

The Castle
New Kent County, Virginia

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Virginia

Historic American Buildings Survey
Major Eugene Bradbury, A.I.A., District Officer
210 East Franklin Street, Richmond, Virginia

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THE CASTLE
New Kent County, Virginia

Owner: Dr. J. C. Gregory's heirs, Tunstall Station, Virginia

Date of Erection: No documentary evidence has been found but the existing original work indicates that the building was erected in the latter part of the seventeenth century.

Architect:

Builder: Probably built by Captain Joseph Forster, whose name appears in the Vestry Book of St. Peter's Church, New Kent County, Virginia, under date of 1686 Ann. Dom. and at subsequent periods. Was originally known as "Foster's Castle."

Present Condition: The building is well preserved, practically all of the original brickwork, except where changes have been made in the openings, intact and in sound condition. The original brickwork was whitewashed clearly distinguishing the old work from the later work which is red brick uncoated. The original structure is, therefore, well defined as a story and a half building with a wing or porch in front two stories high. The present owner remembers it so with dormers on each side of the porch. In 1874, it was altered by the father of the present owner, who raised the story and a half part to nearly two full stories by carrying up the brick walls and flattening the roof pitch, the roof of porch wing being also slightly raised. New windows were installed and a front porch and frame extensions have been added on the rear. It is doubtful if any of the interior is original.

Number of Stories: The main portion has a cellar with two stories above. The porch wing two stories with no cellar.

Materials of Construction: The chimneys, exterior walls and two partition walls in the first story are brick. The early brickwork above watertable is Flemish bond, with glazed headers. Below the watertable at the first floor level and on the ends of the main portion the bond is unusual and irregular, consisting generally of alternate courses of Flemish bond and stretcher bond. The bricks average in size $9\frac{1}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$ inches. The mortar appears to be composed of oyster shell lime and sand. The present roof is metal, with a plain wood box cornice. A concrete protecting base

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has been built around outside of wall just above grade, and inside of portions of wall up to floor beams. All interior walls and ceilings are plastered, except the spandrel and soffit of stairs which are panelled. The interior woodwork is painted a dark color. The closet walls each side of chimneys in the first floor and the interior partitions of the second floor are frame.

Other Existing Records: In the Encyclopedia of Virginia, Biography, Volume 1, is the following abstract:

"Joseph Foster, nephew of Captain William Bassett, first of that name in Virginia, came from Newport, Southampton County, England, and was a justice, of New Kent County, and burgese in 1688, and 1700-1702; vestryman of St. Peter's parish, New Kent, and Lieutenant-Colonel of the militia. He died about 1715, leaving issue."

The following abstract was taken from the William and Mary Quarterly, Historical Magazine, Volume XXIII:

"William Bassett in his will mentions his nephew Joseph Foeter, and this nephew settled in New Kent County, became Captain, Colonel, etc., and his descendants were leading citizens."

The William and Mary Quarterly, Historical Papers, dated 1893-94, records Joseph Foster as Captain Bassett's nephew who resided in the adjoining parish of St. Peter's.

According to the manuscript Vestry Book of St. Peter's Parish, New Kent County, Virginia, 1685-1758. Joseph Foster was appointed vestryman of the parish on the 17th of February, 1690 and Church Warden on the 28th of April, 1692. He was supervisor of the construction work of the "Brick Church" (later known as St. Peter's Church) which was begun in 1701 and finished in 1703. A vestry was held for St. Peter's parish at the House of Joseph Forster on the 4 March, 170 $\frac{1}{2}$. (This house probably was the "Castle," and, judging from architectural evidence, this building was erected prior to that date.

William Bassett is recorded in the Vestry Book of St. Peter's Parish as Church Warden. He may have been the uncle of Joseph Forster.

Robert A. Lancaster, Jr., in the Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, Volume XLIII, says:

"Foster's Castle, as it was originally called, was probably built between 1685 and 1690 and was the home of Colonel Joseph Foster, who was a Burgees from New Kent and sheriff of that county.

"Later the property was owned by Mrs. Maria Brumley and by William Payne Waring. It was purchased in 1872 by Dr. J. C. Gregory and is now owned by his family and occupied by Mr. Roger T. Gregory."

The article, Castle, a Fortified House, appears in the Virginia Historical Magazine, Volume XLIII:

"In his 'Tidewater Virginia' Paul Wilstaoh states that the word 'Castle' meant a fortified house. This seems to hold true in the case of 'Foster's Castle'. Dr. Junius Claiborne Gregory, the former owner, stated that a circular opening in the center front, now filled in, had been an opening through which the occupants had shot at Indians. In a large front room in the second story on either side of the chimney which juts out into the room is an oblong opening about one foot wide and two high, plastered, but with no door. No one knows the purposes of these recesses and no one seems even to have seen similar ones anywhere."

Additional Data: In an interview, Mr. Roger T. Gregory, one of the present owners, and occupant, in speaking of "The Castle," sometimes called "Foster's Castle", made the following statement:

"My father bought the house in 1872. There were two dormer windows to each room upstairs. "The Castle" was shaped as the letter "T". In 1873 or 4, my father raised the roof of the house about four or five feet, cut out the dormer windows and also the windows that were in the ends of the house. To each room on the first floor there were two small windows with a brick partition between. These were made into large windows. The interior of the house has never been changed. There are two closets in each of the downstairs rooms. The hall is identically the same as it was originally. New flooring has been put in all of the rooms except one. The stairway is original. The doors are original. This house was built between 1650 - 90. The original records of this property were destroyed when the Clerk's Office was burned during the Civil War in 1865. So far as I can learn, the property originally belonged to a man by the name of Foster. I have always thought that it was an original grant by the King of England, but to whom that grant was awarded, I do not know."

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Personal interview with Mr. Roger T. Gregory, Tunstall, Virginia,
December 19th, 1936.

Virginia Thompson
Historian

Approved: December 21, 1936

Eugene Bradbury
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