

## THE SEARCH FOR THE PEOPLE OF LINDEN

By

Martha Beggs Orth\*

When Don and I bought our old house, we were curious about all the years of its life and the people who had lived there. It was known locally as "The Old Beauchamp Place," because the Beauchamp family had lived there for as long as any person living could remember. Before that there were only faint memories and few clues. No famous name was associated with the house; it was simply an ancient, humble house. How would we go about finding something about the people who had lived there?

This evening I will share with you the research techniques for uncovering information about old houses and the people who've lived in them, based on the work I did on our house, Linden, in Richmond County, near the village of Farnham on that strip of Tidewater land called "The Northern Neck of Virginia."

The very first thing that must be done is to establish ownership as far back as you possibly can--to when the house was built, or even before that to the land patent. This is similar to what a lawyer does when performing a title search. You put together this historical title document on your house by searching the deed books and the will books in the County Courthouse where your house is located. In most instances, you can also find these same records on microfilm at the Virginia State Library in Richmond. Thus, the two primary resource places for such a search are the local Courthouse and the State Library.

A point to consider in this part of the work is that you must know something of the county history to be able to accomplish this work, for counties have not been static through the years. Your house may have started out located in one county, but as county boundaries changed, may now be in another county. So you may have to move around to other courthouses in the middle of your search, if the county boundaries have changed. Take for example our own Ball-Sellers House in Arlington County. It has not moved, but Arlington County used to be Alexandria County, and before that was Fairfax County. To search this house would mean going to different county courthouses.

My county, Richmond County, is an old one--established in 1692 from what is called Old Rappahannock County. I worked at the Richmond County Courthouse at Warsaw until I got back to the records of 1692. Then I had to move to the Essex County Courthouse at Tappahannock, for that is where the Old Rappahannock records are. Your public library is a good source for learning about your own county and getting familiar with the history of its jurisdiction. Arlington County Library has the Virginia Room with excellent resources.

In addition to knowing your county, you should also know something of the times that you are searching. For example, *relationships* as stated in wills: In the 17th century the word "cousin" was used for nieces and nephews, as well as for cousins. "Father-in-law" meant "Step-father." "Jr." could mean any younger person with a name of an older person, as long as the older person was still living. Or,

take the matter of *time*. Until January 1752, the English year began in March, so that an event taking place between 1 January and 25 March (prior to 1752) was dated the year *earlier*. A person might die in November 1726 and have his will proved in January 1726.

As stated previously, in this land title search, you will be looking primarily in deed books and will books, for most land was acquired either by purchase or by inheritance. In looking at the land title to Linden, note "WB" and "DB," which stand for *Will Book* and *Deed Book*. The first number after the DB or WB is the number of the Deed or Will Book, and the second number is the page number in that book. It is very important to document carefully every one of the deeds to your house in this way.

You might find that land has passed in other ways--by litigation or auction sale. As you can note on the Linden title, I searched some records of a chancery court suit over Linden.

A very important point in this title search is that the Land Title starts with the *present* and works *back*. You read your own deed. Somewhere in it you will find a description and a notation of how it had been acquired by the person who had passed it to you. You then go to that deed, and find reference to the person from whom it was acquired, and so on back. If you find a deed that does not have this information, there is a Grantee Index that will probably assist you in getting back on the right track.

In reading deeds and wills, it is important to check acreage, boundaries, etc. You will note on the Linden title that the acreage has changed over the years, both up and down, as people bought and sold land. Addison Lewis, for example in 1905, sold various amounts of acreage to a number of his children, and we have been able to find the deeds of each one of these transactions. A good cross-check on this part of the work is to read the land tax books, also at the Courthouse and /or the State Library. These are annual account books kept by counties on the ownership of all property for tax purposes. The entries in these large account books are listed in columns, just as an accountant would keep the records. The headings are : Name, Residence/County, How held, Date acquired, Description, Miles from Courthouse, Value, Notes.

