# 'MALVERN HILL' WAS RARE SURVIVAL

by John Francis Speight
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About 15 miles below Richmond in Henrico County, on a high hill overlooking Route 5 and the James River, stands the vine-covered ruins of a charming old traditional house known as "Malvern Hill," for many generations the home of the Cocke Family.

Built of brick, about 1710, it replaced a timber-framed medieval structure believed to have been erected by Thomas Cocke I about 1663. This old place has an interesting history, marked by violence and blood-shed. It was here that the last battle of the "Seven Days' Fighting" in the War Between the States was fought, on July 1, 1862. The old place was bathed in the blood of more than 7,000 dead and gave the bloody conflict its name - "The Battle of Malvern Hill."

Almost in its front yard an engagement was fought between the troops of General Holms and General Warren, known as the battle of Malvern Cliffs or of Turkey Island Bridge. During this engagement and the battle of Malvern Hill, fought the following day, this house was used as headquarters by General Porter and was a signal station in communication with the Federal gun boats in the James River, toward which it fronted. This station directed the fire of the Federal boats while shelling the Confederate positions.

Tyler's seige guns were stationed on the edge of the lawn west of the house. Traces of earthworks and artillery emplacements may still be seen along the foot of the hill on Route 5.

This was not the first time the rattle of sabers and muskets was heard at "Malvern Hill." During the Revolutionary War Lafayette encamped here for the protection of Richmond against the British by way of the James River. In 1813 several thousand men were garrisoned here to keep the British from a similar attack on Richmond.

Near here at the "curls" of the James was the home of Nathaniel Bacon, who, 1667, led a rebellion against the arbitrary governor, Sir William Berkeley. Records show that 40 men were stationed at Mr. Cocke's, "which is near the Henrico-Charles City line," to prevent plundering by the rebels. This could have meant Richard Cocke, of "Bremo," although "Malvern Hill" is nearest the Henrico-Charles City line.

At the time of its destruction by fire in 1905 the old house was cross-shape in plan and was one of the last cruciform, or cross-houses, to be built in Virginia. Its history dates back to 1640, or before, when the immigrant Richard Cocke was granted 1,700 acres upon the head of Turkey Island Creek.

The first house was probably erected soon after Thomas Cocke I married Margaret Jones, a widow, in 1663. By the particular stipulation in his father's will in 1665 in which he states "That she (his second wife) lay no claims to any part of that land formerly given by me to my son Thomas Cocke, but they may enjoy the same entirely to them and their heirs."

We know that Thomas Cocke was in possession of "Malvern Hill" by 1665. No document describing the first house has ever come to light. It was no doubt similar to the one destroyed in 1905, except that it was of frame construction. The chimneys, one of which is now standing, belonged to the first house and were ornamented with lozenge, or diamond, patterns of glazed brick called "block diapering." This type of ornamental brick work was found in many of the medieval houses. It is believed by some that the original house was burned about 1710 and was replaced by a brick house.

"Malvern Hill" was built during a transitional period of architecture in Virginia, from medieval to Georgian, and therefore had many characteristics of both. Some of its strongest characteristics of the medieval were its cross-shape plan, its one-room thickness, and absence of a partitioned off central hall. Some of its other features were definitely Georgian, such as dormer windows, Flemish bond brickwork, sashed windows, and a splayed roof.

The chimneys were originally outside chimneys, as they have tile washes and tooled mortar seams, which were concealed by the roof of the later house whose walls were extended flush with the outer edge of the chimneys, making them inside chimneys and forming closets on each side of the fireplace.

The walls at ground level are almost four feet thick. The walls of the later house no doubt framed those of the original, as the original walls were not stout enough to support a brick house. This would explain the difference in the size and texture of thebrick in the outside and inside of the basement walls, and their unusual thickness.

There were several houses of this type in Virginia in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Some of the best known were "Bacon's Castle," Surry County; "Christ Cross" and "Forster's Castle," New Kent County, and the Matthew Jones house at Fort Eustis, in Warwick County.

The chimneys of the Matthew Jones house, like those at "Malvern Hill," belong to an earlier house. At "Malvern Hill" a 12-foot square tower on the rear balanced a porch on the front, thereby forming a cross. In most medieval houses these towers were used as stairtowers, as at "Bacon's Castle." The tower at "Malvern Hill" has no staircase, but three diminutive chambers with fireplaces in each. The chimney on the rear of the tower was evidently a later addition, as the size and texture of the brick differ from those of the walls. On the front a small attic chamber above an arched vestibule porch was lighted by a small gable window. The small chamber on the second floor of the tower was lighted by two tiny segmented arched windows on each side of the chimney.

The west room was known as the parlor-hall and contained the staircase--there were no partitioned central halls in the seventeenth century Virginia houses. In this room, a partitioned or "boxed-in" staircase rose to a landing several feet above the floor, then turned and led to an unlighted passage on the second floor from which the four bedrooms were entered. The east room was used as a dining room and was entered from the basement kitchen by a small staircase on the left side of the huge chimney.

