

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

Williamsburg in the Beginning

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By
Edith Phillips Ryan

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WILLIAMSBURG IN THE BEGINNING...

By Edith Phillips Ryan

Questions continually arise concerning the changing of the name from Williamsburg to Orangeburg. It is not hard to understand why the town was called Williamsburg, when it is known that the land on which the village was laid out, was Catherine (McDermed) Williams share of her father's, Francis McDermed, estate. Therefore, it is safe to say the name Williamsburg was in honor of the Williams family.

However, it is hard to figure out why the name was changed. Some written accounts state that it was because there was another Williamsburg in Kentucky. When the history of the other Williamsburg was researched, it was learned that the Williamsburg in Whitley County, Kentucky was established in 1819. It was originally called Whitley Courthouse. The name was changed to Williamsburgh in 1882 and the spelling was changed to Williamsburg in 1890. This was long after February 29, 1836, when the name of Williamsburg, Mason County, was officially changed to Orangeburg.

Laws of Kentucky (page 381), Chapter 232 - AN ACT to change the name of Williamsburg, in Mason County.

Sec. 1. *Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky*, That the town known by the name of Williamsburg, in Mason County, shall be hereafter known by the name of Orangeburg.

Sec. 2. *Be it further enacted*, That the name of the Williamsburg Precinct, in Mason county, shall be changed to that of Orangeburg precinct.

Approved, February 29, 1836

Although the name was changed in 1836, the post office was called Williamsburg until January 9, 1850. This

might indicate that the name of Orangeburg was not readily used by the town for several years.

Why was the name Orangeburg chosen? It is believed to have been named for Providence Orange Pickering, who was a tailor in the town. Court records revealed that he purchased property in Orangeburg as early as 1808, when he bought lot # 8 from Richard Soward and his wife, Nancy. Between about 1808 and 1836, Mr. Pickering must have won the favor of the citizens to have had the town named in his honor.

Providence Orange Pickering was born November 17, 1778, Northumberland County, Virginia. He was the son of John and Betsey Pickering. Following the death of his father, on 15 May 1790, Providence Orange Pickering, at the age of twelve, was bound out as an apprentice in the lower district of Saint Stephens Parish of Northumberland County. He married Hannah Henrietta "Ritta" Smithers, November 7, 1803, Northumberland County, Virginia. She was born in 1781, in Virginia, the daughter of Sarah Smithers. She died 10 September 1857, Mason County, Kentucky and is buried in the Williamsburg/Orangeburg Cemetery. A record of any Pickering children has not been found. The death date for Mr. Pickering is unknown.

The citizens of the town continued to look to the future. In 1860, the town of Orangeburg, in Mason County, was incorporated.

LAWS OF KENTUCKY (page 84), Chapter 385 - AN ACT to incorporate the town of Orangeburg, in Mason County.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky:

1. That the town of Orangeburg, in Mason

county, is hereby incorporated, the boundaries of which shall be the same as the original plat of said town.

2. That there shall be elected, by the qualified voters upon the discharge of their duties, take an oath before some justice of the peace of said county, that they will faithfully and impartially discharge the duties of the office aforesaid. That said trustees and their successors in office shall be a body politic and corporate, and shall be known by the name and style of "The Board of Trustees of the town of Orangeburg," and by that name shall be capable of contracting and being contracted with, of suing and being sued, of pleading and being impleaded, answering and be answered, of defending and being defended, in all courts of this Commonwealth, and have and exercise all the powers, rights, and privileges which incorporated bodies may lawfully do, for the purposes contemplated by this act.

3. The trustees of said town shall keep a journal of their proceedings, which shall at all times be open to inspection of the citizens of said town.

4. The trustees may annually appoint one of their own body chairman, who shall preside at their meetings, and also a treasurer of said town, who shall be intrusted with the custody and safe-keeping of the money and other property of the corporation, subject to the order of the trustees.

5. The trustees shall have power and authority to impose a tax upon auction sales of others than residents, and upon shows and exhibitions of all sorts within said town, in any sum they may deem proper.

6. The trustees of said town shall have the right to tax, and the exclusive right to license all taverns, groceries, victualers, confectioneries, retailers of spirituous liquors, alleys for nine or ten-pins, and all other houses of public resort in said town, except gambling-houses or houses of ill-fame, and fix the tax for the same in a sum not exceeding one hundred dollars per annum, and to discontinue any of said licenses at pleasure: *Provided, however,* That the trustees shall pay to the trustee of the jury fund for said county the sum of ten dollars for each tavern license granted in said town each year; and any law giving the county court of said county authority to license taverns in said town, is hereby repealed. When any prosecution is instituted and carried on at the instance of the trustees, the warrant shall state that it was issued at their instance, in which case they shall be entitled to the fine or penalty recovered; but if the prosecution fail, the said trustees shall pay to costs of the same.

7. Before the treasurer of said town shall enter upon the discharge of his duties, he shall execute bond to the trustees in their corporate name, with security to be approved by the trustees, stipulating for the faithful discharge of the duties of his office: and for the violation of which, proper

auctioneer proceeding. All money derived from taxes, licenses, or otherwise, shall be expended for the benefit of said town.

8. None but persons qualified to vote for State officers shall be permitted to vote at any election of trustees for said town.

9. No person shall be elected to the office of trustee of said town, who has not been a resident within the limits of said town for at least six months prior to the election.

10. The first election for trustees of said town shall be held on the first Saturday in April, 1860, and there shall be an election on the first Saturday in April in every year thereafter: *Provided,* That in case an election should not be held at the time herein provide for, the trustees then in office shall hold their office until their successors are elected and qualified.

11. That W. H. Pollitt, Henry Brisfield, Benjamin P. Anno, D. P. Judd, and A. Caldwell, are hereby appointed trustees, who shall hold their office until their successors are elected and qualified as herein provided.

12. This act to be in force from its passage.

Approved February 20, 1860. It would be interesting to know how long the town functioned under the above terms of incorporation.

In summary, Orangeburg was established as Williamsburg in 1795/1796, the name of the town was legally changed to Orangeburg, February 29, 1836, the name of the post office was changed, January 9, 1850, and the town was incorporated, February 20, 1860. Although research has provided the foregoing information, there are many unanswered questions regarding the history of Williamsburg/Orangeburg.

References: *The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, Laws of Kentucky*, pages 381 and 84; *The Kentucky Encyclopedia*, John E. Kleber, Editor in Chief, The University of Kentucky Press, 1992, pages 949 and 957; Mason County, Kentucky Court Records, Deed Book __, page __; tombstone inscription, Williamsburg/Orangeburg Cemetery; Northumberland County, Virginia marriage record; *Northumberland County, Virginia Apprenticeship, 1750-1852*, by W. Preston Hayie, Heritage Books, Inc., page 65.