

Robert's second cousin Gen. Francis S. Preston was a member of the Virginia State Senate and a Brigadier General in the War of 1812. Francis built the house which later became the Martha Washington Inn in Abingdon.



Martha Washington Inn, Abingdon, Virginia

Robert's 3rd cousin Col. James Francis Preston was a Civil War officer for the Washington Mounted Riflemen based in Abingdon. Robert's nephew John Montgomery Preston built the buildings now known as Exchange Place in Kingsport, Tennessee.



Exchange Place, Kingsport, Tennessee

## CURRENT STATUS/NEEDS

The house was donated to the Bristol Historical Association (BHA) with the proviso that it be moved from the current location which is slated for commercial development. BHA has obtained grant money to move the house but needs to raise \$20 thousand to remove the roof and reattach it afterwards as the house is too tall to move down the highway. The grant money obtained to move the house may be lost if the house is not moved by December, 2009.

The City of Bristol has offered a new location in Sugar Hollow Park. One condition is that the house exterior will be made presentable shortly after it is moved. BHA needs donations, construction materials and volunteer services such as land grading and labor to restore the exterior post-move. A related log cabin also needs to be moved and reconstructed at the same site.

## DONATIONS/VOLUNTEERS

Donations should be payable to:

Bristol Historical Association  
POB 204, Bristol TN 37621

Volunteers should contact:

Jan Rainero, Preston House Chair  
(800) 336-8775  
[janrainero@hotmail.com](mailto:janrainero@hotmail.com)

Bristol Historical Association website:  
[www.bristolhistoricalassociation.com](http://www.bristolhistoricalassociation.com)

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## **THE ROBERT PRESTON HOUSE**

THE OLDEST FRAME HOUSE IN  
WASHINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

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*Preservation begins with remembering...*



Robert Preston House, Washington County, Virginia

The Robert Preston house was constructed circa 1790. It and the related log cabin are the only remaining wood frame structures from the 1700s left in greater Bristol, Virginia. The house (located on the Lee Highway near Exit 7 across from Goodpasture Motors) was donated to the Bristol Historical Association for relocation. Once moved it will become a Living History Museum dedicated to the pioneer settlement of southwest Virginia in the 1700s and early 1800s.

## THE HOUSE

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The Robert Preston House is listed on the National Historic Register of Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register. It was mentioned in *Preservation Magazine* published by the National Historic Trust as a property recently saved from destruction.

The house was once the main building of the Walnut Grove plantation which spanned 1000 acres and contained a number of buildings, including a church.

## ROBERT PRESTON

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Robert Preston was born in Londonderry, Ireland in 1750. He immigrated to Virginia in 1773 at the age of 23 and apprenticed as a surveyor under his cousin, William Preston of Smithfield Plantation in what is now Montgomery County, Virginia.

William Preston was active in politics in colonial Virginia. He was a member of the House of Burgesses and a friend and colleague of Thomas Jefferson.

As well as learning the surveying profession, Robert was also influenced by his cousin in architecture because the detailing

found at his house at Walnut Grove is very similar to the Tidewater architecture found at Smithfield.

In 1779 Robert Preston moved to what is now Washington County. Soon after his arrival in February of 1780, he surveyed the lots for Abingdon, the new county seat of Washington County. Later he became one of the first Trustees for the town of Abingdon. Robert was granted a surveyor's bond signed by then-Governor Thomas Jefferson. Later in the summer of 1780 Robert married Margaret Rhea and acquired eight hundred acres of what is now part of Bristol, Virginia. He named the tract of land Walnut Grove.

## PRESTON HERITAGE

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The Preston family cemetery is located on the grounds of Walnut Grove Presbyterian Church, 3012 Lee Highway, Bristol, Virginia. Robert's wife Margaret and his mother Eleanor Fairman Preston are credited with starting the church, which was originally a log building also used as a school. The Preston family owned the land where the original church was built about 1780. Later the Prestons donated the land to the church, which was formally chartered in 1866.



Walnut Grove Presbyterian Church Marker

The Preston family to which Robert was related played a very important role in western Virginia/eastern Tennessee during colonial, revolutionary war, and civil war eras.

Robert's cousin Col. William Preston was a surveyor who built Smithfield Plantation (<http://civic.bev.net/smithfield>). Smithfield is now owned by Virginia Polytechnical Institute, which was originally named 'Preston and Olin Institute.'



Smithfield Plantation, Blacksburg, Virginia