NEWS AND NOTES

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The Fauquier Historical Society

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Part I: Up From Poverty

Wallis Warfield, a Woman of the World

By JOHN TOLER
Newsletter Editor

As the 20th century draws to a close, many people will reflect on the "big events" that have occurred over the past 100 years.

While some may argue the superlatives – who was the most influential person of the past century, what was the greatest discovery, or what crime was more heinous than all the rest – others may be more interested in determining what was the greatest love story of the past 100 years.

During the first half of the century, most people in the western world would have been certain that the courtship and marriage of England's King Edward VIII (1894-1972) and American divorcee' Wallis Warfield (1895-1986), would unquestionably be the "Romance of the Century."

All of the elements were there: a forbidden love affair, intrigue at the highest levels, a disapproving family, and ultimately, great sacrifice in the name of love. Add to that every schoolgirl's dream of marrying a prince, and perhaps you have the makings of a contender for the title of "Romance of the Century."

There was an important local connection to this story. As recalled in an exhibit in the Old Jail Museum, Wallis Warfield lived on-and-off at the Warren Green Hotel in Warrenton from June 10, 1926 until early 1928, while awaiting a final divorce decree dissolving her marriage with her first of three husbands, Lt. Earl Winfield Spencer Jr., U.S.N.

As was true everywhere she went throughout her life, Wallis Warfield became part of the local social scene, and she made a name for herself in Warrenton. Her stay here would become an interesting footnote in the many writings that would later recount her unique climb to fame.

Mrs. Earl Winfield Spencer, in front of her home in San Diego, 1917.

While many Fauquier people met or socialized with Wallis Warfield, very few knew much about her background, other than the fact that it was her divorce that brought her here.

Less than a decade later, they would recall her connection with Warrenton when she became the central figure in the abdication of an English monarch.

Early Life

A close reading of even Wallis Warfield's most flattering biographies is noticeably vague about the circumstances surrounding the courtship and marriage of her parents, Teacle Wallis Warfield and Alice Montague.

The most sympathetic biographers paint a picture of her parents' "impetuous young love, early marriage," and the untimely death of her father.

Reminiscent of an old Horatio Alger story, most biographers recount the struggles of the young widow and her plucky child, prevailing against tough odds.

But British author Charles Higham, in his well-researched biography, *The Duchess of Windsor: The Secret Life* (McGraw-Hill, 1988), has uncovered many facts about the woman who became the Duchess of Windsor.

By contacting previously untapped sources, studying recently declassified government documents and judiciously applying the Freedom of Information Act, Higham dispels many of the myths about Wallis Warfield that have been perpetuated over the years.

The first startling revelation in Higham's book is the proof that Wallis Warfield was an illegitimate child, actually born in *1895* – a year before she claims to have been born.

Other biographers, content to take the lady at her word, never picked up on this fact, which Higham uncovered in a census of the Warfield household taken in 1900. Further proof lies in the fact that no birth certificate for Wallis Warfield ever existed.[1]

By the late 1800s, the Warfield and

(Continued on Page 3)

Fauquier Historical Society News

Historic Property Plaques will complete Walking Tour

By JOHN TOLER
Newsletter Editor

After revising the Fauquier Historical Society's popular "Walking Tour of Warrenton" in 1998, Fauquier Historical Society President Maxwell Harway thought it was important that the 55 properties on the tour be identified with numbered brass plaques.

Over the past year, a committee composed of board members and led by President Harway and Director Linda Anderson worked on a design, contacted a foundry headquartered in Chantilly, and worked out a price.

With the assistance of the Town of Warrenton, letters were sent recently to the owners of the properties on the tour, asking for their permission to have town crews install the plaques.

Warrenton Town Manager John Anzivino said he was happy to offer the services of the town to complete the project. "This is a good thing for everyone involved," he remarked.

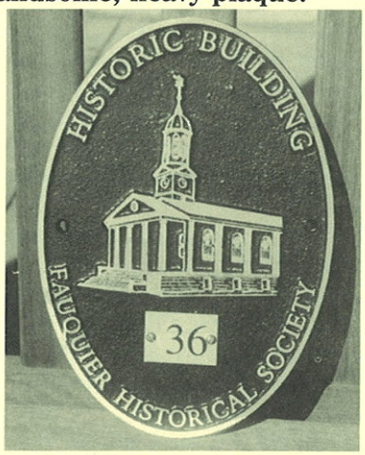
According to Harway, there are actually 135 properties in Warrenton that are 100 years old, or older.

