

History of the Coles District

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In the early days, Prince William County was not broken into districts other than for purposes of tax assessment. From the 1780s, the tax rolls identify an upper district and a lower district, divided by Cedar Run and the upper reaches of the Occoquan River. What is now Coles District would have fallen within the lower district (also called the district below Cedar Run).

Before 1869, Prince William and all Virginia counties were administered by the justices of the County Court. In 1850-51, the General Assembly established eight election districts in Prince William County for the election of justices. One of them was called Coles. Though it is currently uncertain what its boundaries were, we can be confident that it was named for its center of population (a village, crossroads or most popular gathering place in the district). Most of the other districts can be identified as towns or villages of the time: Dumfries, Occoquan, Brentsville, Haymarket and Sudley. [*Prince William, the Story of Its People and Its Places*, p. 46]

The Virginia Constitution ratified in 1869 provided for a new form of government. The Board of County Supervisors was established, each Supervisor serving a particular Township. [*Code of Virginia* for 1873.] A few years later (before 1880) these townships became known as Magisterial Districts.

Coles is apparently named for the structure shown on McDowell's 1862 map of Northern Virginia as "Coles Store," probably the main meeting spot for residents of the area. The map's features are somewhat distorted, but it seems that Coles Store was located on the north side of Dumfries Road near its intersection with Joplin Road, within the area of Independent Hill.

The earliest certain reference found to the store is on the land tax list for 1851. Wileman P. Cole, a resident of Prince William County, is shown as owning 170 acres located 5 miles southeast of the courthouse at Brentsville. It was worth \$5 per acre, had buildings on the property worth \$300, a total value of \$850, and he paid taxes of \$1.70. The tax list identifies the property as containing a "Store." It also says he obtained it "By deed from E. Cole."

The 170 acres is shown on the lists of 1847-1850 as belonging to Elizabeth Cole and others. The distance from Brentsville is given as 8 miles east, adjacent to B. Davis's property. The value is only \$1.87½ per acre, total value \$318.75, 32 cents in taxes, and no improvements are shown. In 1851 this owner's name disappears from the tax list. From 1843 to 1846, Elizabeth Cole and others are shown as owning 370 acres, reported in 1843 to be "by deed from Cole." The 1847 list explains what happened to the missing 200 acres: It was "Reduced by deeds to H. Cole and Wm. Lynn."

In the 1850 census of Prince William County, Wilman P. Cole, age 35, born in Virginia, white male, farmer, with \$800 in real estate, is shown with wife Mary E. Cole, age 27, child Samuel Cole, age 7. Also in his household was Edward Wilbourn, a laborer, described as a black male aged 25. [Household 506, census dated 15 Sept. 1850] There is no indication he has opened his store by this time.

On March 26, 1851, Alexandria [*sic* =Alexander] Cole and Susan his wife of Prince George's County, Maryland, sold to Wilmon P. Cole of Prince William County, for \$100, all their right and interest in a tract of land on the waters of Powells Run and the north fork of Quantico Creek, known as the late residence of Elizabeth Cole deceased supposed to contain 370 acres and 24 poles. The document was recorded May 21, 1851, in Prince William County Deed Book 21, p. 271.

Alexander Cole bought that 370-acre tract of land September 20, 1839, from Walter and Catharine King, for \$740.30. At that time they all resided in Prince William County. The document in Deed Book "Land Records," p. 545, shows the exact metes and bounds of the property. On 8 Sept. 1842, Alexander Cole of Prince William County (no cosigner, apparently unmarried at this time) sold the same property to Elizabeth Cole, Mildred Cole, John Cole, Mary Cole, Benjamin Cole, Robert Cole, and Lucian Cole, children of said Alexander Cole, for love and affection and \$1.00 in cash. He also gives them all right, title and interest in the dower right of Elizabeth Cole his mother in the estate of which Mathias Cole his father died seized. (Deed Book "Land Records," p. 582)

The Prince William land tax lists show Wileman P. Cole's store property as follows:

1851 Cole, Wileman 170 ac. [140?], **Store**, 5 SE, \$4 per acre, \$300 impr., \$560? total value, 67½ cents tax, [obtained] from E. Cole.

