



# NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: LEIGH ANN MCKELWAY  
Phone: 748-1623  
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## Board of Supervisors to vote on Eppington donation

The Chesterfield County Board of Supervisors is expected to vote on Wednesday, Aug. 23, on accepting a donation of Eppington, a colonial plantation home, and 43.8 acres of land. Discussions of the donation have been under way for about a year between the Parks and Recreation Department of Chesterfield County and Parker E. Cherry, a member of the Hinds family, which owns Eppington. The donation would include the house, the lawn (which includes a cemetery with markers dating to the 1800s) and a surrounding buffer of trees.

Eppington, the ancestral home of the Eppes family, is located one mile from the Appomattox River in the Matoaca District of Chesterfield County. No value has been placed on the donation, according to Parks and Recreation Director M.D. "Pete" Stith Jr., because "it's impossible to attach a dollar figure" to the site's historical significance. "Because of its ties to the Eppes family and to Thomas Jefferson, Eppington is a very important site for Chesterfield County and the state of Virginia," Stith said.

Although it is in good shape for a house that was built more than 200 years ago, Eppington will need some renovation before it can be opened to the public. "Within a year, we expect to be able to offer limited, supervised tours of the grounds of Eppington," Stith said. "Eventually, we hope to open the house for public tours."

The donation process began Aug. 1, 1988, when Mary Ellen Howe, Chairman of Chesterfield County's Preservation Committee, was "inspired to pick up the phone and ask Mr. Cherry if he and his family would consider donating Eppington to the county," she said. "He called me back the next day and asked me to set up a meeting with county officials. He thought the donation was a good idea."

If the Board of Supervisors votes to accept Eppington, it would become the second historic home for which the county has assumed responsibility; Magnolia Grange is also overseen by the county through the Chesterfield Historical Society.

Another Eppington-related donation is possible. Chesapeake Corp. uses a large tract of land next to Eppington for lumbering. The Parks and Recreation Department has met with representatives of Chesapeake Corp. and is "engaged in positive discussions about the donation of a 100-foot right of way for a road and a buffer of trees," Stith said.

### History of Eppington

Built ca. 1765-1775, Eppington draws its name from its early owners, the Eppes family, who were major landowners in the area as early as the mid-1600s. Col. Francis Eppes, a Burgess from Henrico County, was the first owner of the property. His son Richard Eppes (who served as Burgess from the new county of Chesterfield) inherited the site. His 4,000 acre holdings then descended to Francis Eppes V (1747-1808), who built Eppington.

Today, the house is virtually the same as when it was described more than 100 years ago by a later Francis Eppes

— more —

Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation Department  
P.O. Box 40 ♦ Chesterfield, Virginia ♦ 23832

(the son of John Wayles and Mary Jefferson Eppes):

"The mansion house itself, an old-fashioned, two-story building, with hipped roof in the centre and wings on the sides ... and with piazzas front and rear, was placed at the extreme side of a large level or lawn, covered with green sward, extending to a considerable distance in front, and in the rear to the low grounds of the Appomattox, a mile off. In front, over the neighborhood road which skirted the lawn, was situated the garden, long famous in the vicinity for its fine vegetables and fruit; and to the right of the lawn, as you entered, was an extensive orchard of the finest fruit, with the stables between ....

"The mansion, painted a snowy white, with green blinds to the windows, and its rows of offices at the end, was almost imbedded in a beautiful double row of the tall Lombardy poplar – the most admired of all trees in the palmy days of old Virginia – and this row reached to another double row or avenue which skirted one side of the lawn, dividing it from the orchard and stables. The lawn in front was closed in by a fence with a small gate in the middle and a large one on either extremity, one opposite the avenue of poplars, and the other at the end of the carriage-way which swept around it."

Thomas Jefferson was a well-known visitor to Eppington. He and Francis Eppes V married half-sisters, the daughters of John Wayles of Charles City County. After the death of his wife in 1782, Jefferson left his two youngest daughters at Eppington while he went to serve as Minister to France. Two-year-old Lucy Jefferson died of whooping cough and was buried at Eppington. Mary Jefferson, who was 4 when she moved to Eppington, grew up to marry her cousin, John Wayles Eppes, and live at Eppington until she died in 1804.

As well as being brothers-in-law, Jefferson and Francis Eppes V shared an interest in agriculture. Francis Eppes (the son of John Wayles and Mary Jefferson Eppes) continued his description, saying: "The plantation was quite an extensive one, and in the days of my grandfather, [Francis Eppes V], was remarkably productive. Indeed, it could hardly have been otherwise, under such management as his; for he was eminent for his skill both in agriculture and horticulture; and I have heard Mr. Jefferson, who knew him intimately, say he considered him not only 'the first horticulturist in America,' but a man of the soundest practical judgment on all subjects that he had ever known."

In 1796, Eppington was acquired by the Thweatt family, which married into the Eppes family. The site passed through several hands before it was acquired by William and Annie Hinds of Pittsburgh, Pa., in the late 1800s. The house is owned today by the grandchildren and grandchildren-in-law of William and Annie Hinds: Parker E. Cherry, Virginia Cherry Brown, Mrs. William F. Cherry and Jerome T. Cherry. They wish to make the donation of the site in the name of the Hinds family.

## **Description of Eppington**

Eppington is registered as a Virginia Historic Landmark and as a Chesterfield County Historic Landmark. The historic roadway sign about Eppington reads:

### **Eppington**

Two and one-third miles south stands Eppington, built in the late 1760s by Francis Eppes and his wife Elizabeth Wayles Eppes, half-sister to Martha Wayles Jefferson. Thomas Jefferson frequently visited Eppington. Lucy Jefferson, his daughter, died and was presumably buried at Eppington in 1786. Mary Jefferson, another daughter, was married to John Wayles Eppes, the son of Francis and Elizabeth Wayles Eppes in 1797, and subsequently resided at Eppington.  
(Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission 1975)

The exterior of the house is painted white; its roof is red. The peaceful setting of the lawn offers deer a place to graze at dusk.

The original structure (built ca. 1765-1775) consists of a parlor, dining room, living room and bedroom downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs. The downstairs rooms feature high ceilings, raised paneling and original wooden floors, joined

by pegs. In the parlor, the hand-hewn timbers and bricks that were made on site can be seen. The dining room includes a sideboard that was built on site by a traveling carpenter. The windows in the house contain the original wavy glass. The only outbuilding that remains standing is a garage/carriage house located to the right as one faces Eppington. A chimney from the old kitchen stands behind the house, and farther back is the foundation of the barn. Majestic oak trees – along with apple and walnut trees – shelter the back of the house.

An addition to the house (built in the 1880s) consists of a kitchen, pantry and bathroom downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs.

The cemetery that is located at Eppington contains several markers, including one for the builder of Eppington, Francis Eppes V (who died on July 4, 1808, at age 61) and his wife Elizabeth (who died on June 10, 1810, also at age 61).

## Note

Most of the information in this news release concerning the history of Eppington and its inhabitants was derived from:

Chesterfield County – Early Architecture and Historic Sites, by Jeffrey M. O'Dell (County of Chesterfield, Virginia, 1983).

"Mary Jefferson and Eppington," *Virginia Cavalcade*, by Bettie Woodson Weaver, Autumn 1969.