

THE RE-DISCOVERY OF BRANDYMORE CASTLE

By

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Brandycore Castle is an Arlington County landmark mentioned in at least five of the land grants made by the Proprietors of the Northern Neck to the early 18th Century settlers in the Four Mile Run area. It was first described by Charles Broadwater in 1724, as "the Rock Stones called Brandycore Castle," but no hint is given as to what the place actually looked like. We can only surmise that it was some sort of a prominent topographic feature, probably dominated by a rocky outcrop, and perhaps having a castle-like profile. I have searched the lists of English, Welsh, Scotch and Irish castles, thinking perhaps Broadwater or his fellow settlers might have named it after a structure in their former homeland. I could find no such name and in fact none of the Gazetteers of Great Britain list a locality so designated. The name is evidently of local origin, with perhaps the humorous overtone intended.

As to its location, Fairfax Harrison, an outstanding authority on the history of Northern Virginia, states that Brandycore Castle "appears to have been what is now called Minors Hill, which tops the drainage between Pimmett's and Four Mile Run"¹. Local historians have generally accepted this verdict in the absence of contrary data. The evidence given below, however, strongly suggests that Brandycore Castle is not Minor Hill, but rather is the rocky-crested hill in Madison Manor Park, near the intersection of N. Roosevelt St. and the abandoned W. & O.D. RR (Figure 1). Since Brandycore is used as a land reference in the five grants previously mentioned, it follows that if the grants can be placed upon a modern map in their proper places, the location of the "Castle" will become evident. Those who may have tried to map the Northern Neck grants know what a fascinating and frustrating task it is. The frustration arises from two main causes: 1) inadequate descriptions of their location, coupled with the crude surveying measurements of that time, and 2) the deliberate distortions which are thought to have taken place in fixing the boundaries (and consequently the area upon which the grantee's quit rent was based).

In consequence of these uncertainties, in order to plot the grant boundaries, it is most convenient to select a modern base map on which to first set down all known factual information. For this purpose I use the U.S. Geological Survey topographical quadrangle maps at a scale of 1:24,000. Since all of the 18th century surveys use the pole as the unit of horizontal measurement, I constructed a plastic 1:24,000 scale, in poles, as a plotting aid (One pole=16½ feet).

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¹Harrison, Fairfax, 1924, *Landmarks of Old Prince William*: (reprinted 1964) Chesapeake Book Co., Berryville, Va.

