

Checking Up on the Doctor

by [Harry Kollatz Jr.](#)

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Illustration by Victoria Borges

Richmond's First Mayor, William Foushee

The ratification of Richmond's charter as a city occurred on May 6, 1782, and on July 2, the first municipal election among white men of property put forth 12 representatives to serve as the "Body Corporate." The next day, they selected physician William Foushee as mayor.

Foushee was a descendant of French Huguenots who came to Virginia in 1699. John and Winifred Foushee settled in Northumberland County; William was born on Oct. 26, 1749.

He apprenticed in medicine in Norfolk and then attended the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. He returned to practice in Norfolk, where he married Elizabeth Isabella Harmanson (or Harminson, depending on documentation). By 1777, the Foushees had moved to Richmond. He served as a physician and pharmacist to the Revolution's soldiers.

In spring 1779, a combined group of British and German prisoners, mainly officers, arrived in Richmond. They came from Gen. John Burgoyne's army, which had surrendered Oct. 17, 1777, at Saratoga, N.Y. Some 4,000 of them were first interned in Massachusetts, then a long, harrowing march had taken them to Charlottesville. According to a parole agreement, the captives could reside within a 100-mile radius of Charlottesville. After two years, many of these men were shoeless and penniless, and hadn't received a change of clothing.

Thomas Jefferson entertained some of these British officers at Monticello, and the ranking Virginia gentlemen followed his lead. As pointed out by Harry M. Ward and Harold E. Greer Jr. in *Richmond During the Revolution*, the hope was that such gracious hospitality would encourage these individuals to drop out of the war. Foushee, a young man of means, joined the plan. His apparent courtesies to hated British officers ignited ire in the heart of one street tough, who assaulted the doctor. Like others of his kind, he'd grown a thumbnail long and hardened it over a candle to make it a weapon for eye-gouging and testicle-cutting.

WILLIAM FOUSHEE – EARLY POSTMASTER OF RICHMOND 1808 – 1824

A bystander, Lt. Thomas Anburey, related how Foushee's attacker "flew at him, and in an instant had turned his eye out of the socket, and while [it] hung upon his cheek, the fellow was barbarous enough to endeavor to pluck it entirely out, but was prevented."

Foushee must've recovered — eye, solicitous character and all else intact. He advertised that, despite the rising cost of everything, he still charged the same five shillings for a daytime doctor visit. He accepted payment in commodities, tobacco and cash — but, he added, "the indigent, or those whose circumstances may render it necessary to make an abatement, they will be attended to as formerly."

Historian Samuel Mordecai described Foushee as "a gentleman of fine personal appearance and deportment, and a favorite physician with the ladies, who said his visits were restoratives without the aid of medicine This calm and sunshine which distinguished his medical character, could be changed to storm and thunder in his political one."

According to the 1782 tax census, then-31-year-old Foushee owned six slaves, two cows, three horses and two vehicles. He and Elizabeth Foushee, 25, are listed as the parents of three children: John, 6; Nancy, 3; and Charlotte, 6 months. There would ultimately be four more: William Jr., Margaret, Elizabeth and Isabella. Mordecai said that Foushee's Main Street residence (on the site of the 1936 Parcel Post building/Fourth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals annex) "contained some rare attractions, which caused it to be a favorite resort of the beaux, who called it the home of the Graces," referring to Foushee's five daughters. Mordecai himself wrote poetry in appreciation for one of the girls, whom he did not marry. The girls married into the business community and aristocracy. Isabella wed Thomas Ritchie, the influential founder of the Richmond Enquirer.

Through Ritchie, Foushee became a member of the "Richmond junto." The group of some 20 prominent men, interrelated by blood or matrimony, formed a pro-Jeffersonian shadow government after the Revolution that advocated state's rights and attempted, sometimes successfully, to manipulate affairs.

