

## A Domestic View of William Fleming

Pamela Hutchison Garrett, 2018

William Fleming wore many hats in his lifetime – a privileged and educated man of Virginia, he was a student at William and Mary College in the early 1760's, and studied law under Patrick Henry. These preparations set him off on a career of public service that spanned more than fifty years. He served in the Virginia House of Burgesses and House of Delegates during the Revolutionary War years. He was also a member of the Continental Congress. Following the war he took up a variety of positions in the Virginia Court system, and served as the Chief Justice of Virginia's Supreme Court for fifteen years.

There are numerous accounts of William Fleming's service to his nation, but this story focuses on his service to family and friends – an opportunity, and responsibility that he took seriously during his lifetime. It is clear from the few "remembrances" of William Fleming that have been found, that he was admired and respected by his colleagues, and deeply loved and appreciated by his family and friends.

William Fleming was born on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 1736 – one of the younger sons of John Fleming and Mary Bolling of Virginia. His father's success as a plantation owner, and public servant, provided William with a solid education, and an introduction to important people. William Fleming's mother died in 1744, when he was still a young boy. John Fleming did not remarry, and he died twelve years later, as William was entering his adulthood.

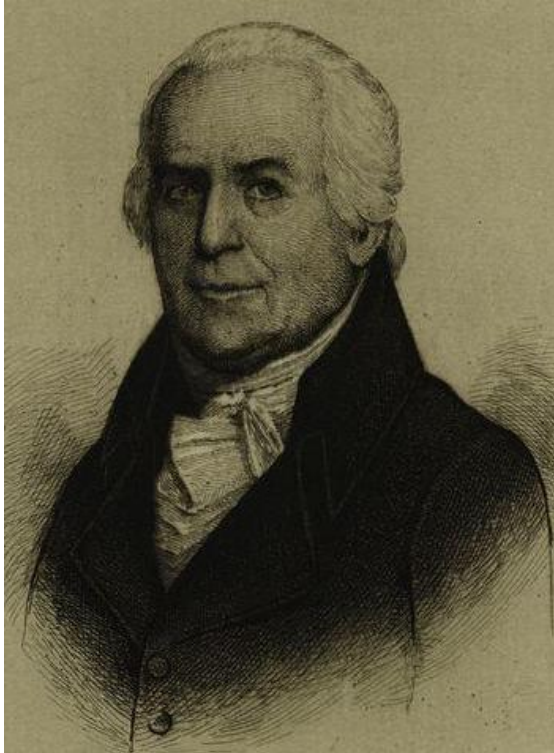
The Martha Markham letter (further detail below), gives a fun account of her grandfather William Fleming's early schooling:

*My great-grandfather Fleming [John Fleming] did not approve of sending children to school young. So when my grandfather [William Fleming] was eight years old he went to his father and told him he wanted to go to school. He told him certainly he should go. My great grandfather had a home on Rivanna river, the school was on the other side. He had a little boat made for my grandfather and he set himself over the river every day to school. That was the beginning of his education.*

During William Fleming's childhood years the Fleming family lived primarily at Mount Pleasant in Cumberland (later Powhatan) county Virginia. When John Fleming died in 1756, he left this family home property to his third son, William Fleming, providing other properties for his older sons.

Some researchers suggest that the Mount Pleasant plantation was the same property where William Fleming lived out his adulthood – his home later being called "Summerville". But, this is not the case. William Fleming purchased Summerville from Robert Moseley in 1777. An excellent accounting of the plantation and its owners can be found in an article written by Harrison Ethridge, published in 1988 in the journal of the Chesterfield county Virginia Historical Society. Ethridge indicates:

*Summerville is one of western Chesterfield County's earliest documented residential sites . . . Straddling both sides of Michaux Creek, it was close to Powhatan County . . . [Today located] at the end of Castleford Drive in the Salisbury development.*