1852 Cole, Wileman 170 ac. [140?], **Store**, 5 SE, \$4 per acre, \$300 impr., \$560 total, 11 cents tax, from E. Cole.

1853 Cole, Wileman P. 170 ac., **Store**, 5 SE, \$5 per acre, \$300 impr., \$850 total, \$1.70 tax, by deed from B. Cole.

1854 Cole, Wileman P. 170 ac., **Store**, 5 mi. S. \$5 per acre, \$300 impr., \$850 total, \$1.70 tax.

1855 Cole, Wileman P. 170 ac., **Store**, 5 S, \$5 per acre, \$300 impr., \$850 total, \$1.70 tax.

1856 Cole, Wileman P. 170 ac., **Store**, 5 S, \$5 per acre, \$300 impr., \$850 total, \$3.40 tax.

1857 Cole, Wileman P. 170 ac., Tacketts Road [=location, Store not mentioned], 5 S, \$5 per acre, \$300 impr., \$850 total, \$3.40.

1858 Cole, Wileman P. Estate 170 ac., Tacketts Road, 5 S, \$300 impr., \$850 total, \$3.40 tax.

1859 Cole, Wileman P. Est. 170 ac., Tacketts Road, 5 S, [no improvements assessed], \$850 total, \$3.40 tax.

Wileman Cole died in 1857. An inventory of his estate was prepared in October 1857, and recorded December 7, 1857 (Prince William County Will Book R, p. 251-252). The appraisers were Lawrence Cole, Joshua Taylor and Thomas Norman. The items inventoried include the store's goods.

The widow, Mary E. Cole, age 36, is shown on the 1860 census with her children Samuel (age 17), Linda (age 10), Lucy (age 6), and Henrietta (age 4). (Dwelling 1070, family 1043, Brentsville P.O.)

In the 1870 census, Mary E. Cole, age 46, is shown as owning \$1,600 in real estate, \$100 in personal property. Living with her are Linda (age 19), Lucy (age 16), Henrietta (age 13), also Samuel Cox (age 71) and Sarah Cox (age 66), whom we learn from other sources are her parents. (Coles Township, family 148) Son Samuel is lost sight of and may have died between 1860 and 1870.

Her daughter Lucy was married in 1879 to Henry A. Keys. In the 1880 census Maud E. Cole, age 56, is shown with daughter Linda Cole (age 29), daughter Lucy Keys (age 26), daughter J.

Henrietta Cole (age 23) and mother Sarah Cox (age 76). Daughter Henrietta died in 1881, unmarried.

Linda Cole, b. September 1850, is listed on the 1900 census of Coles District (family 91), and living with her is nephew William Keys (b. March 1886). Her mother Mary apparently died between 1880 and 1900. Henry A. Keys (b. November 1831) and wife Lucy (b. May 1854) were also living in Coles District (family 103), with their children Minnie (b. February 1882), Gilbert (b. November 1883), Grover (b. February 1884) and Ethel (b. August 1890). Of the nine children Lucy had borne, five were living in 1900.

The marriage of Wilemon P. Cole to Mary E. Cox, daughter of Samuel Cox, took place in Loudoun County. They were married on June 9, 1842 by Samuel Trott, Baptist minister, of Centreville. [*Marriages of Loudoun County, Virginia, 1757-1853*, by Mary Alice Wertz, p. 28]

What happened to the store after Wilemon Cole's death? The 1860 census shows one other man in Prince William County named Cole who was running a store: Horace Cole, age 43, was a merchant in the region whose closest post office was Brentsville. He had a wife and seven children living with him (dwelling 1073, family 1046). On the 1850 and 1870 censuses, he is shown as a farmer, so his career at running the store may have been only for a short time. By 1880, he and his family have left Prince William County. It is unconfirmed, but assumed that he is Wilemon's brother.

The next county map with any detail is dated 1901. It shows a cluster of buildings at Independent Hill, about where the Coles Store was located, but that name does not appear. The name "Coles" does not appear in *A List of Places Included in 19th Century Virginia Directories*, edited by Ray O. Hummel Jr. (Va. State Library, 1960). Neither does it appear as a post office in Prince William County before 1890 (*Virginia Genealogist*, v. 21, 1977, p. 55-56). Independent Hill was designated a post office as early as 1841.