

Colonial Beach Museum Building

128 Hawthorn St. Colonial Beach

Built in 1892 (This date is from local oral history. – there are no markings on the building. The town has no records of the dates when buildings were erected.)

Timeline for the Colonial Beach Museum

Prior to 1885 the land which now contains the museum was obtained by James Albert Clark and Mary Adelaide Clark as part of an indenture. An indenture is a legal contract for land transactions; in other words, a deed in writing that is a legal title to land. Colonial Beach was not yet a recognized town in Virginia.

1885 – Westel Willoughby purchased the land which contains the present museum lot. (from Deeds and Wills Westmoreland County Book 45 P. 403) The museum lots (1 and 5) were part of a large parcel of land indentured in the township of Washington, County of Westmoreland. James Albert Clark and wife Mary Adelaide Clark owned the indentured property and were selling the large plot of land in what was then known as Classic Shore Plantation on Feb. 24, 1885. The price was \$100 for the entire plot of land. The purchaser of the parcel was Westel Willoughby of Alexandria VA. Each lot was 50 x 150 feet in size. Boundaries: On the west Lee St., on the north by lot no. 6, on the south by lot no. 3, and on the east by Potomac River at low tide. The museum property is within these boundaries. (WE HAVE A COPY OF THIS 1885 TRANSACTION FROM CLARKS TO WILLOUGBY.)

1890 - Westell Willoughby did not pay taxes owed on his purchased land. Some or all of the lots were sold at a “tax sale”. W. P. Billingsley purchased three lots by paying the total taxes of 44 cents. (from Deeds and Wills Westmoreland County Book 60 p.470-472) Westell Willoughby (here his first name has an added “l”) was delinquent in paying his state taxes and his county levy and the total sum owed was 44 cents. His property was offered through public auction for the payment of the taxes. W.P. Billingsley paid the 44 cents and became the purchaser of lots 4, 5 and 1 which are included in the lots conveyed by James Albert Clark and his wife in 1885. (WE HAVE A COPY OF THIS 1890 BILLINGSLEY PURCHASE.) The lots were apparently empty and unimproved (no confirmation). These lots include the museum property and more.

1892 – February 25, 1892 - The town of Colonial Beach was officially incorporated by the general assembly of Virginia. The government of the town is described in the incorporation document and mayor Frank Schwarz and four councilmen are appointed until an election can be held.

The current museum, a two-story building (in some places referred to as one and one-half stories) was built in 1892 by William Powell Billingsley (sometimes spelled in records as Billingsly or Bellingsley and sometimes called “W.P.”). Mr. Billingsley’s original plan for the building use was apparently intended for retail rental. We do not have positive confirmation of the date that the building was built.

William P. Billingsley was 29 years old when he purchased the property. He had been raised on a large “farm” or “estate” not far from Colonial Beach. His childhood home was in what is now King George County and in the area that was called “Chotank”. (The Post Office nearby was Edge Hill.) His father had two marriages. William is one of the younger children of the second family. His father was a planter who became a Baptist minister after age 60.

(FAMILY INFORMATION IS FROM VARIOUS SOURCES – WE HAVE COPIES OF ALL OF THEM.)

William P., at age 28, married Nanny Maud Rogers, age 19, and by then resided in Colonial Beach. They had a young son named William Kirkland according to U.S. census data by 1892.

1898 – On July 1, 1898 William P. Billingsley is elected to the Colonial Beach Town Council with 72 votes. He is elected in the first town election held. Previous officers were appointed when the town was chartered. All the original appointed officers are put out of office by the first election.

(INFORMATION IS FROM THE MINUTES OF THE TOWN OF COLONIAL BEACH BOOK #1)

The town's oral history says that the museum building became the chartered town's first one-room school in 1898. This is **not** the case because there was a public school operating soon after the town was chartered that appears to have been in another location. The first town council appointed some school trustees, found a teacher and rented a room for the school in Oct. 1893. The first public school was co-ed and for white students only.