There is considerable variance in the date given for the marriage of William Fleming and Elizabeth "Betty" Champe. The date of 5th October 1766 appears to be the most reliable. This would place William Fleming at age thirty, and his wife a few years younger. Betty Champe was the daughter of John Champe and Jane Thornton of "Lamb's Creek" in King George county Virginia. John Champe has been marked as "one of the wealthiest and foremost men of the colony"; his "six daughters, all noted beauties . . . "

William Fleming and Betty Champe were married for about fifteen to twenty years, and four daughters survived into adulthood – Caroline Fleming, Jane Fleming, Lucy Champe Fleming, and Mary Bolling Fleming. It is not clear exactly when Betty Champe Fleming died, but it was probably between the years 1780 and 1790.

In 1905, Martha Markham, a granddaughter of William Fleming, wrote a letter to her niece Pattie Sleeper. William Fleming and his granddaughter Martha Markham both lived almost to the age of ninety years. Their lives crossed over for only about five years, but Martha must have carried forward the collective family memories:

*. . . You ask to know something of our grandfather . . . I am more familiar with the history on the Fleming side than the Markham . . . My mother [Lucy Champe Fleming Markham] was a perfect register . . . I am very familiar with her father's history, for I have never seen such devotion from a child to a father as hers --- such reverence and faith and certainly it was not misplaced for he was a grand man. He was the benefactor of his people. He was a man full of business but never neglected his neighbors and friends. His home was always filled, more like a place of resort than a private dwelling. The poor he never forgot. He was judge of the Court of Appeals forty years of his life, consequently away from his home a great deal of the time, but always had an eye to those who needed his help.*

*My grandmother [Betty Champe Fleming] his wife died young, left him with four little daughters. He kept them, always had some female relation living with him to help care for them. He was both father and mother to them. He had them educated at home. Their teachers were from England, a Mrs Dudley and a Mrs Livingston.*

*Summerville was the name of his home twelve miles from Richmond . . . I could tell you so many little things which I cannot write that I think would interest you about dear old Summerville, and that grand old home which was paradise to us all. My grandfather had all of his children and grandchildren to meet there every summer.*

William Fleming was called upon in particular and difficult ways to support and encourage his daughters and other female relations.

In his Will William Fleming described his “beloved” daughter, Caroline Fleming, “who at times is and for many years past has been afflicted with a mental malady that requires the particular compassion and kindness of all her friends.” The Will registers his concern for Caroline’s welfare, and it may have been a comfort to him when Caroline died in the year between the writing of his Will and his own death in 1824. She was just past the age of fifty, and had lived all of her life under her father’s care. William Fleming’s Will also left a mourning ring to Maria Branch, probably the daughter of his niece, “who has lived with me from her early infancy”.

William Fleming’s second daughter Jane was likely named for her grandmother, Jane Thornton Champe. She was the second of the Fleming girls to marry. In 1797 she was married to Beverley Stanard of Spotsylvania county Virginia. Sadly, the marriage was brief – she died at about the age of twenty-five, a young bride without children.

It is one of those interesting family facts of note that Mary Bolling Fleming, the youngest of the Fleming girls, also married a man named Beverley Stanard – distinguished from Jane Fleming’s husband as Beverley Chew Stanard. The Martha Markham letter explains:

*My other two aunts both married Beverly Stanard. They were own cousins. When Uncle Beverly asked Grandpa for Aunt Mary, he told him he had no objection to him, but if he married her, he should never take her from him. He had to come there, which he did. They raised their family there, lived and died at dear old Summerville.*

Mary Fleming and Beverley Stanard were married in 1799, and probably began their life together at Summerville. They were the parents of six surviving children. At some point they may have removed to a home nearby.

*William Fleming of Chesterfield and Beverly Chew Stanard and Mary Bolling (Fleming) his wife. William Fleming for the natural love and affection he hath and beareth for the said Mary Bolling, his daughter and for one dollar paid by BC Stanard, acres being a part of a tract of one hundred and twenty acres which William Fleming purchased of Joseph Smith known as Frank Walker’s place. Left to Joseph Smith by his grandfather, Francis Walker. Stanard must pay out one carload of indian corn yearly to Fleming.*

[source] Chesterfield county Virginia Deed Book 16, page 430; 9 June 1804.