President Maxwell Harway (left) and Warrenton Town Manager John Anzivino place one of the new historic designation plaques on the front of the Warren Green Hotel. Below right, a detail of the handsome, heavy plaque.

For the 80 or so historic houses and stores that are not on the walking tour, Harway had a number of extra plaques made that will be available for purchase by property owners.

Installation of the plaques by town personnel will follow, and while Harway does not know when all of the plaques will be up, he is pleased with the progress.

"We've come a long way since 1983, when we first started talking about this idea," said Harway.



NEWS and NOTES

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Annual Meeting Features Fashion Show

At the Annual Meeting of the Fauquier Historical Society on June 16, members enjoyed an evening of educational and stylish entertainment.

Society Vice President Janet Hofer arranged for members of an historical group from Leesburg that specializes in creating and modeling period dress to present the program.

The 16 models showed women's clothing styles and trends over the years, starting in the early 18th century and into the late 19th century. A narrator explained the background of each form of dress, and how it figured in the society of the time.

It was an enriching experience for all in attendance.

A model in period dress at the annual meeting in June.

Wallis

(Continued from Page 4)

the bridesmaids were Mary Kirk, Lelia Barnett and Renee' du Pont. A Navy honor guard accompanied the groom. Following the ceremony, Wallis tossed her bouquet, which was caught by Mary Kirk.

The couple honeymooned at the Greenbrier Hotel in West Virginia, and it was there that Wallis began to see her husband's dark side. Win had a drinking problem, and a twisted sense of humor to go along with it.

They returned to Pensacola – a "dry base" under LCDR Mustin – where Win continued his drinking.

Even though it was common knowledge that he was an alcoholic, Win avoided being disciplined. He toyed with his superiors by stashing gin bottles filled with water in strategic places, should he be questioned about drinking on duty.

Somehow, he escaped flying accidents, even though he was often drunk while at the controls of his aircraft. Commanders knew of his problem, and basically, his career was destined to go nowhere.

With the outbreak of World War I, Lt. Spencer was transferred to Boston, then to Hampton Roads, followed by yet another re-assignment to San Diego, which he and Wallis reached on Nov. 8, 1917.

On Aprtil 7, 1920, an important event in Wallis' life occurred. The Prince of Wales and his cousin, Louis Mountbatten, visited San Diego on their way to Australia aboard the *H.M.S. Renown*. An elaborate luncheon with the Prince was held on the *U.S.S. New Mexico*, and while many of their friends were invited, the Spencers were not.

This was probably due to the Win's drinking and his clashes with his superiors, who feared he might cause embarassment to the Navy. It was a galling, unpleasant episode that Wallis never forgot.

Win's relationship with Wallis continued to worsen. He became jealous if Wallis spoke to another man, and often abused her in private and humiliated her in public. She soon fell out of love with him. By then Wallis was aware of another extremely troubling secret: Win was bisexual.

For nearly five years, their marriage would founder. Why it lasted that long can only be explained that in those days, divorce for any reason was considered a disgrace.

Uncle Sol, who until his death held considerable sway over the family, would not permit the Warfields to be "disgraced" by divorce, regardless of the cost to Wallis.

Even when Win told Wallis' mother Alice that he was in love with another woman – and was far happier when he was away from Wallis – the family still counseled her against divorce.

By February 1923, Win Spencer's luck ran out, and his commanders permanently grounded him because of his drinking. He was transferred from Naval Aviation to Asiatic Fleet, and put in command of an old gunboat off Canton, China.

Wallis declined to join him there, and stayed in Washington, D.C. with Marianna Sands and Ethel Noyes, two old Navy friends from California.

In Washington, she began her career as a "professional houseguest," and through her friends, she realized a golden opportunity to enter the city's diplomatic society.

Early on, she met Prince Gelasio Caetani, an Italian diplomat. Married or not, she was determined to become involved with the powerful, handsome

LCDR "Win" Spencer, later in his naval career.

prince, and had a short but intense affair with him. They remained friends; it was Caestani who first introduced Wallis to Fascism, a political movement that was gaining momentum in Europe.

Later, Wallis initiated an affair with Felipe Espil, first secretary to the Argentine Embassy. But soon Espil became involved with another woman. Wallis was enraged.

"In an excess of jealousy, she attacked Espil, clawing his cheeks until they bled," wrote Higham. "He dropped her at once; she decided to give up Washington, where her defeat made her a laughingstock."[4]

There seemed nowhere else for Wallis to go, but back with her husband, stationed in China.