This public school did not generate much interest from the town's population and the school only lasted for a few months and was closed for lack of pupils. The first teacher, Miss Cook, was employed for only the few months while her pupils were in attendance although the school was scheduled to run for six months per year. The next year, 1894-95, more students came, a new teacher was hired, a new rental location found and the school was a bit more successful. (MINUTES OF COLONIAL BEACH TOWN COUNCIL BOOK BOOK 1 SEPT. 13, 1897 AND NUMEROUS OTHER SITES.) The location of this second school is not recorded but it appears to have been in a building owned by one of the councilman who was not William Billingsley.

There had been small schools operated in the area for some years previous to 1892 and the town charter. These were one-room "private" schools for "colored children" and white children. They may have continued to operate after the public schools were established. Parents paid "tuition" for the teacher and paid for renting the space.

We do have anecdotal evidence that a school was held in the current museum building by 1898 (after W. P. was elected to council.) Whether it was public or private is uncertain. In 1898 Eleanor (or Elinore?) Agnes Jones (later DeAtley) was the young teacher in the current museum building. The town council decided in 1897 that two rooms and two teachers were needed. (Perhaps W. P. offered to rent his building for that expansion. Documentation has not been found.) We do have confirmation from the DeAtley family that Elinore did teach in the current museum building in 1898 and that she was a newly certified teacher.

In "Remember When There Was Another School" 1991 by Shinn and Coates, Lula DeAtley shared information about her mother who was that teacher in 1898. Elinore and her friend Miss Lola Minor "trained at Bowling Green Female School and earned a certificate there", probably a general education certificate which allowed teaching. The two girls took their teaching test in King George and passed. Elinore or Eleanor taught students named Charlie Redding and two sisters named Gladys Miller and Janie Miller (Mason). We don't know how many students were in the class nor how long Ms. Jones taught in the building. (WE HAVE THE SHINN AND COATES ARTICLE – NO OTHER CONFIRMATION TO DATE.)

Note that in 1899 a “petition for colored people of this place” requested that a public school be established in the town for the education of their children. Councilman W. P. Billingsley suggested that the clerk “go over the tax” paid by the colored population and put 20% of the tax paid toward establishing a “school for the education of the colored children”. A private “colored” school had been in operation in the town but this was the first public “colored” school. The town council of 1899 did establish a “school for the education of colored children” by the following year. Location and teacher were not recorded. (MINUTES OF COLONIAL BEACH, BOOK 1)

1900 - On July 3 W.P Billingsley resigned from the CB Town Council in order to become the Sergeant and Treasurer of the town. This was a paid position. He was initially paid \$25.00 per month. (FROM THE TOWN MINUTES BOOK 1 MAY 4 1989) By 1907 his Sergeant/Treasurer salary had increased to \$50 per month. He had another occupation according to his U.S. Census records. He listed himself as a “grocer” and “merchant” in 1900 and he owned a home without a mortgage. William and Nannie were now the parents of three, two boys and a girl. (WE HAVE THESE U.S. CENSUS RECORDS.)

To date no information has been found in regard to the location of this Billingsley grocery store where he was a grocery merchant. Again evidence suggests that this store was not in the museum building. (WE HAVE RECORDS FOR THIS INFORMATION.)

1905 - By 1905 the school had moved to another building and the current museum became the home of the town’s first newspaper, the “Colonial Beach Progress”. The newspaper personnel also operated a printing shop in the building. (THIS IS FROM SHINN AND COATES BUT THE NEWSPAPER IS MENTIONED IN OTHER SOURCES AND WE HAVE A PICTURE OF THE BUILDING FROM A NEWSPAPER ARTICLE IN 1910.) The existence of the newspaper is confirmed throughout the Colonial Beach Minute Book #2 which begins in 1902 as the CB Town Council minutes state that they are advertising various activities such as bids for putting in electric lights, bids for building wharves, and the like – and the advertising is in the Colonial Beach Progress newspaper. Perhaps the newspaper was in the current museum building prior to 1905.

