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*Brockenbrough*  
H · O · U · S · E

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An endangered  
gem of Colonial  
Tidewater history  
& architecture

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ST. MARGARET'S SCHOOL WOULD LIKE TO THANK  
CALDER LOTH, SENIOR ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN AT  
THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HISTORIC RESOURCES,  
FOR RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS PROJECT.  
THE FEATURED QUOTES ON EACH PAGE OF THIS  
DOCUMENT COME FROM HIS MARCH 31, 2003 LETTER  
TO HEAD OF SCHOOL MARGARET R. BROAD.

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APRIL 2004

# History

The walls of Brockenbrough House enclose the history of Virginia itself. Here colonists took a stand against the mother country's increasingly burdensome system of taxation. Fifty years later, citizens of the young country shuddered as the British armada sailed up the Rappahannock to bombard their prosperous river town. The parlor hearth may bear the proof: local legend says it was made from shards of the black marble mantel that a royal cannonball shattered.

In the years after the Civil War, Brockenbrough House served as Judith Brockenbrough McGuire's academy for young ladies—foreshadowing things to come in the next century, when it would be a girls' school once more. It also was where Mrs. McGuire, the author of *Diary of a Southern Refugee During the War*, lived with her husband, The Rev. John Peyton McGuire, known as "Apostle of the Rappahannock" for his success in reviving the post-revolutionary Episcopal Church in this region of Virginia.

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"The house has been a witness to history, serving as the scene of a demonstration against the Stamp Act in 1766 and a target for British artillery in the War of 1812."

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To accommodate its growing enrollment, St. Margaret's School purchased the home in 1927 from a Brockenbrough descendant, Virginia Supreme Court Justice Joseph William Chinn. Modern descendants remain in the neighborhood today, as well as in Richmond.

The historic value of Brockenbrough House has been recognized by its inclusion in the Virginia Landmarks Register and National Register of Historic Places as a contributing member to the Tappahannock Historic District.

## TIMELINE

**1652** - Land patented by Clement Thrusch

**1682** - After succession of four owners, Crown buys land, then sells it to Col. Edward Hill, Sr., who builds small house

**1706** - Lot sold to Richard Buckner, then Robert Beverley

**1761** - Beverley sells original land and structure to merchant Archibald McCall, attorney for His Majesty

**1763** - McCall builds larger house on land or heavily renovates existing structure

**1766** - House "unlawfully, riotously and routously" searched by local citizens because of loyalist McCall's support for the Stamp Act, which levied additional English taxes



**1774** - McCall returns home to Scotland on eve of American Revolution

**1806** - McCall mortgages house and property, which eventually is purchased by Thomas Brockenbrough

**1814** - Legend says cannonball fired from British ship on the Rappahannock enters house's north wall and shatters black marble mantel

**c. 1865** - Judith Brockenbrough McGuire leases house for use as girls' school

**1921** - Episcopal Diocese of Virginia establishes St. Margaret's School

**1927** - St. Margaret's purchases house from Brockenbrough descendant Judge Joseph William Chinn

# Architectural Significance

**B**rockenbrough House records a fascinating, nearly 250-year history of changing architectural influences and building practices in the Virginia Tidewater. An unusually fine example of a wealthy gentleman's town home, it features ornamental woodwork on a par with some of the region's best-known Colonial plantations.

Attic framing reveals that the original late Georgian house (c. 1763) was a two-story, L-plan, single-pile dwelling, with a broad central hall and three end chimneys. The hipped roof has a classical eave with scrolled modillions around the entire building. An especially unusual feature is the north chimney's rounded plan that regularizes window spacing and provides room for the wood frame's corner bracing.

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“It is an outstanding high-style

Colonial dwelling preserving a

remarkable amount of original

architectural fabric inside and out.”

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Evidence of Colonial workmanship abounds: hand-hewn wood timbers connected with mortise and tenon joints, handmade wrought iron nails, hand-planed ornamental woodwork, and foundation walls of hand-molded local brick and oyster shell mortar laid in Flemish bond with glazed headers. A full English basement hints that the earliest part of the house was built by the merchant McCall, who needed space to store his goods. Some basement windows retain remnants of the original wood and iron security bars.

A recent architectural survey confirms that the house assumed its current U-shaped plan in the Federal period with the addition of a front room next to the south parlor, probably after the house came into Brockenbrough ownership. The river porch, most likely remodeled to become an interior room at this time, is extensively ornamented with Adamesque moldings and other Federal details. The west porch and its bandsaw “gingerbread” work were added in the Victorian era. A modern south wing, with kitchen, bath and additional rooms, was added in the mid-20th century.

## WONDERFUL WOOD

**Original wood paneling** and woodwork that resembles the work of William Buckland, the Colonial craftsman responsible for similar features at Gunston Hall. Wood paneling from the south parlor is thought to reside at the Winterthur Museum.



The extensiveness and sophistication of the interior woodwork is readily apparent in the original mantles, doors, trim, decorative wall paneling with fluted pilasters, and stair balustrade with fluted newel posts. **Above**, fully paneled wall in small rear parlor.