Foushee was kept busy by his civic-mindedness and, perhaps, ambition. He was extraordinarily well-connected in a city, by 1800, of 6,000 people — a population that could fit comfortably in The Diamond baseball park today. He was a trustee for the Richmond Academy and a founding director in 1793 of the Bank of Richmond. In 1785, when George Washington declined the presidency of the James River Navigation Co. that built and ran the canal system, Foushee accepted; he held that position for 33 years. Foushee represented Richmond in the General Assembly in 1791 and from 1797 to 1799, and then served on the governor's council of state, before returning to the assembly as a representative of Henrico County from 1806 to 1808.

In 1808, President Jefferson appointed Foushee as Richmond postmaster. When Foushee seemed to be on his deathbed, a Richmond office-seeker thinking him actually deceased journeyed to Washington to inquire about the vacant postmaster position. But the careerist returned to find Foushee alive and convalescing. In 1819, Foushee built a gristmill on the James River near today's Texas Beach that was later owned by his son-in-law Ritchie, and ruined by an 1832 flood. Today, only parts of the walls remain.

The doctor died at home on Aug. 21, 1824. He is buried at Shockoe Hill Cemetery.

WILLIAM FOUSHEE – EARLY POSTMASTER OF RICHMOND 1808 – 1824



William Foushee



William Foushee Sr. (October 26, 1749 – August 21, 1824) was an American medical doctor, politician, and socialite. After serving with distinction as a surgeon in the American Revolution, he entered into local Virginia politics, notably serving as the first Mayor of Richmond.^{[1][2]} He went on to become a political, social, and commercial leader in Richmond for the next half century of his life.

Early life

Foushee was born to John Foushee and Winifred (Williams) Foushee on October 26, 1749, in Northumberland County, Virginia.

A third-generation Virginian, Foushee's paternal grandfather James immigrated from France.

Marriage and children

On March 6, 1775, Foushee married Elizabeth Isabella Harmondson in Northampton County, Virginia.

The couple had seven children:

- William Jr.
- John
- Nancy
- Margaret
- Elizabeth
- Charlotte
- Isabella

Isabella went on to marry founder of the Richmond Enquirer, Thomas Ritchie.

Career

Physician

WILLIAM FOUSHEE – EARLY POSTMASTER OF RICHMOND 1808 – 1824

Foushee was highly regarded in the medical profession. He was a surgeon during the American Revolutionary War.[3] He was at one time President of the Medical Society of Virginia. He was also a first mover in the newly discovered smallpox inoculation.[4]

Mayor of Richmond Later years and death



Foushee's grave at Shockoe Hill Cemetery in Richmond

For the last sixteen years of his life, Foushee served in the capacity of Richmond's postmaster. He was appointed to that position on June 20, 1808 by President Jefferson.

On August 21, 1824, Foushee died in his home. His body is interred at Shockoe Hill Cemetery on Shockoe Hill in Richmond.

References

1. Christian, William Asbury (1912). Richmond, Her Past and Present. Richmond, Virginia: L.H. Jenkins. Retrieved 18 March 2013.
2. Nuckols, Robert R. (1899). A History of the Government of the City of Richmond, Virginia and a Sketch of Those Who Administer Its Affairs. Richmond, Virginia: The Williams Printing Co. Retrieved 18 March 2013.
3. Kollatz Jr., Harry (1 July 2014). "Checking Up on the Doctor". DBA Richmond Magazine. Target Communications, Inc. Retrieved 25 December 2015.
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WILLIAM FOUSHEE – EARLY POSTMASTER OF RICHMOND 1808 – 1824



<https://www.meetup.com/James-River-Hikers/messages/63401612/>

Dr. William Foushee

Article by James River Hiker Andrew McRoberts:

Dr. William Foushee: Richmond's First Mayor and First Citizen

Dr. William Foushee, Sr. (October 26, 1749 – August 21, 1824) was an American physician, politician, and socialite. He notably served as the first Mayor when Richmond became a city in 1782, and went on to become a political, social, and commercial leader in Richmond for the next half century of his life.

This post will recite some of the history of Dr. Foushee's life, explain the significance of his accomplishments and prominence, and discuss a unique historic gristmill he built that needs our protection.

Foushee was born to John and Winifred (Williams) Foushee on October 26, 1749, in Northumberland County, Virginia. He was educated at and graduated from Edinburgh in Scotland. A third-generation Virginian, Foushee's paternal grandfather James immigrated from France. (Ahhh... Foushee is a French name!)