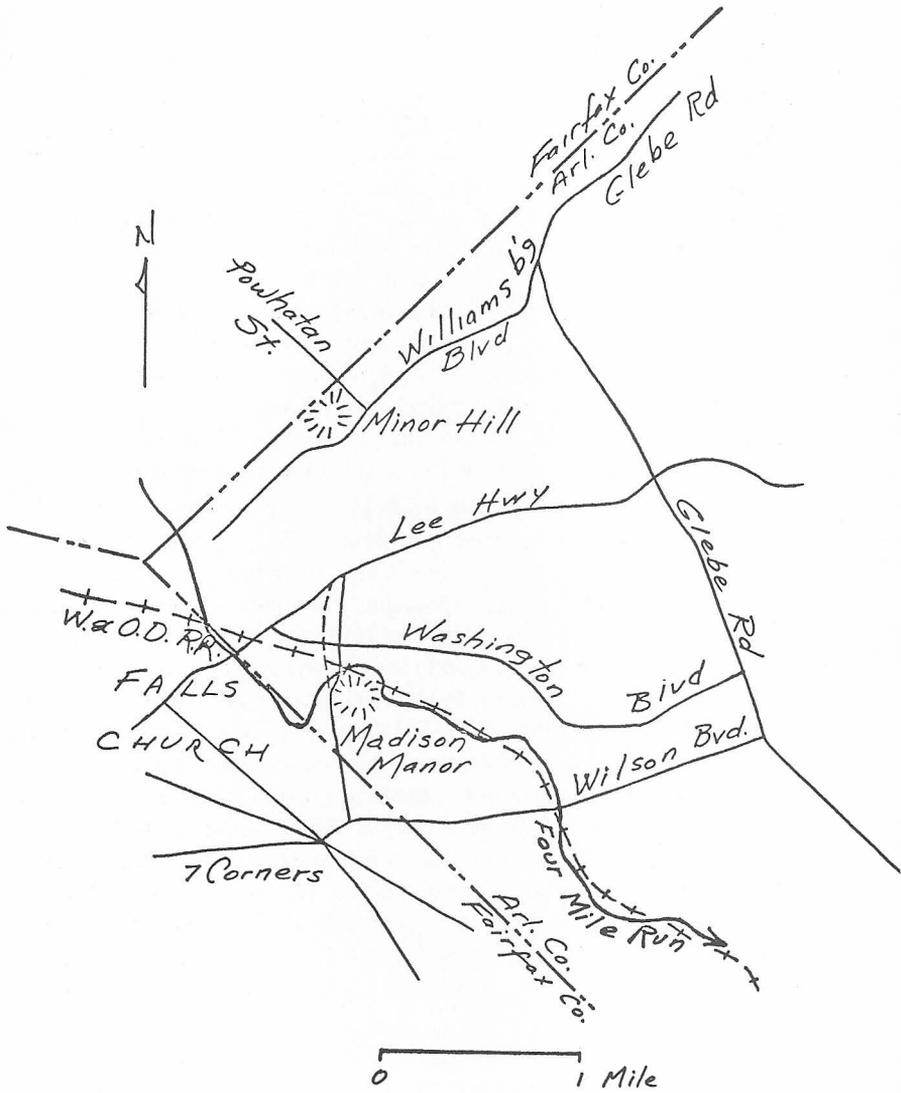


Figure 1.

Index map of the western part of Arlington County and vicinity showing the area discussed in this report.

There are several supplemental sources of information that are very useful in locating the grant boundaries. One of the best is a set of aerial photomosaics of Northern Virginia made in 1937, probably by the U.S. Army Air Force. A thorough inquiry by the Geological Survey, which holds a set of the prints, could not locate the original negatives or determine definitely the source of the photography. Some of the grant boundaries, particularly in the western part of Arlington and Fairfax Counties and Falls Church are clearly evident in the form of tree and fence lines. This area was largely rural in the mid-30's so the lines are more easily seen than on later photography when urban development became dominant.

The Howell and Taylor land ownership map of Alexandria County in 1900² is also a valuable guide. Most important of all, in my judgement, are the Records of Surveys and the deed books which for this period of Arlington County history reside primarily in the Fairfax County Court House.

From the foregoing sources we can at once fix the locations of a few of the grant boundaries, grant division lines, and the locations of several of the grant corners. For example, Howson's "back" line is a major boundary extending from Cameron Run in Alexandria to near Washington and Lee High School. This line can be traced on the Howell and Taylor map as can Howson's north line. In fact, this is the only map I know of on which the important back line is shown with respect to modern land lines.³ (The name of the grantee is spelled in varying ways but has been standardized as "Howson.")

The Ravensworth east and north lines are likewise very clear on the land ownership maps⁴ of Fairfax County and they are particularly evident on the aerial photomosaics. I have no doubt but that these lines can be located today within a very few feet of their 18th century location. Moreover, we know precisely the location of the streams and runs so often referred to in the Northern Neck land grants.

These boundaries, corners, and watercourses which can be identified without any ambiguity, provide a rigid framework to which the other grants must be fitted. Each grant on upper Four Mile Run was individually plotted at 1:24,000 scale on a transparent graph paper overlay, using the boundaries given in the original grant description and corrected according to any later surveys of record. These transparencies constitute pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. One can sometimes discern from the shapes of the pieces where they ought to be placed, but more often than not they are too long or too broad or skewed so as to overlap or leave a gap with their neighbor. Fortunately, however,

²Howell and Taylor, 1900, Map of Alexandria County, Virginia, for the Virginia Title Co., (Library of Cong., Map Div.)

³Details of the litigation affecting the location are given by Charles Stetson in *Four Mile Run Land Grants*. Mimeoform Press, Washington, D.C., 1935.

⁴Fairfax County Planning Division.

⁵Northern Neck Grant Book (hereafter abbreviated NNG)-F:57.