**Colonial stairs** in the entry hall are noteworthy for their end scrolls and turned balusters.



**Full classical entablature** encompassing triglyphs, guttae and modillion blocks distinguishes the river porch.

# A Preservation Emergency

Since its purchase by St. Margaret's in 1927, Brockenbrough House has been many things: a dormitory, infirmary, faculty residence, and most recently, the offices of the school's admission, development and marketing staff. Now it is only one thing: empty.

A termite infestation in early 2003 required the removal of an interior section of wall that revealed more severe damage to wooden sills, studs and joists than had been expected. A structural engineer recommended that the building be vacated immediately. Staff now are working from temporary quarters in other school buildings as initial work is done to stabilize the house. This phase of emergency preservation has included supporting the frame with house jacks and external bracing as termite-damaged wood is removed and replaced.

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“Unanticipated structural deficiencies recently have been discovered, resulting in the relocation of facilities from the house.”

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This was, however, an emergency for which the school was prepared. As part of its campus master plan, St. Margaret's commissioned architect Joseph Dye Lahendro, AIA, to conduct a condition survey of the house. The survey was completed in Spring 2002 and is serving as a guide for the current preservation efforts, which are designed to retain as much of the house's original architectural fabric as possible.

**The project's cost currently is estimated to be nearly \$800,000**—and, as with any similar preservation effort, unforeseen costs may be encountered. The school is seeking gifts from foundations, corporations, and individuals.

Previous preservation work was conducted in 1979-1980 with funding from the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Repairs were made to the cedar shake roof, chimneys, foundation walls, shutters and porch woodwork.

## SAVING A GEM

Proper historic restoration of Brockenbrough House will require immediate attention to:

**Brick foundations**, which have begun to deteriorate as a result of excessive moisture. The foundations need to be repaired, and also may need protection by a permanent barrier system. Foundation walls damaged by previously installed utility pipes also will need to be repaired. **\$80,000**

**Wooden sills, studs and joists**, which have suffered extensive termite damage accelerated by the wicking action of the wet, porous brick foundations. Several walls and floors sag noticeably as a result. **\$210,000**

**Climate control**, to reduce damaging fluctuations in temperature and humidity by installing a modern furnace and central air conditioning. **\$80,000**



**Plumbing and electrical upgrades** to support HVAC service and building code compliance. **\$35,000**

**Insulation** in attic and crawl spaces for climate control and energy efficiency. **\$5,000**

**Termite control**, to reduce and manage future infestation of the structure and interiors. **\$3,000**

**Carpentry** to repair and replace paneling, flooring and windows that were removed to access the house's frame. **\$30,000**

**Wall resurfacing** to replace plaster finishes that were removed to access the house's frame and repair moisture damage. **\$15,000**

**Painting** to seal and protect new wood and wall surfaces. **\$15,000**

**General conditions**, including construction management, permit, and consulting fees. **\$50,000**

**Roof repairs** to structural beams. **\$20,000**

**Architectural survey** for historic landmark designation. **\$3,500**

**Endowment**, to provide for continued maintenance. **\$218,600**

*Costs are estimated as of the brochure date and do not include marketing or development costs.*

# Benefits of Preservation

St. Margaret's understands that its historic buildings are neighborhood anchors. Stewardship of three such structures—Brockenbrough House, Anderton House (c. 1706) and St. Margaret's Hall (1840)—long has been an important part of the school's commitment to the Tappahannock community.

The care that St. Margaret's has taken of these buildings has not only maintained the historic character of the Water Lane neighborhood, it also has helped catalyze three recent preservation projects within a block of the school: the ongoing restoration of Emerson's Ordinary (c. 1710), the 2002-2003 repair and conversion of the Roane-Trible House (1850) into a country inn, and significant exterior improvements to St. John's Episcopal Church (1850) in 2001-2002.

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“The house (is) a demonstration of period details and a potential teaching facility for architectural literacy. It is one of the primary contributing historical structures in the Tappahannock Historic District.”

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Your support for the preservation of Brockenbrough House will help:

- maintain the integrity of the Tappahannock Historic District, supporting tourism and economic development,
- preserve an essential part of Virginia's history and heritage, and
- maintain the historic landscape that motorists, pedestrians and boaters enjoy along Water Lane and the Rappahannock River.

## LEARNING FROM HISTORY

Brockenbrough House has opened its doors to a variety of historic and preservation groups, including these past and future guests:

- \* Essex County Historical Society
- \* Historic Richmond Foundation
- \* Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities

Preservation activities will provide additional learning opportunities, not only for such groups, but also for the community.



## A NEIGHBORHOOD ANCHOR

St. Margaret's School owns 3 of the 14 structures in the Tappahannock Historic District. The school also adjoins the town center, which saw a sharp decline in business occupancy when Wal-Mart opened in the early 1990s.

Over the last five years, the local climate for historic preservation and economic development has improved markedly. Several new businesses have opened along Prince Street, and a citizen committee formed in early 2003 to discuss converting the old movie house into a community arts center. The county museum plans to renovate an older home by 2005 to provide a larger, more permanent downtown location.



