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NEWS FROM WESTON

SUMMER 2019

Letter from the President

It's our 60th anniversary!

Thanks to the support of loyal friends and newcomers, the responsibility of owning Weston for 60 years has made for a remarkable adventure in research, preservation and involving the community in local history and storytelling. This adventure has also established a meaningful legacy for those who lived at, worked at and cared for Weston for hundreds of years.

As you may remember, the Warrenton Antiquarian Society (WAS) was bequeathed 10 of the original 469 acres of Weston when Charles Nourse's last surviving child, Charlotte, passed away in 1959. This property, then as now, was surrounded by fertile fields, native woodlands, and the close-knit railroad community of Casanova, Virginia. With a main house, numerous agricultural buildings, a remaining slave and worker quarter, Weston was both a testament to earlier times and a property with an impressive story but in a state of disrepair.

Sixty years later, we are still asking and answering the big question we were faced with in 1959: What does it mean to maintain and share the history and resources of Weston? Our mission, "preserving, interpreting and providing educational resources related to local agricultural, community and family histories" requires this.

Over the past months, more than 500 local school children and other non-school visitors have come to Weston to learn about advances in agriculture, science and culture, and experience aspects of nineteenth and twentieth-century farm life, including the use of tools for grinding corn, churning butter, winnowing seeds, sheering sheep and shoeing horses.

In addition to these tours, other activities since 2018 have included: training new docents and expanding the knowledge of experienced docents with updated information; holding an annual Open House featuring the Virginia's Slave Housing Project and Weston's own effort at slave-cabin preservation; receiving and researching donated items (a cream separator, tin ware, and books and papers of the Nourse family); repairing Timber Barn tools, (a corn grinder and homemade butter churn); installing electric lights inside this barn to enhance our visitors' experience and its display of tools; assessing the failing main house's drain field and contracting a design for a new system; planting a new garden in honor of Joan Semple, one of the Antiquarians' long-standing members who contributed much to Weston's gardens and landscaping; and updating WAS Bylaws and five-year strategic plan. Most recently, two local Boy and Girl Scout troops built and donated two benches and a picnic table.

At our Friends of Weston Tea on September 29, we look forward to honoring Weston's friends and donors who have made all this work at Weston possible. As a result of your support, Weston has become one of Fauquier County's most completely preserved nineteenth-century farmsteads and an American treasure.

We hope you'll attend the Tea and, perhaps, bring along some of your own Weston memories and maybe even a photo or two we can post and add to our album. Your interest and generosity have enabled Weston to survive and prosper.

Gratefully,

Mary Ashton

A Growing Trend: School Tours at Weston

By Beth Lynn

This past school year 290 students from Fauquier County Public Schools toured Weston. Their visits were funded by a grant from the County school division, which has renewed the funding for the coming year. This support speaks volumes about student experiences at Weston, an historic site surrounded by forests and farms. Students are immersed in a rural setting where an old farmhouse and its six dependencies inform them about nineteenth-century daily life and farming practices.

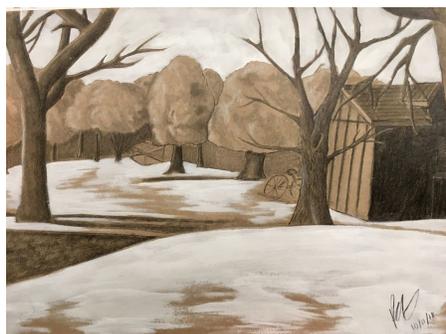
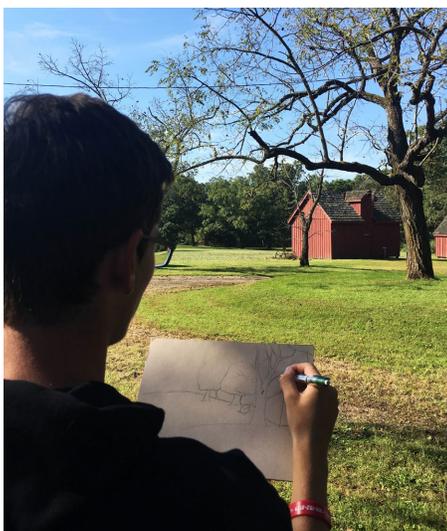
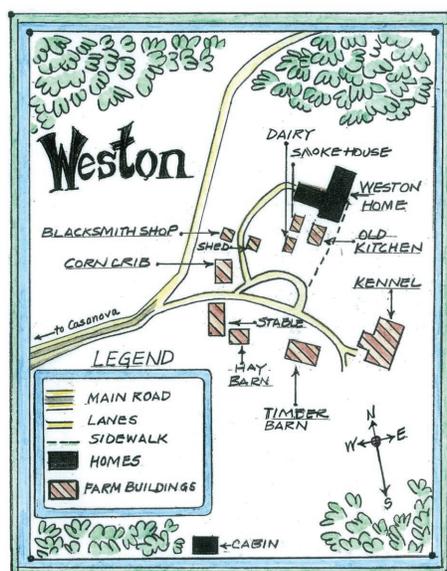
A big farm bell has become a useful and charming addition to school tours. Donated by John and Susan Hanback, it has been mounted on a post near the Dairy and Black Horse Shop and is rung at set intervals to signal when groups are to move to their next location. Being selected to ring the bell is now a highlight for children touring Weston.