There are a number of facts you can learn from these land books. For example, take *residence*. If a person held property in Richmond County, but resided in Lancaster County, then you can surmise that he did not live in the house in Richmond County; perhaps he rented it out, or maybe his mother lived there. But, if he lived in Richmond County, and only owned one piece of property there, then no doubt he lived on that property. Another example: if one year the value went up because of buildings added, then perhaps that was the year the house was built, or an addition made, or a barn raised. The "how held" column states how the property was held; widows often held land for their life only, with it passing to the children upon their death. "In fee" means that clear title to the property was held by the owner until it was sold. But perhaps the most interesting and important point is the "distance from the courthouse." This was very carefully recorded and helps pinpoint more precisely the location of a piece of property.

In some cases there are drawings with the deeds, or in the land books. These

drawings are called plats, and are generally collected into Plat books. While there is not a plat for every piece of property, you should check these books to see if there is one on your property.

Thus, I worked at the Courthouse with the deed books, the will books, the land books, the plat books. What tools does one need for this work? Few and simple ones. First, pencils. Not pens. Most court clerks are quite precise on this; there is too much danger of accidentally marking records with permanent ink pens, so most insist on the use of pencils. Second, you need a pad of paper and note cards. If you are copying a *whole* will or deed, then you will probably want to write it on a sheet of paper. However, if you are going through a number of sources and making short notes on different people, then you should use index or note cards. Put the name of the person who is your subject at the top of each card; later you can sort and alphabetize these cards. And finally, you need a magnifying glass. Some of the records are very faded and the writing is hard to decipher because of tight spacing and old styles of writing.

It was thus that I established the past ownership of Linden. But I was not content with this timeline of names when I had completed it. I wanted more. I wanted to know about the people--what their work was, how they lived, what they looked like, what children they had, how they furnished their house, what crops they raised, where they are buried, how long they lived, what they did in the community, if they were in any war.

It was at this point that my places to conduct research and the sources from which I drew greatly expanded from my public library, the Courthouse, and the Virginia State Library. Now I also visited the following places:

1. Cemeteries
2. Local history societies and museums
3. The National Archives
4. Homes of people to interview
5. Virginia Historical Landmarks Commission
6. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Va.

And my tools also expanded--still modest, but expanded--to a camera, tape recorder, and a typewriter.

Some comments on the significance of these places for research:

1. *Cemeteries* are obviously a wonderful source for finding birth and death dates and sometimes can help establish relationships, i.e., "beloved wife of . . . . . " or "daughter of . . . . ."

2. *Local historical societies and the magazines* they produce are helpful because they deal with the area in which you are working. Often in the publications or manuscript files you can find names associated with your house. Let me stress here the tremendous importance of a good index. Over and over again in my research I have blessed indexers. For example, I can't tell from the title of an article in *The Northern Neck Historical Magazine* if it has anything in it about my people, and I don't have the time, much as I would like to, to read every single article. Therefore, I look in the index for words that might pertain to my search--the names of my

people, or an event, or a place name nearby. I am convinced that the most valuable contribution our Arlington Historical Society could make right now for historical research is to complete the index on our magazines.

3. *The National Archives* is good for military records and census records. although census records and some military records are also available at courthouses and the Virginia State Library.

4. Talking to people--old timers in the community and relatives and descendants of the people you are searching--adds greatly to the human side of your story, and gives you clues for your search work. However, you must be careful in oral accounts to realize that you cannot always rely on people's memory for accuracy and for details and facts. You must check those out with other sources.

5. *Virginia Landmarks Commission* has an excellent 4-page paper by Margaret Peters. "Some Basic Techniques to Follow in Searching an Old House." They also have insurance files, as well as old journals that might prove helpful.

6. But the most splendid place of all to me is the *Virginia Historical Society* in Richmond, the repository of a wealth of family manuscripts, papers, letters, Bibles. And again, it is outstanding because of its thorough index. My librarian, Sara Collins, kept urging me to go there, and I kept saying, "No one famous has lived at Linden. They won't have anything on my ordinary folks." Ah, but I was wrong. Everytime someone has donated a dusty trunk of letters and photos, the staff has carefully indexed every scrap. In my case, many of my references were found in the collection of the Tayloe Papers. The Tayloe family has been a leading family in Richmond County since the 18th century when their beautiful home, Mt. Airy, was built high on a hill overlooking Warsaw. Since they have been such a powerful family, they corresponded with everyone in Richmond County, and in turn kept every bit of paper sent to them. Recently the family has donated trunks of records that have been in the Tayloe possession, and for anyone doing research in Richmond County, it is indeed a rich source. I was able to read original documents from many of my people who lived at Linden and who wrote to the Tayloes, or borrowed money from them, or signed contracts with them, or worked for them.