China Adventure

On July 17, 1924, Wallis began the arduous trip from Brooklyn to Hong Kong aboard the *U.S.S. Chaumont*, one of four female Navy dependents assigned to a cramped cabin on the old troopship.

After stops at Pearl Harbor and Manila, she reached Hong Kong on September 8.

China was in the midst of a civil war, and there was a growing resentment among the populace against foreigners, and foreign influence.

Win met her there, where his ship, the gunboat *U.S.S. Pampanga was* undergoing repairs and refueling.

Win and Wallis stayed in an apartment owned by the Navy in Kowloon, and for a time, it seemed that their marriage could be patched up. In mid October, the *Pampanga*, with Win in command, was sent to Canton.

Upon his return, they spent time together in Hong Kong, where Win introduced Wallis to the "singsong houses," which were actually strange Oriental brothels.

It makes no sense that she would go anywhere near a brothel, but she did. Even in her autobiography, she mentions these visits, but she says that Win forced her to go to the singsong houses, where he "subjected me to taunts and humiliation."[5]

At about that time, Win began drinking again, and announced that he was moving into another apartment in Hong Kong with a handsome young man, a painter of some note. That was too much. Wallis was convinced that the marriage could not be saved.

She left Hong Kong, first going to Shanghai to file for divorce. But she didn't have enough money, and soon became involved in other things. But this was just the beginning. Her adventure in China would take many strange turns.

Wallis moved to Peking and connected with Katherine Rogers, an old friend from her days as a Navy wife in California.

Katherine's first husband, a naval officer, had been killed. Her new husband, Herman Rogers, was the son of a wealthy American family that had made their fortune in railroads. Rogers, who had retired from the family business at age 35 to pursue a writing

(Continued on Page 6)

Wallis

(Continued from Page 3)

have dealt with this question in numerous ways, and all agree that while Wallis was not an outstanding beauty, she did have obvious sex appeal. It is recalled that her most outstanding physical characteristic was her eyes, which were an unusual shade of blue.

But more importantly, she had a natural ability that allowed her to attract attention to herself, and to quickly establish close relationships with people she was interested in getting to know.

This Wallis accomplished in a most intelligent manner. She would learn as much as she could about the person she had targeted, including his interests, so that she could converse intelligently with him and create a favorable impression. The strategy – albeit shallow – worked very well for her throughout her life.

"Debutante Days" for Wallis Warfield began in late 1913.

The "Flying Yankee" coach in front of *Burrland*, near Middleburg.

Although her rebellious streak and interest in other things kept her from excelling in school, Wallis completed her studies at Oldfields. At age 18, it was time for her to make her debut into Baltimore society, which she did at the Bachelor's Cotillon in December 1913.

Uncle Sol Warfield provided funding for the event – evening gown, transportation, flowers, etc.

Wallis was not the most beautiful girl at the ball, but by using all of her gifts, she was soon the most popular debutante among the young men.

"In the wake of that glorious night, Wallis considered herself a woman," wrote Higham. "Wallis was man-mad ... asked to sum her up in one word, a contemporary said she was 'fast.' She was especially attracted to men in uniform."[3]

After her debut, Wallis became a popular figure among the young Baltimore set, invited to dances, plays and to march in the Easter Parade.

At the time, she was looking for a husband, and had nearly made up her mind to marry a young man named Carter Osbourne; however, he was posted to Mexico with Gen. John Pershing's army to fight Pancho Villa, and was not available.

First Marriage

In the meantime, her grandmother Anna died, leaving her a $4000 inheritance. In an effort to get away from her mourning, depressing family, she accepted an invitation from her cousin, Corrine Mustin, to join her and her husband, Lieutenant Commander Henry C. Mustin, U.S.N., at his new assignment in Pensacola, Fla.

LCDR Mustin, a pioneer naval aviator, was in charge of the new Naval Air Station there. Wallis joined the Mustins in Florida in April 1916.

She enjoyed her stay from the beginning, and before long, she had met several of the other naval aviators

Wallis (right) in "hobbleskirt race" at *Burrland*.

stationed on the base. At a luncheon arranged by Cousin Corrine, she met Lt. Earl Winfield "Win" Spencer Jr., Naval Aviator No. 11, who swept her off her feet.

Son of a wealthy Chicago stockbroker, Win Spencer seemed to offer everything Wallis sought in a husband: money and good looks, as well as an element of danger.

They soon fell in love, and Win proposed.