Other hands-on experiences enjoyed by primary students include testing eggs for freshness by floating them in water, gathering hickory nuts, acorns, and walnuts while learning to differentiate the leaves for each tree, and working the “dasher” on a reproduction butter churn.

In the Timber Barn, Tom Walmer adapted the lid of an old corn sheller so students can see the gears in motion. Docents in the Blacksmith Shop supervise children as they pump the bellows while classmates feel the flow of air over the forge. The Virginia curriculum for primary students includes basic map-reading skills. This spring students who toured Weston used copies of a map of Weston created by Diane Gulick to find their way around the farm. It has proven to be an engaging and relevant addition to their experience, and one that will continue to be part of student tours.

Although most school groups that visited Weston were first graders, Liberty High School’s art and photography students came last October to sketch and photograph outdoors while also visiting the home and a few outbuildings. As Gary Colson’s art students toured the house, they focused on the artwork of Charlotte and Constance Nourse, including paintings and sketches from the archives. The students were asked to paint a botanical subject or scene from Weston using gouache when they returned to school, so Constance Nourse’s landscapes were of special interest.

Our dedicated and talented docents enjoy hosting students at Weston. Wide-eyed and curious, children are eager to ask and answer questions. We have learned to explain what one means when stating that “leaves” were added to the dining room table to make it bigger for guests. Posing the question “What goes into a butter churn to make butter?” can lead to surprising guesses, such as “Eggs,” or as one English Language learner proudly replied: “Peanuts!” ■



Liberty High School's Javier Jimenez sketching at Weston (left). Brendon Goodnow painted gouache scenes of the landscape (above and right).



How the Virginia Slave Housing Project Helped Save Part of Weston

By Douglas W. Sanford, Virginia Slave Housing Project

Douglas Sanford is Professor Emeritus of Historic Preservation, the University of Mary Washington.

The slave cabin at Weston first came to my attention in 2012. By that date my colleague, Dennis Pogue, and I had spent five years conducting the Virginia Slave Housing Project, an interdisciplinary effort intended to draw greater attention to slave housing in Virginia and to encourage further study and preservation of these buildings, a critical aspect of America's history of slavery and of African American heritage.

The work of this project involves gathering data on slave housing from archaeological sites; from period documents, such as fire insurance policies and tax and census records; and, from previous architectural surveys. Typically, the layout and construction of slave housing varied depending on the values, resources, and locations of those who owned and housed enslaved people, from stereotypical log cabins and brick or frame quarters on former plantations, to urban settings involving small brick or wooden structures on narrow lots, to the combination of slave housing with other functions, such as kitchens, laundries, and stables. To date, the Slave Housing Project has recorded over 95 structures in the field and directly assisted with the preservation of eight buildings. The Project's database, using the sources noted above, has close to 800 examples of slave housing.

Over the course of a few visits to Weston during the summer and fall of 2012, Dennis and I carried out our documentation of the site, closely investigating what materials and elements survived from the period of slavery, and what changes had taken place over the nearly 150 years since the Civil War. We immediately recognized that the Weston cabin was a relatively rare survivor of slave housing in Fauquier County, with only 45 slave quarters in Fauquier

having been surveyed and filed with Virginia Department of Historic Resources while the U.S. Census listed 2,236 slave houses for the County in 1860.

