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The Wares of Ware's Wharf

*Textual Excerpts Reprinted from "Historic Ware's Wharf"
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by Carroll M. Garnett*

At Ware's Wharf in Essex County, Virginia, waves rustle against the remaining barnacle clad piles, remnant of what was a substantial pier for over seventy years. These slow decaying pillows appear as silent sentinels over an area which once flourished with diversified activity. If these

sentinels could talk, this is the story they would tell: it would be a tale not only of this steamer wharf which for so long was the focal point of daily activity but, earlier of a Confederate battery which engaged enemy gunboats on several occasions; of a post office which functioned for

forty-five straight years; of a general store; of a ferry; of an oil company; and of a close knit, established family whose influence has been preeminent in this area since the 1840's.



Ware's Wharf, 2004, artist's rendering from a 1915 black and white photograph belonging to Helen and Joe Ware, Dunnsville. The original photograph is part of The Mariners' Museum collection in Newport News, VA.

"The River took this once vibrant wharf, but the memories documented or passed along will never become weathered. They are a testament to the ingenuity of the American spirit to make life better for family and neighbors."

Gigi Vranian
The Artist

Ware's Wharf is well named as virtually a colony of Wares evolved in this area since the 1830's. The "center piece" for the Wares of this location has been the historic home Bellevue (shelled during the Civil War), residence of Edward Macon Ware I and his wife Catherine Waring Ware. They were the parents of Robert Lowry Ware who had a daughter and eight sons, four of whom, Robert Lowry (Jr.), William Latane, Harry Hudnall, and John, made this area their home and their descendants continue to reside here today.

[During the shelling] *Bellevue*, as the target of [...] two gunboats sending forth their deadly projectiles, certainly was not a proper residence for an unhealthy person. Such was the case, however, with Edward Macon Ware who at the time was in bed critically ill. The roar of gun bursts, the whistling sound of shells in flight, and the resultant explosions as the target was hit, all must have amounted to an excruciating experience for this helpless man. One can only speculate but this action seemed to be at least a contributing factor to his death as he expired thirty five days later, on March 28, 1863. Only eight days earlier, he made an addendum to his will:

"Edward M. Ware, do make this codicil to my foregoing will which bears date the 16th day of March, 1863, as follows: In addition to the provision made in my said will for my son Robert L. Ware. I give him the sum of fifteen hundred dollars for the purpose of repairing the damage done by the soldiers to the land and houses at *Water View* and should he recover anything from the Confederate States on that account he must account for the amount so recovered to my estate."

Many unexploded cannon shells, fired during this bombardment, were later recovered and for many years lined the front walkway of this old home (building razed in 1962).

After the Civil War, Robert Lowry Ware of *Water View* was to play a dominant role in the Ware's Wharf area, so it is well to first look briefly into his participation in the war. When Virginia seceded and joined the Confederacy on April 17, 1861, there naturally arose a great surge of patriotism throughout the state. This fervor was even greater when the Confederate capitol was moved from Montgomery, Alabama to Richmond in late May, 1861 since the obvious was present-Virginia would

be invaded by the enemy in force and all able bodied men would have to defend her. State pride carried over to even greater county pride as this geographical unit would be the device for raising volunteer troops, with these units of infantry and cavalry proudly being identified with the name of their county. The doctrine of defense of native state and constitutional liberty was foremost in the minds of citizens of Essex.

Therefore, Robert Lowry Ware, a farmer, 25 years of age on Monday, June 10, 1861, felt keenly his duty. Saddling his best horse at *Water View*, he rode the nine miles to Tappahannock to "join the cavalry", an elite group among military units of the period. With 43 other citizens of Essex, he was mustered into the Essex Light Dragoons as a private, the oath being given by Major William N. Ward; his horse was evaluated at \$125, and the equipment for riding at \$44. The Essex Light Dragoons, under Captain Richard S. Cauthorn (a medical doctor), from June, 1861 to April, 1862, were assigned to assist in the defense of Fort Lowry and the company during this time was stationed either at the fort or nearby at Camp Byron in Dunnsville, which camp was on the property of Dr. Cauthorn. So, Private Ware, during this period, could count his blessings as he was close to home, family and relatives. After March, 1862, however, this would change as the Essex Light Dragoons (designated Company F) joined its parent regiment; the 9th Virginia Cavalry, and Ware remained with this unit until General Lee surrendered at Appomattox Court House. April 9, 1865.