Now that we have discussed searching the title history and talked about the various places that one goes to conduct research, I will move to discussing what you can learn from various sources.

Take *wills* first. Other than the obvious--to find out who got what--wills are rich in providing information about family relationships. William Dew's will in 1769, after leaving possessions to a number of his children, closed with this sentence: "I give unto my son Thomas Dew one shilling current money and no more; he, as well as Benjamin Newsum who married my daughter Sarah, having already had their full parts that they could expect from my estate . . ." (Ref: WB 5/30)

Or, listen to Andrew Dew's will of 1711: "I appoint my *loving* wife Flora Dew my sole executor." (Ref: WB 3/174)

Many older wills leave clothes, a very important item, since they were scarce. Francis Slaughter, in his 1659 will, left broadcloth for a suit for his overseer, Andrew Dew. (Ref: Old Rappahannock Will Book of 1656-64, p.83)

Livestock, especially cows, were carefully and specifically named and numbered in wills. Some men made provision for the education of their children, and many

appointed a male family friend or relative to protect their widows and children to see that no harm came to them.

You also find children's names in wills, and this is particularly helpful for piecing together the total family when you have not been able to find birth records.

Similarly, *deeds* provide information that might not be found elsewhere. I have never been able to find a will for Andrew Dew the first. I did find a great deal of information about his widow, Ann, who married a second time to James Toone, and when he died, she married a third time to Dominick Rice. In a deed of cattle to her two Dew sons in 1663, as noted on the Linden Land Title sheet, she mentions that Thomas had received no land from his father; the clear implication being that son Andrew *had* received land from his father. So, although I have not found a will for Andrew(1), I feel very confident in this document telling me that his son Andrew received his land.

*Census records* are helpful in establishing relationships and pinpointing names and ages of family members, especially children. However, the census records only started in 1790, and prior to 1850 recorded families only by numbers. So names are helpful only beginning with the 1850 census. Here is a census record of the Armstrongs in the 1850 census. What can we learn from this record?

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Worth</u>	<u>Where Born</u>
John	59	farmer	\$1500	Essex
Melisha	44			Essex
Sarah	14			Essex
Mary E.	11			Essex
Martha A.	9			Richmond
John Thomas	6			Richmond
Lucy F.	2			Richmond

Other than the obvious names and occupation, etc., we see that John is 15 years older than his wife, and it appears that she had her first child at age 30. It also seems that they moved to Richmond County in about 1840 (between Mary and Martha).

*Marriage records* give information on age, when you may have had trouble locating a birth record. Marriage records are also helpful in learning the maiden name of the female. This often can be a very difficult task, since deeds, wills, tombstones generally carry only the married name of the female. But the marriage record is ideal for this information.

"Richard H. Lyell and Frances L.M. Belfield, bond 28 Nov. 1837. Consent by John W. Belfield, father; consent by John Lyell, father of the groom." (Ref: *Marriages of Richmond County 1668-1853*, edited by George King) This last statement is unusual: consent by the father of the bride was normal, but consent by father of the groom was strange. However, when you cross reference this with the 1850 census record of R.H. Lyell, you can determine his age at the time of his first marriage to be 19, which was young for the male. This may have been the reason for the need of consent by his father.

*Death records* are also specific, perhaps more so than the deceased would have wished. You can read right in the Warsaw Courthouse that Julia Kate Pitts died of inflammation of the bowel (my doctor friend tells me that this was probably appendicitis), and that Fanny Lyell, Henry's first wife, died in childbed.

*Tombstones*, as mentioned earlier, are useful for dates, but even they are sometimes inaccurate, and they are poor sources for research on females, for they hardly ever give the maiden name. Julia Kate Pitts was a Lyell who married a Pitts. She is buried at Calvary Methodist Church as "Julia Kate, beloved wife of W.D. Pitts." No maiden name mentioned. However, Fanny Lyell was a Pitts who married Henry Lyell. She is buried on her family land as "Fanny L. Lyell, daughter of R.L. and Maria Pitts." No mention of her husband, Henry Lyell, other than her name "Fanny Lyell."