From our investigation, we discovered Weston's cabin was first constructed in the 1840s or '50s and corresponded to a common type of slave housing: a double quarter or "duplex" initially intended for two separate households and typically found on large farms and plantations of white owners with many enslaved people. Most often, owners placed duplexes close to the property's main house or as part of a complex of outbuildings extending out from the house area. As a late antebellum quarter, the Weston duplex exhibited many of the qualities of what architectural historians refer to as "improved" slave housing.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, wealthier owners on Virginia and southern plantations undertook a series of "rational" and scientific improvements in agriculture, such as greater crop diversification, the use of fertilizers, and elements of accounting to determine costs and profits. They extended the same ideology to their slave management practices, including the systematic rationing of food and clothing and a fundamental shift in slave housing. Earlier, owners overwhelmingly relied upon small log cabins with dirt floors, wood and mud chimneys, and few, often unglazed windows. While cheaper and faster to construct, log cabins did not last long and promoted unhealthy living conditions. Improved housing involved tightly framed cabins, set on brick foundations or piers, with brick chimneys, raised wooden floors, and large sash windows for better lighting and air

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When Weston was inherited by WAS in 1959, many of its buildings were in a state of disrepair. These two photos of Weston's slave and worker cabin show the "before" state of this pre-Civil War "duplex" and the "after" state in 2016 resulting from the preservation work performed by skilled craftsman and funded by the generous donations of the Friends of Weston.

Weston Farm Slave Quarter

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circulation. Owners intended these buildings to improve slaves' health and thereby their work productivity.

While a log structure, rather than frame or masonry, the Weston duplex was tightly joined with half-dovetail corner joints with vertical pegged "clamps" on the front and rear walls for further stability. Measuring 14 feet wide and 24 feet long and standing one-and-a-half stories high with a central chimney of stone and brick and a stone foundation, the cabin's hewn log sides allowed for an exterior covering of board-and-batten siding that gave the outside impression of a frame building. Although the garret rooms remained without heat and the interior framing and roofing remained exposed, the exterior doors and windows received further elaboration, as seen in the Greek Revival-style arched moldings, and mirrored some of the architectural qualities of the Weston main house.

In 1844, Giles Fitzhugh inherited from his brother, Thomas, the land that would become Weston, along with 15 slaves. The executors of Thomas Fitzhugh's will attempted to keep primary enslaved families together. According to the U.S. Census of 1850, 17 enslaved persons were living at Weston ranging in age from one to 40 with a near-even split gender-wise. With this many slaves residents, Fitzhugh would have needed multiple quarters. Besides those who likely lived in the lofts of the Timber Barn and above the single-room exterior kitchen (adjacent to main house), the remaining workers resided within the cabin. (Weston records suggest that the Napper and Towles families were possibly housed in the cabin and Jane Riley, the farm's cook, resided in the exterior kitchen with her husband and six children.) When Fitzhugh died in 1853, nineteen people were occupying Weston's outbuildings and were freed by his will.

In 1858, Charles J. Nourse purchased Weston from Harriet Fitzhugh Ward, Giles Fitzhugh's niece. Weston's records show that Charles housed a hired farm manager in the cabin, modifying it to suit a single family. Employed residential workers slept and ate in the expanded exterior kitchen while the cook's quarters continued to be over the kitchen. Charles never owned any enslaved workers. The expanded old kitchen continued to be occupied by farm workers throughout Charles Nourse's life.

As typical with other slave quarters that survive into the modern era, the Weston duplex changed architecturally to reflect changes in uses and occupants. Among other modifications, builders connected the cabin's upstairs and downstairs rooms with interior doorways, replaced the two original ladder stairs with a single staircase, added a lathe ceiling to the upstairs, and upgraded the downstairs



The southern side of the cabin shows remnants of the roof and doorway of the cabin's kitchen added by Charles Nourse when the structure was converted to accommodate a farm manager.

flooring with tongue-and-groove boards. The structure went from a four-room arrangement for housing multiple families and individuals to an accommodation for a single family. Starting around 1882, builders constructed a kitchen addition on the south gable end, changed the stairs to a gentler rise, and replaced the original rafters and wood shingle roof with a standing-seam, sheet-metal roof. In the early twentieth century, the distinctive shed roof porch with cedar posts was attached to the front wall and later electricity (but not plumbing) was installed. The cabin remained in domestic use until the early 1960s.