1909 - Dr. Stuart A. Ashton had an office in the museum building – probably on second floor. He did not practice in town for long because he died quite young of infantile paralysis. (WE HAVE THIS ARTICLE: “Free Lance Star”, Sept. 10, 1910 AND INFORMATION FROM SHINN AND COATES.) Dr. Ashton’s presence in town as boarder with the Henry W. Williams family is confirmed by 1910 U.S. Census records.

1910 - By the 1910 census, William Billingsley, now 48, was no longer listed as a grocer, but as a policeman for the town of Colonial Beach. He and wife Nannie now had four children and their oldest, William Kirkman, was age 19. William Kirkman Billingsley (the son) was listed as “retail merchant groceries” under “occupation” on the 1910 census, so the grocery store may have still existed. The younger Billingsley children from age 8 through 16 are listed as “in school”. (WE HAVE THIS CENSUS RECORD)

1916 – Financial problems occurred with the grocery business owned by W. P. Billingsley and W. K. Billingsley. The property and everything in the building was sold at a trustees sale to pay the creditors of the two Billingsleys, father and son. The location of this property is not named but it is **not the museum building as they retain ownership of the museum property.** (From Deeds and Wills, Westmoreland Co. Book 78 P. 94-95) (WE HAVE A COPY OF THIS TRUSTEE SALE)

Later in the year of 1916, a group of eleven businesses has lien on some property of W.P Billingsley, Nannie Billingsley and R. H. Stuart. The property includes Lots 17 and 18, Block 76 in Colonial Beach. This is not the museum building. The creditors have not been paid in full and wish to obtain the money owed them on this property. **The outcome is that the creditors do not get the property or the money because the records from the original lien have been lost by the county and it cannot be proved that the creditors were owed the money.** (From Deeds and Will, Westmoreland Co. Book 78) (WE HAVE COPIES OF THIS TRANSACTION.)

1918 - In 1918 the current museum building reportedly held a men's clothing store called Sak's. Mr. Wilbur Gouldman remembered a suit he had purchased there for \$20 when he was about 18-years-old. The upstairs portion of the museum had been converted to an apartment and Mr. Gouldman had a girl friend for a short time who lived upstairs in the apartment over the store where the museum is located. (WE HAVE COPIES OF MR. GOULDMAN'S STATEMENTS - FROM SHINN AND COATES)

1920 - By 1920, owner W. P. Billingsley, age 56, is now the father of five, with just two children living at home. He is now 56 and his wife Nannie is 48. W. P. lists his occupation as "Salesman" of paint. WE HAVE COPIES OF THIS U.S. CENSUS)

1920s – The museum building underwent some remodeling. The original porch was removed to give it a more "modern appearance" and a store front was installed. (NO INFORMATION HAS BEEN FOUND IN REGARD TO WHO DID THE REMODELING BUT EXISTING PICTURES SHOW THAT IT DID HAPPEN)

1924 - By 1924 in the current museum building there was a drug store named "Colonial Beach Pharmacy" in the first floor of the building while the town's doctor (Dr. Stuart) had an office in the building. This information is from Shinn and Coates newspaper June 10, 1995 – recollection of former town resident Mr. Wilbur Gouldman at age 93 in 1995. (WE HAVE COPIES OF THIS STATEMENT BUT WONDER IF THE PHARMACY WAS IN THIS MUSEUM BUILDING OR THE BUILDING THAT WAS ONCE IN THE PARKING LOT NEXT DOOR.)

After 1924 and before 1930 according to the Chancery Order Book of Westmoreland County p. 324, W.P. Billingsley and N. M Billingsley were granted a divorce. A copy of the order had been mailed to "the last known address of the defendant". W.P was no longer living in town. (WE HAVE A COPY OF THE U.S. CENSUS REPORTS AND A COPY OF THE DIVORCE.)

1928 - By 1928 the East Coast Utilities Company had an office in the building and remained until the 1940s. They provided the electricity to the town. This utilities company was to eventually merge into VEPCO and then Dominion Electric Power. (Anecdotal evidence from Bobbie Cooper, wife of Abe Cooper.)