Mary Fleming Stanard died in 1812, at the age of about forty-five. She left her husband with six young children between the ages of two and twelve. Within the year Beverley Chew Stanard married Eliza Smith (widow Watts), who brought her own three children into the Stanard home, and in short order, Beverley and Eliza added two more children to the busy household.

As William Fleming's death approached he had but one daughter left, Lucy Champe Fleming. Her story may have been the most challenging. She married John Markham in 1794, and set about over the next twenty-five years to produce twelve surviving children. John Markham had problems of his own – depression, or perhaps alcoholism. He was admitted to the Williamsburg Hospital for the Insane on at least two occasions, and William Fleming, along with John Markham's brother George, took over as legal guardians of his estate. There were many evidences of William Fleming's care for his daughter's large family.

William Fleming died on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 1824, after a long and fruitful life. He was eighty-seven years of age. A resolution presented by the Judges of the Virginia Court of Appeals, – *“this public expression of respect for the memory of a man, venerable for his advanced age, for his high station, for his long and faithful services, a gentleman, ever virtuous, honorable, most amiable and irreproachable, in private life; a citizen, who bore a patriot and a statesman's part in the revolutionary struggle which achieved our independence; a judge of this court from its first organization, and the president of it for fifteen years, who discharged the high duties of his station, with equal fidelity and modesty, with urbanity, dignity and impartial justice towards all.”*

The glowing tribute to William Fleming, the public man, was assuredly deserved. But, it can hardly be imagined, the loss that must have been felt by his remaining family and friends. As his granddaughter remembered, - “He was the benefactor of his people.” Speaking to his daughter's devotion, reverence and faith – “certainly it was not misplaced, for he was a grand man.”

Do you want to know more?

[Link to William Fleming in the database](#)

Further Reading:

The Ancestors and Descendants of John Rolfe . . . - The Fleming Family (continued); Virginia Magazine of History, Volume 24, 1916; pages 327-333.

[William Fleming at wikipedia](#)

Biographical Sketches of Judges - Judge Fleming; Virginia Reports: Jefferson - 33 Grattan, 1730-1880; Michie Company, 1902.

Sketch of William Fleming, the Third President of the Supreme Court of Appeals of Virginia; David J Mayes; Richmond, 1928.

Robert Bolling Woos Anne Miller: Love and Courtship in Colonial Virginia 1760; JA Leo Lemay; University Press of Virginia, 1990. Biographical Glossary includes brief sketch on William Fleming.

Summerville, A Vanished Plantation, Harrison M Ethridge; published in The Messenger, Vol 14, Oct 1988; journal of the Chesterfield Historical Society of Virginia.

Manuscripts of the Virginia Historical Society; Stanard Family; Mss1 St242 a 104-117.

Archives at Colonial Williamsburg; William Fleming Collection, 1773–1802; MS 1996.12; 14 items.

About the Photo:

In William Fleming's Will, probated in 1824 Chesterfield county Virginia, he bequeaths one portrait picture to his granddaughter Elizabeth Stanard. This is likely to be the oil portrait of William Fleming, ascribed to Cephas Thompson. The portrait was passed from Elizabeth Stanard Eggleston to her son William Fleming Eggleston of Birmingham Alabama. The Virginia Historical Society acquired a black and white photograph of the portrait through Mrs CM Chichester (Cassius Moncure Chichester married secondly Virginia Archer Page). There is no known familial relationship between Fleming and Chichester. Etchings taken from the portrait of William Fleming also appear in several books and archives. Today, the location of the original portrait is unknown. – Pam Garrett, June 2018.

**Feature: A Domestic View of William Fleming; written by Pamela Hutchison Garrett for Markham of Chesterfield website; 2018.**