In consultation with Dennis Pogue, the Warrenton Antiquarian Society decided to carry out a partial restoration of the cabin in 2014 with the decision to preserve as much original material as possible and to keep elements from the building's periods of use during and after slavery. Remnants of the kitchen addition were removed. Repairs were made to the exterior siding, the eaves, the windows and the fireplace hearths. The stone foundation was re-pointed and the gaps between the wall logs were re-chinked. One fireplace was returned to its original opening, while the other retained its later, narrower opening. The front porch was rebuilt using its original cedar posts. Most importantly, the restoration work allowed the quarter to be available for public visitation and the interpretation of a more inclusive history at Weston Farm.

Dennis and I wish to express our gratitude to the Warrenton Antiquarian Society for their cooperation and willingness to invest in the preservation of the slave and workers quarter at Weston. Their efforts are helping to keep alive important aspects of American history and heritage. ■

Lavinia Napper Lee

By Anne Van Ryzin

She left behind no written documents, never having learned to write, no photographs, no mention in the diaries of people who knew her. Her story relies on her actions taken when such were difficult to take. There were narrower boundaries for the behaviors of women in 1833, about when Lavinia was born, especially for the enslaved. She was, however, raised to know her own mind and make decisions when circumstances required. Someone in her life had modeled becoming a resilient woman, perhaps her family, Kitty and Dennis Napper.

When Thomas Fitzhugh died in November 1843, he freed only eight of his over 130 enslaved farm workers. The Nappers worked at his home farm, Ajax, located off Rogues Road. Dennis was fifty and considered an old man at that time. Kitty was only twenty-five and was possibly Lavinia's step-mother or sister. The executors of Thomas's will, led by Berkeley Ward, attempted to keep primary families together when dividing property among the 110 entitled heirs. Along with the north half of Owl Run Farm, destined to become Weston, fourteen enslaved people, including the Nappers, were inherited by Giles Fitzhugh.

Lavinia spent her teen years caring for the property we care for today.

When Giles Fitzhugh moved into his inherited log cabin, bringing few possessions other than his riding horses, he was seventy-one years old, chronically ill and considered by many to be eccentric. His formidable niece, Harriet Ward (wife of Berkeley Ward) took a watchful interest in his well-being, riding to the farm to check on him and confronting people who would take advantage of him. In 1852 Giles consulted with lawyer Thomas L. Moore to write his will, which would leave his land to Harriet and set free all of his 19 enslaved people. Moore quoted Giles as saying "...they have worked for me very well and I don't think they have cheated me and I will not have them set up and sold at public sale and separated as my brother Tom's were."¹

Thomas Moore was a respected and skillful Warrenton lawyer and before he prepared the will he consulted with two other lawyers to determine that Giles was competent to bequeath his estate. After Giles died in 1853 his only

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Weston's Eden

By Diane Gulick

If you pull off the main road that leads to Weston's historic house and take a left onto a dirt and grass lane, you will soon find yourself entering the Weston Wildlife Management Area, a conservation site managed by Virginia's Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF).

Having spent so much time with my family and friends there throughout my life, when asked to write an article for this newsletter, it did not take long for me to choose the forests of Weston as my subject matter. In doing so, I hoped to encourage others to enjoy what the VDGIF calls its "forgotten jewel." "Forgotten" in that it is comparatively unknown and unused; "jewel" in that it is a precious gem of natural splendor.

I met with Ron Hughes, VDGIF's manager, biologist, and ardent admirer of the Weston conservation site in June to learn more about this woodland refuge. Not long into the interview, I noted his frequent use of the descriptives "unspoiled," "splendid," and "unique" in response to my questions. The term "Eden" came to mind. Its secular definition is "a place of pristine or abundant natural



Constance Nourse's Watercolor of Weston Bluebells

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Lavinia Napper Lee

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living sibling, Mordecai Fitzhugh, contested the will saying that Giles was too incompetent to have created it. Thomas Moore was ready for Mordecai. With Berkeley Ward as appointed estate executor, the case took almost a year to be settled and the will confirmed. During that time all of the potentially freed people remained on the farm and worked as usual.