*Newspapers* are some of the most fascinating accounts in historical research. "The Northern Neck News," our area's paper at Farnham, was established in 1879 and has been in continuous operation since that time. It is on microfilm at the Virginia State Library, and I have spent hours laboriously pouring over each issue. (Fortunately, it is a weekly, instead of a daily paper.) The Friday, November 26, 1880 issue carried the notice of the marriage of the dashing Capt. W.D. Pitts and the beautiful Julia Kate Lyell.

Through the newspaper I also learned that Linden Farm was a well-known beet farm around the turn of the century. Dec.22, 1905: "Mr. W.A. Lewis, the enterprising beet grower has his land prepared for the Spring crop." And May 12, 1905: "Mr. W.A. Lewis is growing a fine crop of beets for the early market."

The Friday, Oct. 31,1902 paper carried this notice: "On Sunday the 19th last, at Linden, home of Mr. W.A. Lewis, near Farnham, Va., was held a family reunion for surviving members of the family of the late John B. Lewis." Today, the Lewis family is still having reunions in the area, and I hope they will have another one at Linden, even though no Lewis lives there now.

Or look at the information about H.M. Hutt gleaned from these four newspaper accounts: July 10, 1903: "H.M. Hutt is in Alexandria this week as a juror of the U.S. Court." Oct. 16, 1903: "The village (Farnham) has today what it has not had since the Civil War--three stores. H.M. Hutt has opened store with a nice and attractive new stock of goods." But less than a year later: Aug. 5, 1904: "Hon. John M. Lyell has bought from H.M. Hutt his entire stock of goods and will enter the mercantile business in the near future." And another year later: June 9, 1905: "Mr. H.M. Hutt has accepted a position with the Singer Sewing Machine Co."

Even newspapers can err, however. Dorsey Beauchamp's tiny obituary of five lines contained four errors: The date of his death was given as 1934 instead of 1944, his name was misspelled twice, and his "two" sons was written "too."

*Letters* are especially good sources for research because they are personal and give insight and information that could not be gathered in any other way. However, remember that they tend to be very subjective, and again might not be totally accurate where facts are concerned.

It was really a letter that started my research--the letter from Virgie Lewis found in the walls of Linden when we were doing plaster work in 1978. It was written from Washington to her parents at Linden after she had had a visit with them. It is a warm, affectionate letter and speaks to the loving relationship that that family had.

An enlightening letter was written from Mabel Siller in 1947. She had lived in Linden as a little girl, daughter of Charles and Julia Siller, the only Yankees who

lived at Linden. She wrote that her Uncle Frank Siller bought "Linden" in Farnham, but his wife would not go to live in Virginia, so he persuaded his brother Charles, Mabel's father, to buy it. Mabel wrote, "Uncle Frank was always getting stung on real estate somewhere, but he was a poet and an art collector and not a business man. He bought property in Florida, Minn., Wis., Iowa, North Carolina and elsewhere, and usually lost his money on it." Well, Uncle Frank may have gotten stung financially, but his "imprudent" purchase in this bleak and tight period after the Civil War probably helped save Linden during a critical period.

My favorite letter is from Carlos Cox, July 27, 1846, to Wm. Tayloe, who owned Linden at that time, having gotten it by default of a debt to him from Edward S. Saunders. Cox writes: "I have been on your farm in Farnham and find it in very bad order, the fencing very indifferent and a large portion of the land is taken with small pines. The dwelling and every out house want considerable repair. You requested me to make you an offer for it and I endeavor as I think to make you a fair one, I will give you \$1800, one thousand in cash and the balance inside of twelve months." Now, if Carlos Cox thought the place was in bad shape in 1846, he should have seen it in 1977! And we learn from the deed of sale that Cox did not succeed in getting it for \$1800. Tayloe must have written him back holding out for \$2000, which Cox paid. Four years later, Cox was able to sell it only for his original \$1800 offered.

A lovely *oral account* about Linden is from Mrs. Jeanette Yarbrough who told me that her first husband, Murvin Sisson, whose family rented Linden from W.D. Pitts in 1894, was born in Linden. Years later he used to drive down Rt. 3 past the house and tell his little daughter, "Honey, that's the house where your Dad was born, and someday when I become President of the United States, they're going to make that house a National Monument." As we know, Murvin Sisson never became President, but on April 13, 1977, his birthplace was indeed placed on the National Register of Historic Places in America.