At other times in the history of the museum building it also "housed a barber shop run by a man named Jones who gave shaves and haircuts". (Shinn and Coates, W. N. June 1995), and a grocery store (but probably not run by Billingsleys. (BOTH OF THE ABOVE FROM SHINN AND COATES – WE HAVE THE ARTICLES. THERE IS ADDITIONAL CONFIRMATION OF THE EAST COAST UTILITIES CO IN THE BUILDING DURING THE 20S AND 30S.)

1930 – The former Mrs. W. P. Billingsley, Nannie Maud Rogers Billingsley, was now living with her widowed sister Florence Dick and Ms. Dick's family of four children. Young Frances Karn, age 11, is one of the children in the family. The older two sons of William P. and Nannie Billingsley, William K. and

Vernon, were married and living in Washington D.C. Son William K. had two children, a wife who was a secretary for the U.S. government and W. K. had a job as a tire salesman. Son Vernon was selling automobiles and his wife was a clerk for an automobile company. Mrs. Nannie Billingsley lived until 1940 and was buried in Oak Grove Cemetery. (ALL OF THE ABOVE IS FOUND IN THE U.S. CENSUS RECORDS AND OR DEATH RECORDS THAT WE HAVE.)

W.P. Billingsley, age 68, (in the 1930 census) was now living alone in Colonial Beach. He listed his home value as \$2000 and said that he was a “salesman” of “paint”. There seems to be no mention of him after this date in any records searched by his family “genealogists” nor in the U.S. Census records available. There is no known record of his death – all genealogies available leave it blank. His family has a burial plot in King George but William P. is not buried there. What became of William P. Billingsley is a mystery.

Who owned the property from 1924 to 1930 is unclear.

1931 – F.J. (Roy) Rollins (Fautleroy Jackson Rollins) attempts to obtain the museum property. (from Deeds and Wills Westmoreland County Book 89 P.460-461) George Mason, Special Commissioner, was appointed to sell at public auction or private estate sale some property that included part of Lot 1, and also a part of lot 5 block 75 (this is the museum property). No mention is made of whether this was a tax sale or why the Special Commissioner was appointed to sell the property. There was some confusion “it was contemplated to sell part of lot 1 blk 75 directed to be sold to F. J. Rollins, and lot 5 Blk 75 to David F. Rollins, however in an adjustment of lines between the purchasers, agreed to be both, a part of the lot 5 blk 75 is included in the deed to F. J. Rollins.” (WE HAVE A COPY OF THIS TRANSACTION.)

1932 – Fautleroy Jackson (Roy) Rollins and David Rollins (brothers) straighten out confusion by dividing some parcels of land and F.J. (Roy) Rollins gets the museum property. (from Deed and Wills Westmoreland County book 95 p.426-427) George Mason, Special commissioner, was still dealing with the agreement above. In the end David F. Rollins got a small part of lot 1. F.J. Rollins retained lot 5 blk 75 – which contains the museum building. The confusion probably has happened because the building now housing the museum is not situated on a single lot but overlaps onto Lot 1 blk 75.

This property, both parts being sold, was probably in the possession of William and Nannie Billingsley, (now divorced) until this date. (THIS IS DEDUCTION, because THERE IS NO INDICATION IN THE Deed Books of any exchange of property until this time) The two Rollins family members who purchased the properties are known as Roy Robbins and David Robbins. **They are brothers. David ended up purchasing the property which is between the Methodist Church and the Museum building. Roy purchased the property on which the museum is located.**

At one time after the Rollins obtained the property there was a lunchroom in the museum with 50 cent home-cooked lunches and 5-cent coffee with free refills. The information is a Shinn and Coates in the W News 1995 article. No information yet on the operator of the museum lunchroom. However, in the 1920s a lunchroom in town inside the Colonial Beach Hotel was run by Elizabeth (Dishman) Rollins, who is the mother of F.J. (Roy) Rollins and David Rollins. So perhaps she also ran one in the museum. Roy Rollins was listed in the 1930 Census as a “plasterer”.