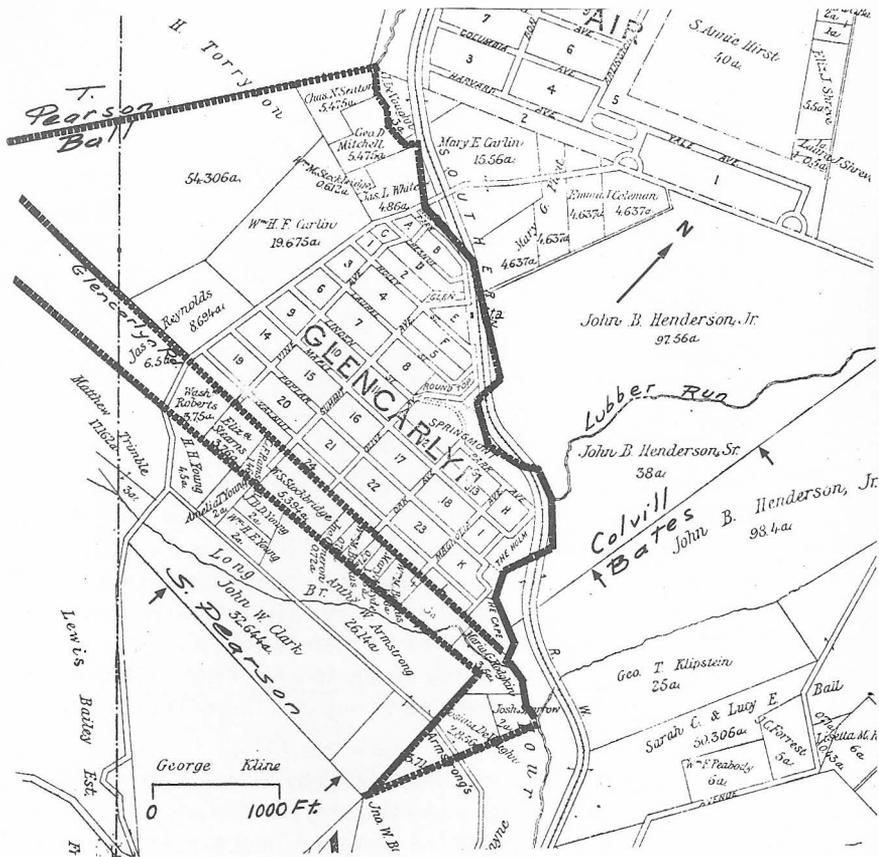


Figure 2.

A portion of the Howell and Taylor map of Alexandria County showing Glencarlynn and surrounding area. The boundaries of the Ball grants (heavy dashed lines) fit very well with the 1900 land boundaries depicted here. Arrows indicate 1900 land boundaries which appear to coincide with other 18th century land grant lines.

each grantee was usually careful to spell out which of his lines was common with an adjoining grant and to specify the name of the adjoining grantee. Thus, starting from a known grant, adjacent tracts can be added on successively until we have bridged to the next fixed point.

For the area of Brandymore Castle, the John and Moses Ball grants at Glencarly⁵ provide the most convenient and reliable starting place from which we can bridge upstream along Four Mile Run. The location of the Ball grants has been discussed in detail by Stetson;⁶ their outline is easily discernable on the Howell and Taylor map (Figure 2) and the bounds can be easily transferred to the topographic base map. Ball's patents bind on the west with Thomas Pearson's 660 acres.⁷ Pearson in turn is followed on the northwest by the grants which mention Brandymore Castle, namely William Gunnel,⁸ Going and Pearson,⁹ George Harrison¹⁰ and Capt. Broadwater¹¹ (Figure 3).

William Gunnel described the northwest corner of his grant (Figure 4) as "...a little above Brandymore." The prepositions "above" and "below" as used in contemporary legal descriptions, meant upstream and downstream, respectively. Thus, Gunnel's corner was a short distance upstream from Brandymore. The corner in question is, in fact, about 600 feet upstream from Madison Manor Hill.

Going and Pearson state that their land is "...on Fourmile Run near Brandymore and joining to the chesnut land of Thomas Pearson deceased."¹² Minor Hill is at the north end of this tract, but the wording of the grant suggests to me that Brandymore itself is on Four Mile Run.

Moving further westward with our puzzle, we come to Capt. Charles Broadwater's 151 acre grant taken up in 1724. It was the second grant in this area and the first to mention Brandymore Castle. The Broadwater tract was said to be located "...on the upper part of Four Mile Run, nigh the Rock Stones called Brandymore Castle."¹³ There is a great deal of uncertainty in my mind about some of the Broadwater boundaries. But the southeast corner we can be sure is common with George Harrison and Gunnel because it is so stated in Harrison's patent. Moreover, Harrison refers to this place as "Capt. Broadwaters corner called Brandymore"¹⁴.