Freedom came at a difficult time in Virginia history as anxiety had been increasing about the potential of uprisings led by the large number of freed men and women remaining in the state. In 1848 and 1850 Virginia law clarified that freed persons must leave the state within a year or be re-enslaved. Local jurisdictions had been frequently lax to implement the law but now there was increased legislative pressure for enforcement. Each of the people freed by Giles considered how to best respond. Some immediately moved north. Some trusted the local Casanova/Calverton community and were quietly protected during the Civil War. Three men, Austin Williams, James Washington and Thornton Riley, sued Berkeley Ward for a year's wages. Angrily, Ward threatened to counter-sue them for his costs in the defense against Mordecai Fitzhugh. Thomas Moore took the case, on behalf of the freedmen, and won against Ward. Lavinia Napper moved to Warrenton and registered her freedom. She had surely already met Thornton Lee, owned by Berkeley Ward, and she was in love.

While they owned a farm in the county, Harriet and Berkeley Ward resided in their house in Warrenton. Almost across Horner Street from the Ward home was the shop and residence of Thornton, a skilled mason. It was common for enslaved craftsmen to work independently for their owners, earning some of the business profit. Lavinia also found ready employment with the Ward family. In Virginia it was not permitted for the enslaved to become lawfully married, even to a free person. At some point, with her presence in Warrenton, Lavinia was threatened with enforcement of the Virginia re-enslavement law as she had stayed for more than the allowed year. That would mean leaving Thornton.

At this time there were over 30,000 registered free black women in Virginia. Twenty-one petitioned the court to become re-enslaved and Lavinia Napper was one of them.² She was twenty-six years old, stood four feet, one inch tall and was pregnant. The court process was careful with its deliberation, asking for her reasons and informing her that she had the right to choose her new owner. Lavinia chose Mary Ward Smith. A complication arose because it was required that the new owner post a bond that the re-enslaved person never become a ward of the state. This

would have been a difficult financial requirement for a married woman, so Mary's husband, Edwin Smith, was substituted as the new owner. He paid the court \$300, half of Lavinia's appraised value.³ On September 13, 1859 Lavinia became re-enslaved but she remained concerned that Edwin Smith could sell her and her future children who would thus be born enslaved. With characteristic persistence she requested that Mary secure her ownership. After a month Edwin did deed Lavinia and her future enslaved children to his wife for Mary's lifetime.⁴

In March 1867, after emancipation, Thornton purchased his house and property from Harriet Ward for \$225 cash. By August 1868, Lavinia and Thornton had been legally married and together sold a corner lot of their land. Thornton then worked with a variety of skills: a mechanic, a barber and, notably, as a hotel manager. Warrenton's druggist, Joseph Jeffries, in his diary, notes the visit to Warrenton of a trained bear.

*"The man and his bear put up with Thornton Lee, an intelligent mulatto who kept a colored hotel near the depot. He told Lee the next morning that he wanted to take his bear down to Cedar Run to water him and would come back and pay his bill. He did not return. Some of Lee's friends asked him why he did not follow him. Lee replied that he had rather lose what food they had eaten than that the bear lay in a month's supply of his body."*⁵

In the 1870 census the Lee family included daughters Mary, age twelve, and Carrie, age ten. According to the law that children follow the status of their mother, Mary, and possibly Carrie, had been born free after Lavinia's re-enslavement. A possible son Edward was born in 1876 but would be lost to tuberculosis in 1880 at age four. Daughter Maisy arrived in 1877 but died of whooping cough in six months. By 1878 Thornton was ill himself and could no longer support his family. The family home and property were taken by the court to pay their debts. In the 1880 census Lavinia was widowed and employed as a servant, apparently working in the home of William Pattie, the Warrenton postmaster. There have been no death or marriage records found for daughters Mary and Carrie but it is to be hoped they were leading independent lives. They would have been well taught by the examples of their capable and loyal parents.

The Warrenton Antiquarian Society welcomes additional information about this historical Weston family and is willing to share documents with their descendants.

