 1743 Thomas West, with his wife Sarah, secured a 183-acre grant next to his grandfather Major John West's 1706 Northern Neck Land Grant, Northern Neck Grants F, 1742-1754, page 151 and Fairfax Deed Book A: pp. 204-208; Some previous historians have also assumed a family relationship between William and Hugh West. Check John T. Phillips, *The Historian's Guide to Loudoun County, Virginia*. Volume 1, "Colonial Laws of Virginia and County Court Orders, 1757-1766 and Harrison, Fairfax. Landmarks of old Prince William, 1924. Between 2004 and 2008 many DNA tests have been performed on descendants of these West family members with some important findings. Lineal descendants of Major John West of Stafford County were tested confirming that descendants of Major John West, through his son, Colonel John West, (Burgess of Fairfax County 1750s-1770s) matches descendants' DNA of Thomas West (French and Indian War and Revolutionary War veteran) and his wife Sarah Trammell, proving a family relationship during this colonial time period; see the West Family DNA website at: <http://web.utk.edu/~corn/westdna/west5.htm#FG7>.

6. Stone, *West Family*, page 326; Steadman, *Falls Church*, pp. 453-454; Sorenson, *Minor-West*, pp. 172-173.

7. See will of Major John West Records of Long Standing, page 208, also see Steadman, *Falls Church*, page 454 and Sorneson, *Minor-West*, pp. 172-173; for very important information about the early inhabitants around Great Hunting Creek including the West family lands see Prince William County, Virginia Land Causes, 1789-1793, (hereafter cited as PWCLC), pp. 282-293; concerning the life of Elizabeth (Semmes) [West] Broadwater and the familiarity she had with the Great Hunting Creek area see FCLROLS 1742-1770, pp. 107-108; for excellent information from a deposition by Mr. Abraham Lay, see pp. 60-69, 79, 84, and 109-113 and the deposition by Charles Broadwater, son of Charles and Elizabeth, found on pp. 109-110; also see Beth Mitchell, *Beginning at a White Oak*, page 310.

8. See Spalding, *West Family of Stafford*; also see John Wheeler's February 21, 1729 197-acre land grant in Northern Neck Land Grants, Vol. C, page 32.

Also about that same time, William's grandfather and his new bride, Elizabeth, who was probably at least 20 years younger than he, had a son of their own, also calling him John. William now had a half-uncle, who was about two years his younger. William, his older brother Hugh, and his younger uncle, John, became very influential in the region between 1730 and 1775.⁹

William West married Elizabeth Gardner in 1741, after having lived with her for almost 10 years, fathering at least four children, William Jr., Thomas, John, and Elizabeth, during that time. Two other children, Ann and Charles, were born after William and Elizabeth were legally married. Elizabeth Gardner was thought to have been the daughter of Sylvester and Mary Gardner, with whom William later had land transactions in Fairfax County.¹⁰ It seemed that William improved

9. See will of Major John West of Stafford County, Virginia, in FCLROLS 1742-1770 and Ejectment Case of "Ashton v. West" General Court Richmond, Virginia, October 13, 1786, in Papers of John Marshall., Vol. 1, pp. 174-180 (hereafter cited as Ashton v. West).

10. During that time William and Elizabeth had at least five of their oldest children. In Loudoun County Deed Book U, 1792-1793, pp. 315-316 in a deposition from a Mary Gardner, age sixty, she states, "that she was a near neighbor to Mr. William West, Father to the Complainant, and was very conversant in the Family and was informed as well by said William West as by Elizabeth Gardner that they were not intermarried to each other until about the year One thousand seven hundred and Forty one or two which was also some short time before the birth of Ann West, and about two or three years before the birth of Charles West their son. And this deponent further saith that William West, father of Deft. Cato West and John West, the other defendant with sundry other Children of said Elizabeth Gardner were born before the solemnization of the said marriage between William West and Elizabeth." It appears that the Mary Gardner that gave this deposition was a sister or sister-in-law to Elizabeth Gardner who eventually married William West. On pp. 316-317 of the same Deed Book there is another deposition, this one by an Ann Botts, aged 58 years. She states, "that she was a near neighbor to Mr. William West, father of the Complainant, Charles West, for many years before the Marriage of said William West to Elizabeth Gardner and was very conversant in the Family and was frequently informed by said William and Elizabeth and it was also generally reported in the neighborhood that they never intermarried until about the year one thousand seven hundred and forty one or forty two. And that the deponent further saith she very well remembers that William West, Father to the Defendant Cato and John West, the other Deft, was born considerable time before the Marriage between said William and Elizabeth and that the Complainant, Charles West was the first born son after the Marriage aforesaid." She also stated, "that it was to make a provision for her three children, Elizabeth, William, and John, for if he (William Sr.) should die without Will they would get no part of her estate as they were not born in Wedlock and further said not."

his circumstance by working as a surveyor. This was a valuable occupation at that time as it allowed one to find some of the most prized land on the frontier. It appeared that William used that profession to his benefit. In 1740, William obtained Northern Neck land grants totaling 779 acres at two locations in Prince William County, including the head of Piney Branch of Broad Run and along Beaver Dam Fork of Goose Creek (both currently located in Loudoun County).¹¹

William also began leasing and putting in motion the acquisition of other lands during that time. William leased land from George W. Fairfax and, by 1743, had established an ordinary at Freedom Hill (near present-day Tyson's Corner) in Fairfax County. One of West's land possessions of 1740 lay on the old Colchester Road near Williams Gap at the location then called Bacon's Fort (currently near Philomont) about 6 miles southeast of Williams Gap. It seems that William West also operated an ordinary at that location known as Bacon Fort Ordinary or Tavern.

Between 1745 and 1766, William West secured an additional one thousand acres in three separate holdings including 584 acres along the south side of Goose Creek, the most important possessions being two parcels of land on both sides of Bull Run and around Bull Run Mountain. It was upon this combined parcel of land that William West lived with his family and established the most visited ordi-

11. On April 3, 1740, William received 495 acres of land in Prince William County adjoining land of Hall, Cocke, and Carter east of Bull Run Mountain. This is the parcel of land on which West's Ordinary stood, found in Northern Neck Grants E, 1736-1742, pp. 144-146; On April 4, 1740 William acquired 284 acres in Prince William County on the north side of a Great Branch of Goose Creek called the Beaverdam Fork located in Northern Neck Grants E, 1736-1742, page 147. William later purchased from his wife's parents, Sylvester Garner and his wife, Mary almost 170 acres of Northern Neck Grants C, page 33 and #198 of original land grants to Andrew Snarr on January 29, 1750. This land adjoined land that was owned by William Ellzey, William West's future brother-in-law, and Lewis Ellzey, William's future father-in-law. It appears that William West never lived there as he lived near Bull Run Mountain on the plantation he called Fruit Hill where he ran West's Ordinary.

nary for travelers to the Virginia northern frontier including George Washington.¹²

Probably by the late 1730s, but at least by the mid 1740s, William West lived just east of the northern base of the Bull Run Mountains. His home was located in a very important location as it was at the intersection of two major roads, one of which headed in a north-south direction and was at one time an Indian pathway to the Carolinas and by the mid 18th Century had become a colonial road connecting Pennsylvania with the Carolinas. The west-east road connected the Blue Ridge Mountain frontier with the Potomac River and the settlement of Colchester near the Occoquan River.

12. For example, on July 6, William West surveyed land for John Gowen (Goings) which adjoined Thomas Ford on the main Branch of Pope's Head; also see Phillips, *The Historian's Guide To Loudoun*, page 93.