On March 6, 1775, on the eve of the Revolution, Foushee married Elizabeth Isabella Harmondson in Northampton County, Virginia, and they went on to have seven children. Dr. Foushee's three beautiful daughters were called "The Three Graces," after the mythical name for the three daughters of the Greek king of the gods. Foushee's youngest of the three daughters, Isabella, married the famous Thomas Ritchie.

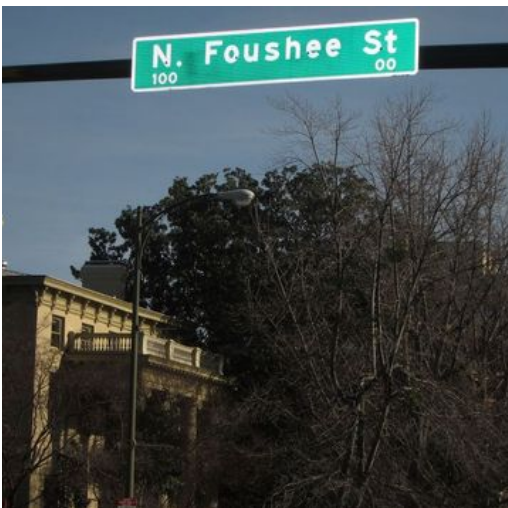
Foushee's son-in-law Thomas Ritchie (1778 - 1854) was a leading American journalist with the *Richmond Enquirer* as editor and publisher for 41 years, and was called "The Napoleon of the Press." Thomas Jefferson said of the *Enquirer*, "I read but a single newspaper, Ritchie's *Enquirer*, the best that is published or ever has been published in America."

Dr. Foushee was the City of Richmond's first Mayor, and he might also have been called her "First Citizen." Elected to the mayoralty in 1782, he was a leader in civic, commercial, political, and social affairs for a period of approximately half a century. He lived on Main Street, near the present Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals building, just south of the State Capitol. The home is long gone.

WILLIAM FOUSHEE – EARLY POSTMASTER OF RICHMOND 1808 – 1824

Dr. Foushee was a contemporary of the founding fathers, about 6 years younger than Thomas Jefferson. He headed various civic and patriotic societies, including such groups as the Society of the Friends of the Revolution in 1813, having served as a distinguished surgeon in the Revolution. He cared for George Wythe, Jefferson's law professor, on his deathbed. As a political leader and a man of wit and social presence, it was also Foushee's function to preside over large political dinners whenever Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe or other prominent leaders of the Republican (Democratic) party came to Richmond.

During its early years as a City, Foushee was as prominent in Richmond as some of the most revered political leaders of the young United States, or perhaps even more. Note that the first city streets west of 1st Street are named for Foushee, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe and Patrick Henry. It appears that Foushee may have taken poor George Washington's street!



Despite his political and social pursuits and busy professional career as a doctor, Dr. Foushee found time to serve as a trustee of Richmond Academy, a director of the old Bank of Richmond from its establishment in 1793, and as president of the James River Navigation Company (which constructed the James River Canal, predecessor to the James River & Kanawha Canal). The last named post he held for 33 years, succeeding George Washington in 1785 after the latter had organized the company. After construction, the canal was at all times during Foushee's life a significant water route for agricultural and other products around the falls of the James.

Perhaps because of his involvement in the canal, one of his business pursuits was constructing in 1819 a two-story grist mill above the City, between the canal and the north bank of the James River. The remains of this mill are located in the City's James River Park, and can still be seen in the vicinity of "Texas Beach" (so-called because it is accessed from the North Bank James River Park parking area on Texas Street, and the sandy shores of the river in the area). Foushee sold the mill before his death to his son-in-law Thomas Ritchie in 1824. Sadly for Ritchie, the mill was destroyed by flooding in 1832.

This grist mill Dr. Foushee built nearly 200 years ago may be one of the only original still standing structures in Richmond that is connected to a truly important person of our City's history that is abandoned, mostly unprotected, largely unknown and crumbling away. We've been told that the roof and windows were largely intact through the 1950's. During the past few months, some have sadly defaced it with graffiti.