1. *Virginia Chancery Court-Fauquier County #1854-045*
2. *see: The Essence of Liberty: Free Black Women During the Slave Era* by Wilma King
3. *Virginia Chancery Court-Fauquier County #1859-080*
4. *see Family Bonds: Free Blacks and Re-enslavement Law in Antebellum Virginia* by Ted Maris-Wolf
5. *see Joseph Arthur Jeffries' Fauquier County, 1840-1919 compiled by Helen Jeffries Klitch* ■

Weston's Eden

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beauty.” I penciled in “Weston’s Eden” at the top of my notes. Perfect title.

Ron explained how the Weston Wildlife Management Area came to be. In 1959, 271 acres were bequeathed to the Commonwealth of Virginia’s VDGIF by Miss Charlotte Nourse to become a wildlife refuge for the perpetual preservation and public enjoyment of her family’s Weston farmstead. This secluded, relatively undisturbed acreage became the VDGIF’s Weston Wildlife Management Area.

The WWMA is located about a mile east of the village of Casanova in southern Fauquier County within the northern Piedmont and Central Appalachian region of Virginia. The site encompasses forests, a stream, a swamp, former agricultural fields, pastures, and hedgerows. All are adjacent to the Nourses’ nineteenth-century home named Weston, now an historic house museum on 10 acres owned and managed by the Warrenton Antiquarian Society.

During the interview, Ron explained that the Weston Wildlife Management Area requires little attention from the agency because the conditions of its overall community are excellent. At the end of the dirt road leading to its entrance, you will find a small, VDGIF-maintained parking area and a simple kiosk setting forth a map indicating the area’s boundaries, hiking trails, and a few rules for its usage. Aside from these fundamental services, the WWMA remains undisturbed and retains its natural state for the benefit and pleasure of all.

There are 15 acres of exceptionally mature and diverse bottomland forest to be admired within the wildlife refuge. Its rich clay loam on upland terraces allows for an overstory of towering hardwoods which include American sycamore, black walnut, hickory, hackberry, and over 10 species of oaks. Massive specimens of pin oak and Spanish oak thrive in older, lowland parts of the Turkey Run floodplain forest. An extraordinary stand of gigantic Shumard oaks—kin to the red oak—with oversized acorns as wide as they are long, is a crowning jewel of Weston’s forest in that its presence is rare in this part of Virginia.

American elm and box elder maples are prevalent in the understory of the flood plain forest on WWMA. Native spice bush and pawpaw trees dominate the dense shrub layer beneath. Mushrooms, lichen, moss, grasses, sedges, and ferns overlay the fertile soil beneath the canopy of the forest’s trees. Non-natives, such as garlic mustard and ground ivy, have a relatively insignificant presence here, indicative of the exceptionally good health of the forest.

In its springtime splendor, a lush herbaceous layer decorated with masses of delightful spring ephemerals covers the floor of Weston’s forest. While walking through the woods at this time of year, you will be treated to a complete palette of native wildflowers which include violet Virginia waterleaf, pale green Canadian wood nettle, ivory Dutchman’s breeches, purple Jack-in-the-pulpits, yellow trout lilies, red columbine, and pinkish spring beauties.

Indeed, the very best time to come to Weston’s Eden is during early springtime to admire its Virginia bluebells which complement all the rest with their bountiful presence beside the forest’s serene, meandering Turkey Run. Enjoy a guided tour of the WWMA offered by the Warrenton Antiquarian Society every year when the bluebells are in full bloom. Come with family and friends. Or simply come by yourself. Allow time for sightings of deer, beavers, squirrels, rabbits, songbirds, waterfowl, butterflies, sunfish, and all that thrive here. Hopefully, you will come to appreciate Miss Nourse’s special gift to Virginia as a refuge not only for flora and fauna but for yourself as well. ■



The Nourse sisters, Constance and Charlotte, were accomplished artists inspired to draw and paint the native plants and animals found at Weston. The watercolor paintings by Constance feature blue bells, trout lilies, and Dutchman's breeches, all still prolific in the woods along Turkey Run.

Warrenton Antiquarian Society

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Warrenton Antiquarian Society

Look for a Special Announcement for Spring 2020



"Portrait of Aja" (Detail)

An Evening with Fine Artist

BECKY PARRISH

**"Revealing the Artist's Subject:
Thoughts on the History
and the Making of Portraits"**

Date and Place to be announced

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