

## MOST COURTHOUSES OF VITAL RECORDS BURNED

The major problem limiting identification of **Pamunkey Davenport** ancestry before and after **Davis Davenport** today lies in the family having emerged from a Seventeenth Century record limbo of an Indian reservation into a Twenty-first Century Virginia records void. The Seventeenth Century, Eighteenth Century, and the early two-thirds of the Nineteenth Century records of New Kent, King & Queen, King William, Caroline, and Hanover counties, crucial to **Pamunkey Davenport** identification, have been largely destroyed by courthouse fires of one sort or another. Most of this destruction was caused by the furious Civil War battles that ravaged the region 1862/65--although the most crucial fire, King William Courthouse, occurred in 1882. Yet we know, by Virginia Patent records, that there was a **Davenport** presence (female) in the Pamunkey Neck as early as 1650, more than fifty years before it ceased to be an Indian domain, and that as soon as the Neck ceased to be Indian in 1701 and King William County was created, there was a **Davenport Path** of some antiquity noted in several surveys, and that **Davis** and his son **Martin** were listed as small acreage freeholders (land owners) there in 1704.

The mid-1990s finding of a 1696 survey identifying a **Davenport Plantation** and an adjoining **Davenport Landing** on the Mattaponi River (little more than a mile from King William Court House, still at its original site but rebuilt several times since the fire), proves that there was a **Davenport** presence--surely related to the family identified here--when the Neck was still within Indian jurisdiction. In 1696, Pamunkey Neck for Virginia governance purposes was considered a part of King & Queen County, but the land whereon the **Davenport** plantation and landing were sited, or adjacent to, had been patented in 1667 (when the Neck was in New Kent County), obviously by Indian sufferance.

That **Davenport** presence surely well antedated 1696 by at least a decade or more, for in those days when every improvement--buildings, fences, roads, tobacco and other fields, etc--had to be done by manual labor, and building materials had to be extracted from the surrounding forest and soil, a plantation did not become such without years of hard work. There is no evidence that the **Davenports** held slaves then to do that labor. To the contrary, the evidence is that **Davis Davenport** and his son **Martin**, whose presence in the Neck are proven, were in the beginning of pioneer yeomanry, who achieved by their own labor, and were not of the Cavalier or Great Planter Aristocracy who had indentured servants and slaves to do their bidding.