In June – less than three months after coming to Pensacola – Wallis returned to Baltimore to discuss their proposed marriage with her mother and Uncle Sol. In July, shortly after a hurricane wrecked the base at Pensacola, Win came to Baltimore to meet the

Portrait of Wallis Warfield at the time of her engagement to Navy Lt. "Win" Spencer.

family, and won their instant approval.

In August, Win brought Wallis home to Illinois to meet his parents, and likewise she won their approval. The engagement was announced on Sept. 25, with the wedding date set for Nov. 8, 1916.

The large wedding, conducted after dark at Christ Episcopal Church, Baltimore, was a grand affair. Uncle Sol gave away the bride, and included among

(Continued on Page 5)

Wallis

(Continued from Page 1)

Montague families were well-established in Baltimore, and both could proudly trace their roots back to feudal England. And although the members of both families were long-time residents of Maryland, they considered themselves Southerners.

There was one significant difference: the Warfields enjoyed greater financial success and higher social standing than the Montagues, a fact that was often pointed out to them.

Matriarch of the Warfield clan was Anna Emory Warfield. Anna lived in a four-story row house in a quiet part of town with her son, Solomon D. Warfield, a successful banker and investor who later became the president of Seaboard Airline Railway.

Teackle Warfield, Anna's youngest son, suffered for years with tuberculosis. In the late 19th century, male tuberculosis patients were forbidden to cohabit with women, in order to avoid spreading the disease. But that didn't stop Teackle from falling in love with Alice Montague, then 24 years old.

The couple conducted their affair in secret until Alice became pregnant.

The situation represented a potential disgrace for both families, so the young couple was sent to live at Blue Ridge Summit, a health resort on the Maryland-Pennsylvania border early in 1895.

The Warfields said that the move was made in an effort to treat Teackle's ill health; Alice was kept indoors and out-of-sight for her entire pregnancy.

When it became apparent that the baby was coming, Dr. Lewis Miles Allen, a postgraduate medical student from Baltimore, was called to make the delivery. According to Higham, "Not only was the birth the only Warfield or Montague advent that was never featured anywhere in print, but the baby, named Bessie Wallis Warfield, was the first Warfield not to be baptized ... birth out-of-wedlock was sufficient reason ... for this grave verdict."[2]

Teackle and Alice were finally married in a simple ceremony on November 19, 1896, in the rectory of an Episcopal church. No family members attended.

But even before then, their situation was desperate. Teackle's health continued to deteriorate, and soon, he was unable to work. They were forced to live for a while in a cheap hotel, and things got worse. The Warfield family at last stepped in to help, allowing them to move into the large family home in Baltimore. Teackle died on November 15, 1897.

Mother and child, Alice Montague and Bessie Wallis Warfield.

Alice and Wallis lived with the Warfields for about five years after Teackle's death, but the arrangement was far from happy. Grandmother Anna ruled the household with an iron hand, and never let Alice forget that she and her daughter were living there as charity cases. It was not a pleasant existence, but it was the best option available.

In 1902, Alice's sister, Bessie Merryman, took her and Wallis in shortly after her the death of her husband, auctioneer David B. Merryman. They were a welcome addition to Aunt Bessie's empty home, although money was constantly a problem.

Wallis began kindergarten, where she began to exhibit the character traits that would shape her life, including the determination to get what she wanted, and to be first in everything she did. Later, she attended the Arundell School in Baltimore, where her strong personality traits continued to develop.

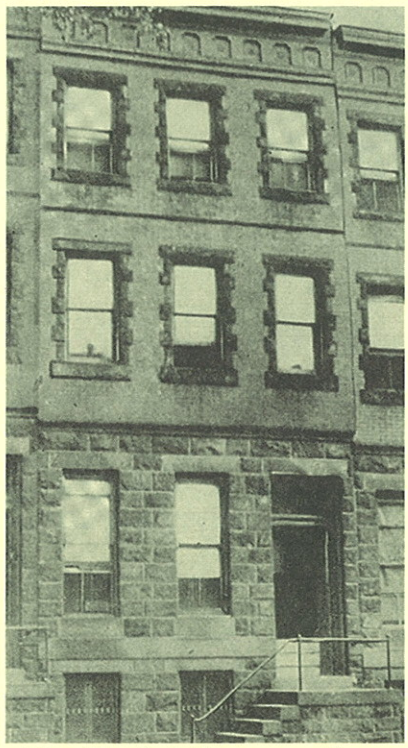
In 1908, Alice married John Freeman Rasin, a Baltimore politician and businessman. Wallis, then 13, resented sharing her mother with another person and created quite a fuss, but the wedding went ahead anyway, this time attended by members of the Warfield and Montague families.