In "Remember When 1995 by Shinn and Coates, they state that "George and Elizabeth Rollins owned much property here at the Beach, "including the building with the most history; the one we feel should be our museum". They say that the Rollins owned the museum property and the Buckingham Hotel (existing at least since 1884) at 110 Hawthorn St. "Mrs. Rollins owned and operated it and offered homelike accommodations; rates by day, week or month." The Rollins also owned "a soda fountain luncheonette" on the Boardwalk next to the King George Hotel.

1941- F.J. Rollins dies and A. Cooper purchases the property (from Deeds and Wills Westmoreland County Book 98 p.541-542) Just nine years after purchasing the property, Roy (Fautleroy Jackson) Rollins was deceased and his executor W. D. Williams was selling at public or private auction the real estate of F. J. Rollins. **A. Cooper was the highest bidder at \$3025.00.** The property Abraham Cooper purchased included the museum property (lot 5 blk 75) plus more. (WE HAVE A COPY OF THIS TRANSACTION)

1941 to 1944 – While Abraham Cooper owns the building, the first floor of the building continued to house the Virginia East Coast Utilities, Incorporated on the first floor. The company becomes Virginia Electric Power Company (VEPCO and then became Dominion Electric. (THERE ARE MANY SOURCES OF CONFIRMATION, and STORIES ARE IN SHINN AND COATES TOO)

The phone company was on the floor above the electric company. The museum building was not the first location for the telephone company serving the Colonial Beach area. There was long-distance telephone communication available in the town by August 17, 1908 (Alexandria Gazette, Aug. 17, 1908) and there were probably three previous locations for the company. (SHINN AND COATES –WE HAVE COPY – AND INFORMATION FROM TOWN RESIDENTS)

The East Coast Telephone, Incorporated, was in the museum building with most of the operation and the main switchboard located on the second floor. At one time there were 52 trunks with party lines throughout the town. One of the only two pay telephones in town was on the first floor of the museum building (with utilities company) and was open to the public. The many carvings made by people waiting to use the pay phone can currently be seen on the walls of the museum. Francis Tate, who lived in Colonial Beach until her death, was one of the operators. (conversation with Gloria Monroe, Sept. 11, 2014). Francis Tate has reported her recollections of working there in the 1999 Shinn & Coates "Remember When". (WE HAVE COPY)

The East Coast Telephone became part of the Tidewater Telephone, then the Continental Telephone Co. and eventually GTE. (Shinn & Coates in a brochure "Welcome to Colonial Beach" April 2000. (WE HAVE COPY)

1944 – Abraham (AKA Abe or A.) Cooper died after owning the building just three years and left the building and lot to his married daughter Eugenia Cooper Hoffman (from Deeds and Wills Westmoreland County Book 102 p.71) Eugenia C. Hoffman inherited the museum property on March 13, 1942. "being part of lot one (1) and lot five (5) in Block seventy-five (75), Colonial Beach , Virginia, on which is situate the building now used by the Virginia East Coast Utilities, Incorporated, and the East Coast Telephone, Incorporated, absolutely and in fee." (from Deeds and Wills, Westmoreland County, Book)WE HAVE COPY

(After this time the property which had been known locally as “The Telephone Company” became mostly known as “The Hoffman Building” or “The Hoffman-Cooper Building” and some people still use each name.)

During World War II the building housed the telegraph office. It was here that the telegrams from the U.S. War Dept. were delivered to local residents informing them of the fate of their loved ones.

When the telephone company left the building, part of the building became a grocery store again, and was owned by a man named “McNeil” who was also a preacher. (from Shinn and Coates W.N. June 10, 95)(WE HAVE THE SHINN AND COATES ARTICLE BUT NO OTHER CONFIRMATION)

Eugenia Cooper, owner of the building, was a teacher in the Colonial Beach Schools and she continued to teach school while owning the building.