*Various journals and other research documents* have abstracted bits and pieces of information out of the old deed books, account books, etc. One of the best of these is "Virginia Colonial Abstracts," a set of about 20 books edited by Beverly Fleet in 1942. Volumes 16 and 17 are on Richmond County Records 1692-1704 and 1704-1724. In this Fleet abstracts from an old record a letter from Col. Wm. Tayloe, Commander in Chief of the Richmond County Militia, to The Worship Her Majesties Justices of County of Richmond, holding court of claims on 6th day of March 1704. This letter notes that Capt. John Tarpley and Charles Barber sent out two squadrons of 12 men each under Quartermaster Andrew Dew.

This information of a Dew fighting the Indians combines with other official *Military Records* show that W.D. Pitts, Henry Lyell, and Addison Lewis all served in the Civil War, as well as Charles Siller, who served with the Union forces. Albert Beauchamp served in World War I, and Donald Orth in World War II.

*Artifacts* that we find in the plowed fields, in the walls, and under the house all are a part of the research of Linden. The pieces of dishes, bottles, buttons, pipe stems are similar to items found at Ball-Sellers House, at Stratford, and at Williamsburg--again confirming the 18th century life at Linden. There is still much for us to learn about the pieces we have found, that in themselves describe the kind of peo-

ple who lived there.

Perhaps the source that helps you feel closest to the people is photographs. The first photograph I found is the one that still remains a mystery. It was found, as the letter was, in the walls of Linden in 1978. I have shown it to everyone living who has the slightest connection to Linden, but its identity remains hidden. Since finding that first photo, however, people have given me pictures, and I now have photos of the Lewises, Sissons, Beauchamps, Lyells, Pitts, Sillers, Hutts. Perhaps the most meaningful ones are the portraits of Dorsey and Mary Beauchamp. Their granddaughter, Virginia Sanders, had taken them with her when we purchased Linden and she moved. However, in late 1980, she generously returned them, saying she felt they belonged there rather than anywhere else. I heartily agree, and once again Dorsey and Mary Beauchamp have taken up residency at Linden.

To reiterate some points about sources: we have been talking about research from what is known as *primary* sources--the original documents. I know that William Dew left a will because I have read it in the Warsaw Courthouse. Secondly, I have also pointed out the importance of *cross referencing*--checking what you find in one document with what you find in another. Third, I have pointed out how information can be obtained in various ways to meet certain purposes. We have discussed the tremendous importance of a good *index*. And finally, I have tried to distinguish between *fact and lore* in this business of research.

There are hunches or surmises that you begin to draw from your research, but they must remain that--pure conjecture. For example, I will share my premise on the naming of Linden. The first time that the name "Linden" was ever used in any document was in 1868 by Henry Lyell. After this research, I am convinced that his first wife, Fanny Pitts Lyell, was instrumental in the naming. She came from the Pitts family of Essex County, who lived in a beautiful old house, still standing today on Rt. 17, named Linden. R.L. Pitts, her father, had married Maria Dobyns of Richmond County and moved there to reside in Maria's family home, the famous "Indian Banks," a large brick structure built in 1699. Thus Fanny had strong ties with two houses that had names. When she married Henry Lyell in 1851 and went to live in a humble dwelling with no name--well, I believe you can see why I think Fanny Lyell was the one who named our Linden.

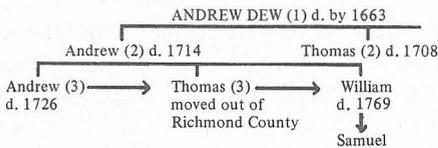
Of personal interest is the tie that I found between the Lewises and my life in Arlington. Their great granddaughter Eugenia Vogel of Newell, Iowa, told me that Addison and Ginny Lewis are buried in Falls Church. In a search one snowy morning last winter of Oakwood Cemetery, we found the graves of Addison and Virginia Lewis--less than 5 miles from our Arlington home. Another tie: Part of the reason that Don and I bought Linden and restored it, was the interest that we had gained through the Arlington Historical Museum--the Hume School Building. In my search, I have discovered that the Lewis granddaughter, Ora Lewis, living today in Seattle, Washington, attended Hume School in the early 1900's.