# About St. Margaret's

Educating young women for life is a mission we take seriously at St. Margaret's School. We not only help students develop academic skills; we also teach them how to be ethical, responsible adults who contribute to their communities.

It's a mission that has remained the same for more than 80 years, and which guides the decisions of our boards, administrators, faculty and staff on a daily basis. Our school culture supports this mission. True to our Episcopal heritage, we are an intentionally diverse, inclusive community that celebrates both the value of each individual and her contributions to the whole. Our Honor Code helps us live together and support each other with honesty, integrity and respect.

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“As the signature building for St. Margaret's, it is... priceless and irreplaceable. Few schools are so fortunate to possess such a venerable historic resource.”

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## The St. Margaret's School Mission:

“As we grow in age, may we grow in grace.” St. Margaret's School's motto reflects our commitment to the growth of young women in every area of their lives: growth in intellectual ability, growth in physical well being, growth in social responsibility, growth in spiritual maturity. We offer a diverse student body a sound college preparatory curriculum, challenging to each individual. In a Christian environment, founded on the Episcopal tradition, both honor and character are developed. St. Margaret's seeks to inspire each student to make the best of herself, and in so doing, make a better world.

## S M S S N A P S H O T

St. Margaret's was established in 1921 as one of the six church schools in the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia. Here are some other SMS facts:

**Enrollment:** In 2002-2003, 158 students attended St. Margaret's (114 boarding, 44 day). They came from 16 states, the District of Columbia, and 9 countries outside the US. Day students come from Tappahannock/Essex and 7 nearby counties.

**Unique Programs:** The River Program, which spans academic, residential, and co-curricular life, makes St. Margaret's unique among girls' boarding/day schools.



International student and faculty exchanges with schools in Australia and New Zealand named for Queen Margaret of Scotland are another point of distinction.

**Academics:** Average class sizes of 10-12 and a student/faculty ratio of 6:1 ensure personal attention. The St. Margaret's faculty consists of 37 teachers, 20 of whom hold one or more master's degrees and 2 who hold a doctorate. The total teaching experience of the faculty exceeds 250 years.

**Athletics:** SMS competes in the League of Independent Schools in 10 sports: basketball, crew, cross-country, field hockey, lacrosse, soccer, softball, swimming, tennis, and volleyball.

**College Placement:** In an average year, 95-100% of the senior class goes directly to college. The Class of 2003's college acceptances include Bryn Mawr, Denison, Case Western Reserve, Clemson, James Madison, Mt. Holyoke, New York University, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Virginia Tech, University of Miami and the University of Michigan.

## Committee

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David H. Charlton  
Richmond, Va.  
*President, Church Schools in the  
Diocese of Virginia*

Charlotte Haile Frischkorn '58  
Richmond, Va.  
*Foundation Board*

Julia T. Henley '68  
Richmond, Va.  
*Alumna*

George Jennings  
Tappahannock, Va.  
*Architect*

Elizabeth Gawen Johnson '66  
New York, New York  
*Board of Governors*

Ellen Metzger LeCompte '71  
Richmond, Va.  
*Board of Governors*

Gordon Lohr  
Richmond, Va.  
*Director, Revolving Fund of the Association  
for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities*

George and Monicia Helton Taylor '77  
Fredericksburg, Va.  
*Board of Governors, parents of alumna*

Nancy Wood  
Ruther Glen, Va.  
*Parent of alumna*

### Advisor

Joseph Dye Lahendro  
Richmond, Va.  
*Architect*

### Ex Officio

Margaret Robinson Broad  
*Head of School*

Kathleen S. Smith  
*Director of Development*

Nancy A. Smith  
*Chief Financial Officer*

James Townsend  
*Director of Maintenance*

## Foundation Board

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David J. Branson  
Washington, DC

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Owings Mills, Md.

Charlotte Haile Frischkorn '58  
Richmond, Va.

Ann Courtland Peck '75  
Atlanta, Ga.

Albert C. Pollard, Sr.  
Irvington, Va.

Samuel A. Tatum  
Newport News, Va.

### Ex Officio

Margaret R. Broad  
Sarah Belle Eason Parrott '68  
Nancy A. Smith

## Board of Governors

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Sarah Belle Eason Parrott '68  
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Williamsburg, Va.

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Richmond, Va.

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Clara MacKenzie Smiley '67  
Dallas, Tx.

George A. Taylor  
Fredericksburg, Va.

Randolph H. Watts  
White Stone, Va.

Catherine Williamson West '81  
Wilmington, N. Carolina

Heather L. Wood '87  
Norfolk, Va.

Margaret R. Broad, *Ex Officio*  
Tappahannock, Va.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

KATHLEEN S. SMITH, DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT  
ST. MARGARET'S SCHOOL  
P.O. BOX 158  
TAPPAHANNOCK, VIRGINIA 22560

(804) 443-3357 • [www.sms.org/bhouse.htm](http://www.sms.org/bhouse.htm)

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