In October 1912, Wallis was enrolled at the Oldfields School in Glencoe, Md., a very strict and traditional girls' school. It was here where she made a number of significant friendships with society girls, most notably Mary Kirk, of the Kirk family known for their fine silverware, and Renee' du Pont, whose father was a principal in the international chemical company.

It was about this time when Wallis began making trips into our part of Virginia, visiting her cousin Lelia Barnett at *Wakefield Manor*, near Front Royal, and attending summer camp at *Burrland*, outside of Middleburg, with other Oldfields girls. Miss Charlotte Noland, who later founded Foxcroft School, owned *Burrland*.

By now a young woman, her interest in boys was awakening. Lloyd Tabb (1892-1960), whose parents owned *Glenora*, outside of Middleburg, was the heartthrob of most of the girls at *Burrland*.

Often, Lloyd would visit the camp with "The Flying Yankee," a huge, antique horse-drawn coach that could carry a number of girls around the countryside, or back to *Glenora* for tennis (chaperoned, of course).



The Warfield home on East Preston Street, Baltimore.

While not the prettiest and by far the poorest of the girls, Wallis pursued young Lloyd with the same determination that she had for everything else, and by mid-summer, he was her steady beau.

What was her attraction? Biographers

(Continued on Page 4)

Wallis

(Continued from Page 5)

career, was serving as an intelligence officer attached to the U. S. Embassy.

Wallis needed a place to stay. The Rogers appreciated the company of a fellow westerner, so they invited Wallis to live with them.

According to Higham, Wallis "entered a bizarre *menage a trois*" with the Rogers, which ultimately ended – as one might expect – in tension and jealousy.[6]

Back home in 1926, Wallis (center) posed in Oriental costume.

By the end of the winter of 1924, Wallis had had enough of this situation and returned to Hong Kong, where out of sheer desperation, she tried to patch things up with Win.

But once again, it didn't work, and by mid-June, Wallis returned to Shanghai. Win's overseas tour was over, and he was sent back to the U. S.

Wallis elected to stay behind in China. She still had her Navy wife's allotment to live on, and was free to travel and make friends. She wasn't abandoned there; it was her choice to stay. She would get by.

During the summer of 1925, Wallis became involved with Count Galeazzo Ciano, 21, a student and the son of an Italian admiral who was one of Mussolini's early supporters. At the time, Ciano was on a "reconnaissance trip" to Peking.

Higham quotes Mrs. Milton E. Miles, whose husband also served on the *Pampanga*: "Wallis went up the coast to Qunhuangdao, the beautiful summer resort. Ciano came down from Peking to spend a lot of time with her there. It was the gossip among us Navy wives in Hong Kong. It was an open scandal."[7]

Wallis became pregnant by Ciano. Since such blatant adultery would have cost her much in a divorce and probably would have ended her husband's naval career, she "attempted an abortion, which destroyed her chances of ever having a child, and caused her severe gynecological problems that dogged her the rest of her life," wrote Higham.

In severe physical distress, she entered the Women's Hospital in Hong Kong on August 20. After minimal recovery, she left China for home on the *S.S. President McKinley*, arriving in Seattle on Sept. 8, 1925. Upon reaching the States, she was immediately hospitalized again.

She referred to the cause of her condition as "an obscure internal ailment" [8] in her autobiography.

Wallis headed east by train as soon as she was able to do so. When Win found out that she was ill, he met her train in Chicago. He accompanied her to Washington before returning to Hampton Roads, where he assumed a new command.

Wallis stayed with her mother for about three weeks to recuperate, and then visited with the Barnetts at *Wakefield Manor*. While there, she decided to go ahead with the divorce.

Acting on the advice of the Barnett's attorney, Aubrey "Kingfish" Weaver, of Front Royal, she made plans to take up residence in Warrenton, and file for divorce there.

Footnotes

[1] Higham, Charles, *The Sectet Life of the Duchess of Windsor*, McGrew-Hill, c. 1988 Page 9.

[2] Ibid

[3] Ibid., page 22

[4] Ibid., page 42

[5] Windsor, Wallis Warfield, *The Heart Has Its Reasons*, David McKay Co., c. 1956. Page 95

[6] Higham, page 54

[7] Ibid., page 56

[8] Windsor, page 109

Coming in January 2000

Part II:

Wallis Warfield's Year in Warrenton

Romance, Abdication and Exile

Celebrating the Visit of Gen. Lafayette

An ambitious undertaking by the Society

Society Project Update

For the Year 2000

The Fauquier Historical Society

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