Perhaps one grant that led earlier historians to believe that Brandymore was Minor Hill is that of Simon Pearson and Gabriel Adams, who mention that their 708 acres adjoins Robertson, Broadwater, and Dorrel "on a branch of 4 mile run near Brandymore."¹⁵ The Pearson and Adams land is in the

⁶Stetson. *Op. cit.*

⁷NNG-3:225.

⁸NNG-C:9.

⁹NNG-0:118.

¹⁰NNG-E:493.

¹¹NNG-A:13.

¹²NNG-0:118.

¹³NNG-A:13.

¹⁴NNG-E:493.

¹⁵NNG-D:40.

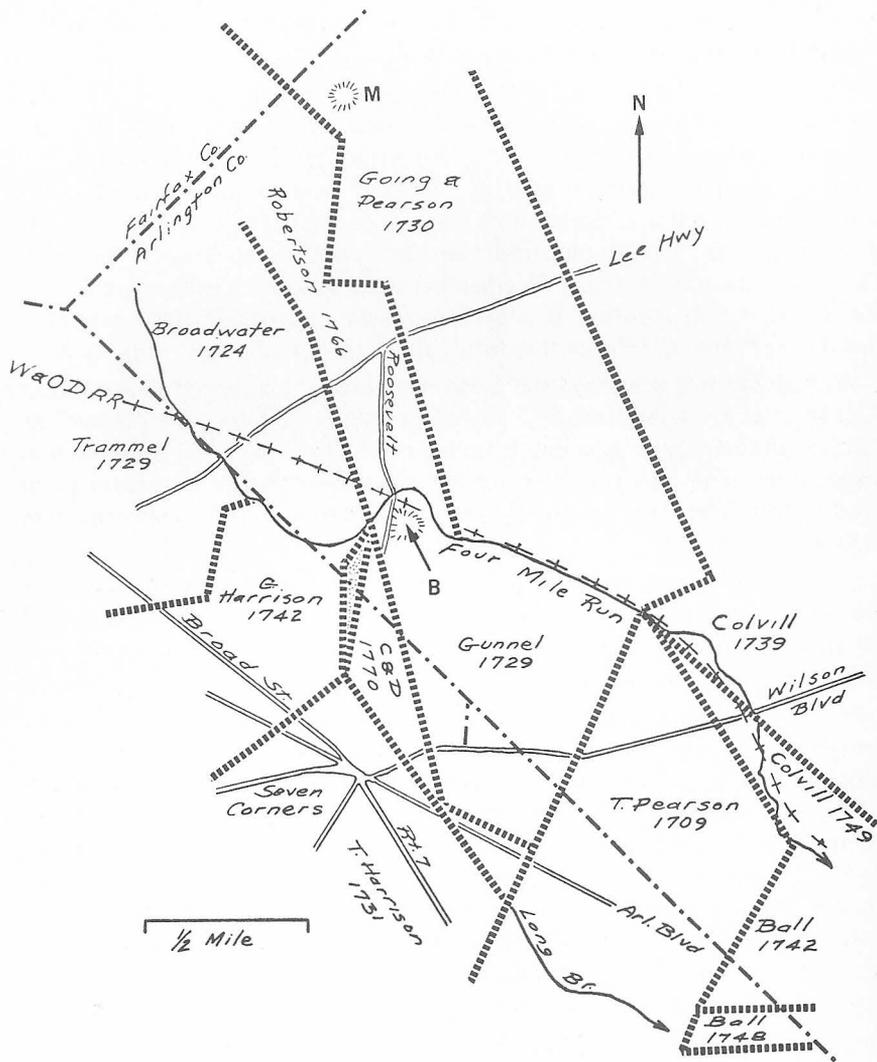


Figure 3.

Map showing the location of the Northern Neck Grants (heavy dashed lines) with the name of the grantee and the year in which the grant was recorded. Four Mile Run also forms a boundary for all of the impinging grants except at the north end of the Thomas Pearson (1709) grant. The tract labelled "C&D" is Carlyle and Dalton. The small stippled triangle near the center of the map is George Minor's 12 acre Treasury Warrant. "B" = Brandywine Castle; "M" = Minor Hill.