This basement kitchen, with its enormous arched fireplace which measured about five by five feet with two flues, was characteristic of the medieval house. The outside kitchen was not used extensively by the early planters before 1700. This we learn from the early Jamestown houses and "Green Spring" and "Bacon's Castle"--all had inside kitchens. Doubtless, the reason the Colonial gentleman set his kitchen apart from his mansion was to reduce the fire hazard, reduce heat in Summer and keep out cooking odors.

There were three fireplaces in the basement, which included one in the kitchen. The other two basement rooms were apparently used as laundry and distillery, where spirits for the plantation were manufactured. If other accommodations were necessary outside of the main house, they have since disappeared. The only dependency now standing is a small brick house which is largely of nineteenth century vintage.

At the time of its destruction in 1905 there was a framed wing on the west end of "Malvern Hill." It was in this framed structure that the fire originated. According to an eyewitness, wet quilts were spread out upon the roof of the main house to prevent the fire from spreading but to no avail. Its destruction was swift and complete, and another fine old house that had withstood time and the elements for hundreds of years was added to Virginia's long list of vanished houses.

In the last quarter of the seventeenth century there was a racetrack or a "race path" at "Malvern Hill." These early race courses were straight paths instead of the present oval or circular tracks. Such "race paths" were common throughout Virginia in the seventeenth century, where Virginians of all ranks and denominations gathered, but where only the gentleman had the privilege of betting; it was contrary to law for a laborer to enter a horse in a race or to place a bet. Racing was a sport for gentlemen!

The Cockes of "Malvern Hill" were men of first importance in the colony and held high office.

The name Richard Cocke appears many times in the early records of Virginia, and it is therefore difficult to determine which Richard Cocke was the progenitor of the Cocke family in Virginia. The name appears for the first time in Virginia Nov. 19, 1627, as Richard Cocke, purser of the ship "Thomas and John." Genealogists have never agreed upon the maiden name of Richard Cocke's first wife. There is strong evidence that she was Temperance Baley, daughter of widow Baley-Jordan-Farrar. The widow Jordan was given enduring fame as a defendant in a breach of promise suit in which she was sued by the Rev. Greville Pooley, minister of Westover Parish. This provided the unique instance of a woman being sued by a man for breach of promise.

Widow Jordan came to Virginia in the "Swan" in 1610. On the same ship were Sir George Yardley and his consort, Lady Temperance Flowerdew Yardley and is assumed to have named her daughter Temperance in compliment to Lady Yardley.

After the death of her first husband she married Samuel Jordan, of "Jordan's Journey" or "Beggar's Bush," which now lies in Prince George County about where the Hopewell ferry lands on that side of the James River. Just across the James where the ferry docks on the Charles City side was "Pace's Paines," the plantation of Richard Pace.

On that fateful day of March 22, 1622, when the Indians led by Opechancanough, Powhatan's brother, rose against the settlers and slaughtered nearly half the planters along the James River, Richard Pace rowed his boat across the James to Jordan's Point and warned Samuel Jordan of the danger. Jordan gathered his neighbors in his home, which he fortified and defended against the Indians so resolutely that not a life was lost there that day.

The next day William Farrar of "Farrar's Island" arrived at Samuel Jordan's, having escaped from his plantation, where 12 persons lost their lives. Thereafter, he remained at "Jordan's Journey," some three or four years and when Samuel Jordan died in March, 1623, exactly one year after the massacre, William Farrar became overseer for the widow Jordan. It was then she became engaged both to William Farrar and the Rev. Greville Pooley, who accused the widow of having jilted him and alleged that it was "nothing short of Skandelous for Mr. Farrar, rival, to be in ordinary dyett in Mrs. Jordan's house and to frequent her company alone."

This case was never decided, and early in 1625 William Farrar and Cicely Jordan were duly and happily married. By this time the settlers had begun to creep back to their plantations which had been abandoned during the massacre. It was then William Farrar took his wife and stepchildren to "Farrar's Island," or Dutch Gap, to live. This was a few miles above "Bremo," where Richard Cocke, the immigrant, patented land in 1637. As this is in the same community, it is quite possible that Richard Cocke courted and married his neighbor's daughter.

In 1814 "Bremo" passed out of the hands of the Cocke family as had "Malvern Hill" before it. Shortly after the Revolutionary War James Powell Cocke sold "Malvern Hill" to Robert Nelson, brother of Governor Nelson, son of Elizabeth Burwell and William Nelson, taking in exchange land in Albemarle County. Robert Nelson lived here from 1783 to 1800. Subsequently the "Malvern Hill" property was mortgaged to Charles Carter, of Shirley," but when he died in 1806 he left specific instructions that the executors should not foreclose on the home of his friends.

About 1888 a brick kiln was established at "Malvern Hill" for the purpose of making souvenirs commemorating the battle of Malvern Hill July 14, 1862, of the Civil War. "Malvern Hill" is now owned by W. H. Ferguson.