During the Civil War, *Water View*, it will be recalled, was owned by Robert Lowry Ware. Before the war, he had married Anne Elizabeth Burwell Latane of Tappahannock. In 1863, while Robert was serving with the Essex Light Dragoons, a daughter, Kate, was born to the couple. The war now over, Robert Ware, a frustrated, defeated former soldier returned to *Water View* and his family. He had given almost four years of his life to "the lost cause". The entire South was in a severe economic and psychological depression which would continue for many years. Essex County was no exception; everything was scarce, food, clothes, jobs, practically all the necessities of life. Robert Ware returned to what was the best opportunity and to that which he was most familiar-farming.

His home place, *Water View*, containing 325 acres, still bore the scars from the construction work of Confederate forces in preparing "the lower battery" engaged Union gunboats.

It took a while but the influence of the Rappahannock, ever present in the lives of the Wares of Ware's Wharf, was again to come to the front and afford several opportunities for Robert. Steamer activity on the Rappahannock had long been the bright star in the lives of citizens residing in counties contiguous to the river. It represented the easiest and most enjoyable method of travel, the means for shipping and receiving freight, and in spots, postal service. A steamer wharf in the area of *Water View* would be an excellent business venture since a structure here would fit in nicely between wharves already situated at Tappahannock and Bowler's, both located about six miles on either side. Such steamer wharves, of course, had to be substantial in nature, long enough to provide a suitable channel for the ship to dock and strong enough to resist the continual elements. In some cases these wharves were constructed and maintained by the steamship companies; in others, by private individuals. From the following contract, however, it is clear Robert L. Ware built and then maintained the wharf situated in the vicinity of *Water View*, and named the structure appropriately, "Ware's":

"This agreement or contract entered into this 28th day of April eighteen hundred and seventy four by the owner or owners of the wharf called Ware's and situated on the Rappahannock River between Lowry's Point and Muddy Gut of the State of Virginia, of the first part, and the owners of the Baltimore & Fredericksburg Line Steam Boats, now running on the Rappahannock River, of the State of Maryland, of the second part, hereby agrees and bind themselves that their two steamboats, shall on their regular trips up and down said river, stop at said wharf for the purpose of landing & receiving freight and passengers, as is now done at all regular landings by them and will continue so to do so for five years, if owners of the steamers find they can obtain sufficient business to justify themselves in so doing. And they further agree to pay to the party of the first part ten per cent on all the freight money carried on their steamers to said wharf or taken on board of their steamers from said wharf, and R.L. Ware the party of the first part hereby

agrees and binds himself to keep their wharf and warehouse in good repair and to give a good road and right of way from the said wharf to the public road for the patrons or customers of the steamers of the party of the second part; also agrees to have a man on the wharf whenever the steamers are coming to the wharf to take their lines and fasten them to the posts and to receive the steamers freight and to give the clerks or the steamers an account of what is to be taken on board. The party of the first part hereby agree and binds themselves that no other steamer boat shall be allowed to run to said wharf or touch at it or take on board any freight or passengers from said wharf or land any freight or passengers on said wharf for the term of five years provided the steamers of the party of the second part continue to run to said wharf for that period. The party of the first part further agrees and bind themselves to have a clear and unobstructed wharf for the steamers to come to and that no obstruction shall be placed on the wharf or drive way to prevent its free and proper use by the employees of the party of the second part and their patrons and customers." S/ Robt. L. Ware, S/ H.W. Corney
Agt. Witness-W.T. Tomlinson.

Through this contract Robert became "wharf agent" and his duties were numerous: he, or a suitable substitute, had to meet all steamers at the pier head to handle lines in connection with docking; he had to manifest all incoming and outgoing cargo and, on instructions of the sender, tag the outgoing to a particular commission merchant in Baltimore; he had to assist passengers, especially ladies and children, when boarding or leaving the vessel; and during each work day, he had to be available in the vicinity of the wharf to meet persons who desired to leave produce or other items for shipment.

The erection of the wharf at *Water View* considerably changed the facade of the area. Now, there was a surge of daily activity in the form of vehicles-wagons, buggies, ox carts, road carts, carriages - as well as other forms of transportation such as saddled horses and mules - all converging on Ware's Wharf. Unpaved roads, which in many instances were impassable, and the lack of rail service for the area, now made the availability of the steamer very attractive indeed.

The U.S. Postal System, ever mindful of community needs, saw this change in the Ware's

Wharf area and apparently in late 1873 or early 1874 conducted a survey to determine if a post office could be justified. The results are obvious since both the National Archives and U.S. Postal Service in Washington agree the post office at Ware's Wharf was established on February 16, 1874 with Robert L. Ware being appointed the postmaster. He made his residence, *Water View*, the post office to conduct postal business: mail sent to and from this office was handled by steamer. There is a possibility there was a postal carrier, acting as an independent contractor, who served between Dunnsville and Ware's Wharf.