Pimmit Run drainage basin and would be closer to Minor Hill than to Madison Manor Hill. But though the wording of the grant is somewhat ambiguous, I believe the mention of Brandymore here refers to the neighboring grants, i.e., Robertson, Broadwater, and Dorrel on Four Mile Run. Moreover, I know of no documents in which the Minors ever referred to Minor Hill as Brandymore.

In some instances, a grantee either deliberately or inadvertently left a gap between his boundary and that of his neighbor. These gaps, as their existence became known, eventually were taken up by grants from the Proprietor or, after the Revolutionary War, by Treasury Warrants from the Commonwealth. There was one such gap between the Gunnel and Harrison tracts. It was partially filled in 1770 by a Proprietor's grant to Carlyle and Dalton.¹⁶ But the most important evidence on the location of Brandymore Castle involves the completion of the filling of this vacancy. George Minor obtained in 1787 a Treasury Warrant for 12 acres of land¹⁷ adjacent to Carlyle and Dalton, Gunnel and Harrison. There can be no doubt that Minor's 12 acres joins Carlyle and Dalton on the northwest since the corner descriptions and the length of their common boundary are identical. He mentions further that his corner is common with Gunnel's northwest corner and is "supposed to be within or about 200 yards of a parcel of rocks called Brandymore Castle." The corner in fact is almost exactly 200 yards from the crest of Madison Manor Hill.

Geological evidence also favors Madison Manor Hill. Excavation at the top of Minor Hill in 1972 and 1973 show it to be composed of terrace gravel, common throughout this area and not particularly noteworthy as a land feature. Figure 5 on the other hand shows the massive outcrop of quartz that forms the rocky promontory on the north end of Madison Manor Hill.

At Madison Manor Park, Four Mile Run flows in a great loop around the base of the hill, perhaps somewhat like a moat to the early settlers. In recent times the north side of the hill has been quarried to a small extent but the craggy masses at the summit are essentially undisturbed, retaining the character of the collapsed battlements of a castle long forgotten.

¹⁶NNG-I:181.

¹⁷Recorded in NNG-T:34.

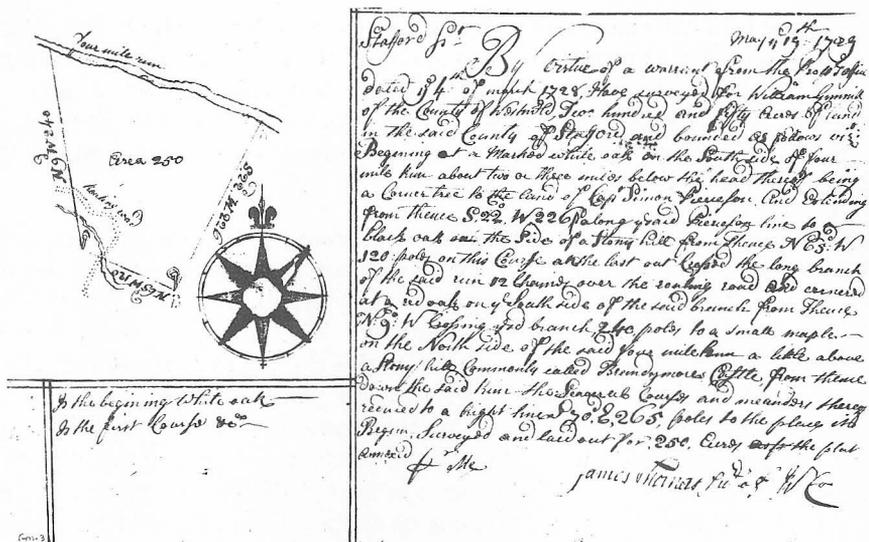


Figure 4.

Map and survey description made in 1729 for an application by William Gunnel for a grant of vacant land. The northwest corner on Four Mile Run, is "a little above a stony hill commonly called Brandy more Castle." The "Rowling rd" is in the Willston area of Seven Corners. The location of this grant is shown on figure 3. (Courtesy of the Virginia State Library)



Figure 5.

View looking southeast showing the crest of Brandy more Castle in Madison Manor Park.