WILLIAM FOUSHEE – EARLY POSTMASTER OF RICHMOND 1808 – 1824

For the last sixteen years of his life, Foushee served in the capacity of Richmond's postmaster, having been appointed to that position in 1808 by President Jefferson. On August 21, 1824, Foushee died in his home. His body is interred at Shockoe Hill Cemetery on Shockoe Hill in Richmond. Here is the memorial marking his grave:

Dr. William Foushee was an important political, social and economic force in the early days of the City of Richmond. In his time, he was as prominent as governors of Virginia and presidents of the United States. Or, as shown by his recognition on the first city street west of 1st, perhaps more prominent.

Doing something to preserve and protect the remains of his unique historic gristmill would be an excellent way for us to honor the legacy of Richmond's "First Citizen," Dr. William Foushee, just as a previous generation did in naming the street.



Here is a picture of the mill's remains

WILLIAM FOUSHEE – EARLY POSTMASTER OF RICHMOND 1808 – 1824

THE RICHMOND TOUR GUYS

<http://www.richmondtourguys.com/dr-william-foushee-remarkable-richmonders/>



Dr. William Foushee
The First Mayor of Richmond

Largely forgotten by history outside of Richmond history buffs, Dr. William Foushee was Richmond's first Mayor, first citizen, and very much a contemporary of famous founders such as Thomas Jefferson and George Washington and was held in similar high regard.

Dr. Foushee was the descendant of French Huguenots (French Protestants who fled France during the Reformation and were given asylum by the Governor of Virginia in the early-17th Century). He grew up in Virginia, but was educated in the Medical Profession at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. He came back to Richmond to practice.

On March 6, 1775, Foushee married Elizabeth Isabella Harmondson in Northampton County, Virginia. They would have 7 children: William Jr., John, Nancy, Margarett, Elizabeth, Charlotte, and Isabella. Which also pretty much covers all of the common names of that era.

Foushee was very highly regarded in the Medical profession. He became a renowned surgeon during the American Revolutionary War. He was at one time President of the Medical Society of Virginia. He was also a first mover in the newly discovered Smallpox inoculation. In 1788, Henrico County gave him permission to administer it. To prove he rolled with the Revolutionary elite, [here is a letter that he wrote to Thomas Jefferson](#) about the vaccine (which he CC'd a Dr. Currie on).

His medical expertise also came in handy in a way he may not have envisioned. At the time of the Revolution, the rougher sort of men in Richmond had the practice of growing one finger nail very long and sharpening it to a fine point. With this point they would try to gouge their opponents eyes out or their scrotum sack open.

WILLIAM FOUSHEE – EARLY POSTMASTER OF RICHMOND 1808 – 1824

Richmond was a... different place back then. A port city with many brigands and lots of rabble. One day, Foushee was walking around with a paroled British Officer named Thomas Aubrey. Among the “Gentleman” it was not uncommon for the aristocracy to associate with British Officers in a cordial manner, but the commoners were not quite so open. One of these sharp-nailed ruffians decided Foushee was too friendly with the enemy and gouged the future Mayor’s his eye out of socket. With the good Doctor’s eye dangling out of the socket onto his cheek, the ruffian attempted to yank it out, but was tackled by Thomas Aubrey. Foushee quickly put the eye back in.

In 1782, Richmond was officially made a City and Foushee was elected as the first Mayor of Richmond from among the 12 Council Members. He also, at one time or another, was a member of the General Assembly, Postmaster, and President of the James River Navigation Company (which built and managed the canal system in Richmond).

During the War of 1812 while Postmaster of Virginia, he commanded a company of troops that was raised to defend Norfolk from British attack. Norfolk was razed and the unit never saw action as Richmond was not attacked during the War of 1812.

On August 21, 1824, Foushee died in his home. You can see his grave at Shockoe Hill Cemetery on Shockoe Hill in Richmond.



In honor of all of his accomplishments... they named a street after him. In case you were curious where Foushee Street came from...