1950s - In keeping with the building as the headquarters for the town’s utilities, during the 1950s the building became the Hoffman-Cooper Gas Company headquarters. Eugenia Cooper Hoffman’s husband Pete Hoffman ran the propane or “bottle gas” enterprise. Gas appliances were displayed in the front of the store. Town folks walked through the building to the back to pay their gas bills. (Gloria Monroe conversation Sept. 2014, Bobbie Cooper conversation 2014, and Shinn and Coates 95) Apparently it was also a place to hang out and talk for a while with the clerk “about the goings-on in town”). (Shinn and Coates W.N. June 10, 95)

Pete Hoffman, husband of Eugenia Hoffman, was a Justice of the Peace. He actually joined several couples in matrimony inside of the Hoffman Building (the current Museum) while it was the gas company. (Shinn and Coates “Remember When” 1999)

Upstairs over the Hoffman Company was Dr. Demming, a well-liked physician. His nurse was Ellen Huff. (Coats and Shinn, “Remember When Flashback to Beach Healers”, 1993, P.32-33) “ He was a tall, thin man who had a number of friends in town. He left to further his education and specialize, but he came back to town to visit at times.” (ALL OF THE ABOVE FROM SHINN AND COATES – WE HAVE COPIES)

Several local people vaguely recall a bakery located in the museum building for a short time – and they recall the aroma of cinnamon wafting outside. Gloria Monroe, town resident who was in her 90 in 2014, said “it may have been called Birmingham’s Bakery”. (Gloria Monroe conversation with Judy and Gary McIrvine Sept. 11, 2014) (NO OTHER CONFIRMATION TO DATE)

1993 – Eugenia Hoffman conveys the property containing the current museum to the town of Colonial Beach (from Deed and Wills Westmoreland County Book 412 p.633) On April 14, 1993, Eugenia C. Hoffman conveyed the property (Parcel A of Lot 5A on a survey plat, .037 acres) including the building currently housing the Museum of Colonial Beach to the Town of Colonial Beach for \$10.00. (WE HAVE A COPY)

1988 - 1995 - Final use of the building as a business was the antique and collectible shop called Reflections which was run by Florence Tally. She closed her business in 1995. (Shinn and Coates, “Remember When” 95) The upstairs was rented as an apartment in 1995. Town resident Bill Thompson lived there with his mother. (Bill Thompson conversation with Gary McIrvine, September 2014)

Eventually the building was scheduled for demolition by the town. **The Colonial Beach Historical Society and civic-minded individuals convinced the Colonial Beach Town Council to preserve the building.** The team of Shinn and Coates consistently urged that the building be used for a town museum. (WE HAVE COPIES OF NEWS ARTICLES)

1998 - The town leased the building to the Colonial Beach Historical Society with the understanding that they would use it for a museum. Town residents struggled to preserve and rebuild parts of the century-old structure and to restore it for a museum. In 1998 the Historical Society launched a fund-raising campaign and obtained some the funds necessary to begin restoration of the building to the original configuration. (NEWSPAPER ARTICLES CONFIRM.)

In the fall of 1998 the weeds and vines that covered the east side of the building were removed. The building had been used by the town of Colonial Beach for storage and both floors were packed with items that the town no longer wanted. After the town removed what they needed, it took eight pickup trucks to remove the remainder to the land fill at Montross. It was hauled by town residents who began immediately to repair broken windows and secure the building. The citizens group removed aluminum siding, installed new plumbing, heating and air-conditioning, and made the building safe for handicapped citizens. (NEWSPAPER ARTICLES)

1998 to present – The town continues to lease the building for the museum. The Colonial Beach Historical Society endeavors to raise enough money each year to maintain the building including pay for utilities. They have spent many dollars and volunteer hours creating and maintaining a useable building though there is always more to be done.

The Colonial Beach Historical Society member dues contribute to the upkeep of the museum in addition to some annual fund raisers. For a number of years the CB Historical Society has sponsored a yearly Christmas House Tour which is a very popular event in Colonial Beach.

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Visit the Colonial Beach Museum on line at: www.museumatcolonialbeach.com