As both postmaster and wharf agent, Robert Ware had to juggle his assignments somewhat. Since his services during the day were needed at the pier for substantial periods, his wife, whom Robert called "Nannie", would handle the office in his absence. The post office being located in a private residence, there were no business hours established as such, and patrons could have postal matters handled there any hour during the day and, within reason, into the evening.

After the Ware's Wharf post office was opened, people at nearby Dunnsville, which long had a post office of its own, soon recognized they could receive their mail quicker by having their correspondence directed to them at Ware's; the speed of steamer delivered mail made the difference.

Robert Lowry Ware died suddenly at his home, *Water View*, on July 3, 1906; he was 70 years of age. He had been a successful farmer; the postmaster at Ware's Wharf from the inception of this office to his death, a period of over thirty-two years; had constructed the wharf at this location and had been the wharf agent there; had been a faithful Confederate soldier; and father of a daughter and eight sons.

During the period July 3, 1906 to December 22, 1906, "Nannie" Ware served as the interim postmistress and continued the post office at *Water View*. On this latter date, her son, William Latane Ware (Sr.), at the age of 37, received his appointment as postmaster at Ware's Wharf. Earlier, William had built a home [*Cedar Beach*] near the river, several hundred yards down stream from *Water View*, and after being designated postmaster moved the postal office from *Water View* to his home.

Stanley Ware recalls as a youngster visiting *Cedar Beach* on numerous occasions to pick up the mail. Entrance to the post office was by way of the back door; the office was on the first floor, and to one's left, or west when entering; a desk and all the postal materials were located under a staircase.

At the time William Ware (Sr.) was named postmaster, he was also designated wharf agent by the Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia Railway Company (M.D.&V.). So, his duties, essentially, remained the same as his father's. He, too, utilized the services of his wife, Roane Ware, as an assistant in the post office in his absence.

It appears after the death of Robert L. Ware, his eight sons fell heir to the wharf. Stanley Ware notes the steamboat company paid a flat fee to the wharf agent per month and also paid the amount due him from the commission merchants (the steamboat company coordinated this latter transaction). William Ware (Sr.) would then have to divide the commission received with his seven brothers, Edward, Robert, Harry, Burwell, Ritchie, John and Catesby.

From about 1912 until the mid-1930's there was no regular telephone service to the Ware's Wharf area. Through innovation, the Wares of this locality, as well as their relatives at nearby Dunnsville, Edward (Eddie) and Catesby Ware, were able to construct a closed circuit telephone system in which each home had a phone and could make or receive calls on this internal system. At Dunnsville, such a phone was located at Ware's Store as well as at the private homes of Eddie and Catesby Ware. It was impossible to make a long-distance telephone call on this closed system. However, since Ware's Store also had a regular telephone connected to a central operator, it was possible to send or receive messages from the Ware's Wharf area by calling this store where the message would be relayed. All the Wares were involved in the planning of the system and maintaining the lines but Eddie Ware coordinated the project; a small maintenance fee was furnished him by each family on the system.

Each home had a phone which was powered by two small batteries; combination rings, such as long-short-short-long, were assigned to each family phone so the intended party, upon hearing his personalized ring, would answer. Other persons on the line could and frequently would listen in on conversations.

This internal phone system reduced distances, as it were, to the area of the phone in one's home, an important item in those days when travel was so slow and often difficult. Other benefits were derived from this phone system such as social, business and emergency calls. The system was discontinued when the regular phone service was provided to the Ware's Wharf area in the mid-1930's.

On September 29, 1919, the post office at Ware's Wharf was discontinued and moved to Dunnsville. William L. Ware, Sr. had been the postmaster at Ware's for a total of 13 years and the post office itself had been located here for a total of 45 straight years.

On May 1, 1920, Harry H. Ware first operated Ware's Ferry at Ware's Wharf, conveying people, cars, trucks, horses, mules, buggies and wagons across the Rappahannock to Wellford's Wharf in Richmond County. Harry personally built the ferry landing at Ware's as well as the ferry boat, *Quick Time*; he later built a larger boat, *Zion*, which replaced the earlier one. Harry and his son, Stanley, were both licensed pilots and ran the ferry. The ferry was discontinued on February 16, 1927 with the opening of the Downing Bridge which spanned the Rappahannock from Tappahannock to Richmond County in the Northern Neck.

