

## Colonel John Mottrom of Northern Neck

Colonel John Mottrom may not have presided at the county court of 1655 for he died about that time. He was but forty-five years old and he had not yet built his brew-house or seen his vision of the town at Coan come true.

The funeral was no doubt a big affair for Colonel Mottrom was a prominent man, and all funerals then were important occasions.[Pg 73] These early funerals were carried on in a reverent manner but there was a cheerful side too. Funerals could even be called festive. The reason for this was that a funeral brought about one of the few chances friends and neighbors had for a reunion, and for feasting and drinking together.

The guests had to travel a long way by boat or on horseback to attend a funeral and these funeral guests were regarded as even more "sacred" than ordinary guests. The unwritten laws of hospitality would have been broken if these guests had been allowed to return home without more than ample food and drink.

Thus the bereaved Mottrom household probably had to put their sorrows aside while they made preparations for the funeral.

Sometimes the minister and pall-bearers, who were usually the leading citizens of the county, were directed to wear certain special items, such as gloves, ribbons and a "love scarf." Mourning-rings and gloves were often gifts to chief mourners from the family of the deceased. Often the will of the deceased directed the family to make such gifts.

Colonel Mottrom may have desired to be "buried ... in the garden plote." It was the usual custom to be buried not too far away from the dwelling.

It could be truly written of this first settler of the Northern Neck, as it had been said of another early Virginian—"he lived bravely, kept a good house and was a true lover of Virginia."

After the body was laid to rest the memory of the deceased was usually honored by a furious fusillade. This may have been done more for the entertainment of those who came to bury the deceased than to honor the dead. Sometimes as much as ten pounds of powder were used. Many accidents occurred at funerals because of the wild firing of guns by persons who had been drinking.

The extravagant use of powder was nothing when compared to the amount of liquor, of all kinds, consumed at a funeral. At one funeral sixty gallons of cider, four gallons of rum, two gallons of brandy, five gallons of wine, and thirty pounds of sugar to sweeten the drinks were used.

Food for the occasion may have included geese, turkeys and other poultry, a pig, several bushels of flour and twenty pounds of butter. Sometimes a whole steer and several sheep were prepared for the crowd. A big funeral cost many pounds of tobacco.

Colonel Mottrom's inventory was valued at 33,896 pounds of tobacco, which was as large as any estate in the colony at that time.[Pg 74] His inventory was recorded in Northumberland County in 1657, and shows that he was a man of "wealth and literary pretensions."

He left his children "well-fixed" as to land. In Northumberland alone he had patented 3700 acres. Tradition says that he left the daughter of his associate, Nicholas Morris, "a riding mare." His will was referred to the governor "because of some ambiguities in the procurings of it." No copy of it can now be found.

Due to distances and lack of fast transportation the widow's hand was sometimes spoken for at the funeral of her husband by one of the guests who was afraid that he might lose out if he waited to make another visit. This was probably not true in Ursula's case, but she did remarry soon enough for her new husband to act as one of the executors of Colonel Mottrom's will.

Major George Colclough, Ursula's third husband, was a burgess in 1658. After his death Ursula Bish Thompson-Mottrom-Colclough married Colonel Isaac Allerton. Even after she had married this fourth time she continued to have trouble in settling Colonel Mottrom's estate, because of the "ambiguities" of his will.

Colonel and Mrs. Allerton lived at his home, The Narrows, which was located in the new county of Westmoreland, formed from Northumberland in 1653.

Colonel Allerton was the son of Isaac Allerton, who came to Plymouth on the Mayflower in 1620, and of Fear Brewster, only daughter of Governor William Brewster, of Plymouth. He was born in 1630 and was one of the early graduates of Harvard College. He came to Virginia and settled in the Northern Neck at The Narrows.

From Ursula and Isaac Allerton was descended President Zachary Taylor.

Source: The Stronghold A Story of Historic Northern Neck of Virginia and Its People by Miriam Haynie