This brings me to my conclusion of my talk, but not to the end of my research. I hope that never ends, for I have truly found that the joy is in the search. As long as there is some mystery, some unanswered question, I will relentlessly pursue. George Washington Carver said in reference to his research work, "Anything will render up its secrets if you love it enough." Linden is a greatly beloved house, and it has richly rendered up delightful accounts of the people who have lived there.

\*This paper was presented to the Arlington Historical Society at its meeting on September 10, 1982.

LAND TITLE TO LINDEN FARM  
Richmond County, Virginia

<u>Dates of Ownership</u>		<u>Acre at Purchase</u>	<u>How Acquired</u>	<u>Recorded</u>
1977-	DONALD J. & MARTHA B. ORTH	20	Purchase from Sanders	DB 111/410
1973-1977	VIRGINIA BEAUCHAMP SANDERS	28	By Grandfather's will	WB 14/432
1949-1973	WILLIAM FRANKLIN BEAUCHAMP	28	By Father's will	WB 14/432
1944-1949	EDMONIA SCHOOLS BEAUCHAMP	28	By Husband's will	WB 14/432
1909-1944	DORSEY BASSEY BEAUCHAMP	50+	\$1100 from Lewis	DB 41/325
1900-1909	WM. ADDISON & VIRGINIA LEWIS	170	\$1700 from Becker	DB 38/84
1898-1900	HENRY M.L. & SOPHIE BECKER	170	\$1600 from Penn	DB 37/102
1896-1898	ROBERT T. PENN	170+	\$1600 from Hutt	DB 36/446
1895-1896	HIRAM M. & LAURA C. HUTT	165-170	\$1600 from R.H. Lyell, Commissioner for Pitt estate	DB 36/264
1883-1895	WILLIAM DANDRIDGE PITTS	184	\$2000 from C.G. Siller	DB 33/339
1874-1883	CHARLES G. & JULIA H. SILLER	200	\$2000 from Frank Siller	DB 32/38
1873-1874	FRANK & SARAH A. SILLER	200	\$3300 from Lyell	DB 31/458
1871-1873	R.H. & ELIZABETH LYELL	360	\$5012 (price includes 2 tracts of Henry Lyell's land)	Chancery Suit #105 DB 31/460
1851-1871	HENRY LYELL	360+	\$2520 from Armstrong	DB 28/310
1850-1851	JOHN & MELISSA ARMSTRONG	360	\$1800 from Cox	DB 28/215
1846-1850	CARLOS COX	370	\$2000 from Tayloe	DB 27/293
1845-1846	WILLIAM H. TAYLOE	371+	\$1000 debt of Saunders	DB 26/412 WB 25/190
1826-1845	EDWARD S. SAUNDERS	150	By Grandfather's will	WB 10/124
1780-1826	EDWARD SAUNDERS	150+	\$3000 Va. from Dew	DB 15/18
1770-1780	SAMUEL & BETTY DEW	150	\$141 Va., per father's will to self & divide land.	DB 13/170 WB 7/54
1726-1770	WILLIAM DEW	half of 300	By brother Andrew's will(3) Other half to brother Thomas(3)	WB 5/30
1714-1726	ANDREW DEW(3)	300	By father Andrew's will(2)	WB 3/174
? -1714	ANDREW DEW (2)	300	Unclear how Andrew got it back from brother Thomas (2)	?
1705- ?	THOMAS DEW (2)	300	From brother Andrew (2)	DB 4/19
1663-1705	ANDREW DEW (2)	300	Inherited from father Andrew (1)	*
1661-1663	ANDREW DEW (1)	300	Purchased from Bedwell & Powell, who purchased from John Williams, a part of his 1800 acre patent.	Old Rappahanock DB 1656-64/194



\*In a gift of cattle to her two children on 7/12/1663, Ann Dew, Widow of Andrew (1) stipulated that son Andrew (2) receive one-third, and Thomas (2) receive two-thirds, since "Thomas had not land left him by his Father." (Ref: Old Rappahanock DB 1663-68/1.)