William Latane Ware, Sr. died November 21, 1924 and his son, William, Jr., who was a student at V.P.I., was called home to take over his father's duties as wharf agent. William Ware, Jr., would continue as wharf agent until steamboats discontinued their service on the Rappahannock in the mid-1930's.

In 1925, William Ware, Jr. and his uncle, Catesby Ware of Dunnsville, founded the Ware Oil Company as a distributorship for Texaco products. The wharf at Ware's was ideal because

Texaco commodities could be delivered there by the company's tankers. In the early days, however, Ware Oil had no storage tanks at the wharf so the tanker would deliver some products there in a unique manner: a number of oil drums would be lashed together and then floated into the shore. This method saved time and labor, eliminating handling cumbersome drums from the pier head. Later, several large storage tanks were constructed ashore along with connecting pipes from there to the pier head; this allowed the tankers to pump directly to these reservoirs.

Smith Y. Durham was a driver for this company for several years and in 1929 moved to Ware's Wharf to be close to his work and to provide a type of supervision. In 1931, William Ware sold his interest and at this time Smith bought into Ware Oil.

Two Texaco tankers from Norfolk, the *Richmond*, under Captain Overton, and the *Elizabeth City*, under Captain Gayle, continued to make deliveries at Ware's until about the middle of WW II when the threat of German submarine attack caused the company to discontinue this service. From then on, Ware Oil had to haul their products from the Texaco plant in Richmond. Catesby Ware died in 1959 and Smith Durham sold his interest in the company the same year. Ware Oil is now owned by the descendants of Catesby Ware. The office is located at Dunnsville.

The Wares of Ware's Wharf, over the years, have excelled in such diversified fields as farming, music, medicine, education, pilots of river boats and aircraft, law, engineering, accounting and public service. It has been said these Wares are so intrinsically tied to the Rappahannock they have salt water running through their veins. This being the case, add to this a substantial portion of pride coupled with a driving spirit in pursuit of excellence.

Editor's Note: *Our featured artist is Gigi Vranian. Gigi, who lives in Manakin-Sabot, VA, began painting when she was 10 years old, and hasn't stopped. She was a professional nurse until four years ago when she retired to devote all of her time to her art. Having relatives in the area and visiting often, she has loved the beauty and history of Essex County for many years. Her recent body of work has evolved into a series of paintings concentrating on local marinas, lighthouses and locations like Ware's Wharf. Her primary medium is water color and she has displayed over a range of venues and locations throughout her career. She currently serves as President of the James River Art League. We wish to thank Gigi for her gracious permission to include one of her most familiar works in this issue of the Bulletin. Her love for the subject is reflected in her words, "My work is really a historical documentary of what was" in the history of Essex county.*

Capital Campaign

\$ 200,000 is the Goal. Pledges and gifts have exceeded \$20,000 three weeks into the campaign. Museum expansion and mortgage principle reduction will position the Museum and Historical Society for program excellence and continued growth. Contact the ECMHS at 804-443-2406, or e-mail staff@ecmhs.org for more information. Donations can be mailed to ECMHS, POB 404, Tappahannock, VA 22560.

Changing Exhibits

Jamestown 2007 "Clash of the Cultures" opens this spring.

**Essex County Museum hours are:
10 am-3 pm on M, Th, F, S and 1-3 pm on Sun
Admission is always free**

Visit our website, www.ecmhs.org for additional information on all of the activities, board meetings, exhibits and exciting historic information opportunities about Essex County.

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**The Board of Directors also includes all members of the Executive Committee.*

Upcoming Events

April 29, 2007 at Studio9 - Reception and exhibit of Essex County Students, Jamestown 2007 Art Contest Winners.

May 5, 2007 - Members Spring Gala Event and Annual Meeting - Look for your invitation in the mail.

May 12, 2007 - Stratford Hall, home of Robert E. Lee, Old Mill lecture, tour and lunch (choice of entrée), \$35 per person. Event begins at 10:30 a.m. Call 804-443-4690 or e-mail staff@ecmhs.org for more information and reservations.

May 19, 2007 - Armed Services Day - Dinner and lecture by Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Col. Harvey J. "Barney" Barnum.

May 26, 2007 - Annual Memorial Day weekend yard sale. Items needed! Call I.C. Smith, coordinator, at 804-445-1510.

August 12, 2007 (10-5:00) - Re-enactment Voyage of John Smith, landing at Parker's Marina in Tappahannock. Re-enactment exhibits, Native American cultural activities, Essex County and Northern Neck historical exhibits, interactive exhibits and activities for children.

**Essex County Museum & Historical Society
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