



## Smithsonian American Art Museum

March 2012



### *A Dog Swap*

1881

**Richard Norris Brooke**

Born: Warrenton, Virginia 1847

Died: Warrenton, Virginia 1920

oil on canvas

47 1/8 x 65 7/8 in. (119.6 x 167.2 cm)

Smithsonian American Art Museum

Gift of Colonel Thomas G. Young, Jr.

1956.11.2

[Collections Webpage and High Resolution Image](#)

*Artist Richard Norris Brooke (1847-1920) was born and lived in Warrenton, Virginia, the county seat of Fauquier County. Brooke recorded the names of some of his models, including individuals in A Pastoral Visit, a companion piece to A Dog Swap. Researcher Liz visited libraries and historical societies in Fauquier County in an effort to find out more about the identities of the people in the painting.*

- **Do we know the identities of the African-American family in *A Dog Swap*?**

Richard Norris Brooke was known as a painter of African-American subjects, even though most of his paintings depicted landscapes. The artist maintained a home and studio in [Warrenton, Virginia](#), as well as in Washington, D.C. and taught for thirty years at the Corcoran School of Art. Brooke studied painting in Paris with Leon Bonnat and emulated the style and sensibilities of the Barbizon Painters. “It has been my aim, while recognizing in proper measure the humorous features of my subject,” wrote Brooke of his paintings of African-American life, “to elevate it to that plane of sober and truthful treatment which, in French Art, has dignified the Peasant subjects of Jules Breton [French Barbizon painter, 1827-1906] and should characterize every work of Art.”

A devastating fire on November 29, 1909 destroyed a whole neighborhood in Warrenton, including Brooke’s studio and 225 works of art. Fortunately for art historians, Brooke kept a meticulous logbook, “Record of Work,” a copy of which is in our museum library. Brooke

remarked that *A Dog Swap* painted in Warrenton in 1881, was a companion piece to [A Pastoral Visit](#) and that “old George Washington” modeled as the pastor and “Daniel Brown” as the host. Brooke also recorded a lost painting of “Aunt Adelaides” (1890) that had the “same background as *Dog Swap*.” Since Brooke based his characters in *A Pastoral Visit* on African-Americans in Warrenton, I wondered if the people shown in *A Dog Swap* might be relatives of “Aunt Adelaide.” (Southern whites addressed mature black women as “aunt” during this time period).

Through Google, I found the [Afro-American Historical Association of Fauquier County](#) in The Plains, Virginia. On a visit to AAHAFC in late January, Karen White Hughes and her colleague, Judy Butler, helped me search census records for Fauquier County for 1880 and 1900. This is what we found:

- There was only one African-American woman with the first name of Adelaide listed as living in Warrenton in the 1880 census. Adelaide Brown, a 56-year-old African-American woman, was listed on Ninth Street with her 53-year-old sister, Judith Brown; Adelaide’s 36-year-old daughter, Frances Gaines; 3 granddaughters – Adelaide Brown, 6, Lilly Brown 16, and Cordelia Gaines, 7, and a 20-year-old grandson, Lewis Brown. Adelaide’s profession was listed as “keeping house;” her son and daughter were both domestic servants. I wondered if Adelaide could have been a relative of Daniel Brown.
- Also in the 1880 census in Warrenton was a 62-year-old African-American man, George Washington listed as “laborer” with his 45-year-old wife, Susan, although their street of residence is not specified. Karen White told me that she had heard about a Warrenton pastor from that era named George Washington.

Next, I drove from The Plains to downtown [Warrenton](#) where I located First through Sixth Streets, but no Ninth Street! I stopped at the [Fauquier Public Library](#) and learned from the reference librarian that they had a resource room for local history. The librarian directed me to maps of Warrenton and several books on Fauquier County history (Brown, 2008; Hollie et al., 2009; Moffett, 1996; Toler, 2010).

I discovered from the maps that Ninth Street had been renamed Pelham Street in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The 1878 map showed the property at the corner of [Ninth Street and Waterloo Street](#) as owned by James Vass Brooke, the artist’s father.

On February 14, I visited the Gott Library of the [Fauquier Heritage and Preservation Foundation, Inc.](#) in Marshall, Virginia; the [Fauquier Historical Society](#) in Warrenton, and also returned to the [Fauquier Public Library](#). The director of the Fauquier Historical Society showed me two vertical files on the artist. One file contained an article from the *Fauquier Citizen*, written at the time of the Corcoran Gallery’s landmark *Facing History* exhibition on African-Americans in art. The article mentioned Daniel Brown, the model for the host in the Corcoran’s *A Pastoral Visit*,

whose descendents owned the house at 28 Smith Street (the setting for the painting) for several generations.

I was also astounded to find a copy of a land deed for 28 Smith Street dated March 15, 1963. The Brown family sold the property in 1963 to George Tayloe Ross. The deed mentioned Adelaide Brown's direct descendents including her children – Frances Gaines (mentioned in the 1880 census) and Eli Brown (not mentioned), grand children, and great-grand children. I recognized several names from the 1880 census. I learned that George L. Ball willed the property to Adelaide in 1874 which she received in 1875.

Returning to the Fauquier Library, I found George L. Ball's will, dated April 30, 1874. Ball willed his house at 28 Smith Street, land, and several articles of furniture to a "colored" woman, Adelaide Brown "as a compensation to her for her services and attention to me during sickness and the decrepitude and infirmity incident to an advanced age."



**Thaddeus Norris House, built c. 1812, 74 Waterloo St. (owned by the artist's father, James Vass Brooke. Cross street is Pelham St., formerly South Ninth St.)**

The Brookes and the Browns lived in close proximity to one another. I found James Vass Brooke's house at the corner of [74 Waterloo and Pelham](#). I also photographed [67 Waterloo Street](#), where Richard Norris Brooke lived and his birthplace at [12 Smith Street](#).



**Eppa Hunton House, built c. 1825, 67 Waterloo Street, home of Richard Norris Brooke in late nineteenth century**



**Right: James Caldwell House, c. 1831, 12 Smith St. (Birthplace of Richard Norris Brooke)**

Just down the street from Brooke's birthplace is [28 Smith Street](#). Built of brick, the original part of the house (c. 1825) stands nearest the street.



**Left: Captain Ball House at 28 Smith Street (built c. 1825); Right: Detail of house in *A Dog Swap***

28 Smith Street's façade has a small window and a door resembling the window and door in *A Dog Swap*. The difference in color between the house in the painting and 28 Smith Street may have to do with the practice in this region of whitewashing brick buildings. Whitewash fades over time if not re-applied. So I believe that 28 Smith Street may be "Aunt Adelaides'" house portrayed by Brooke in *Dog Swap*. The individuals in *A Dog Swap* may be based upon Adelaide Brown's children and grandchildren, possibly her daughter, Cordelia Gaines (the woman in the doorway?) and son, Eli Brown (the younger man on the right?). The ages of Adelaide's granddaughters in the 1880 census, Adelaide Brown, 6, Lilly Brown 16, and Cordelia Gaines, 7, correspond to the approximate ages of the teenager and little girl in the painting.

So often art historians can only speculate who modeled for the figures in an artist's composition. Therefore, it is significant that Brooke recorded the names of some of his African-American models in his "Record of Work," and that these individuals were his neighbors in Warrenton.

Several questions are yet to be answered. We know that by 1881 (when *Dog Swap* was painted) 28 Smith Street was already in the possession of Adelaide Brown and family, but the 1880 census has them living on Ninth Street.

- **Why was Adelaide Brown listed in the 1880 census as residing on Ninth Street, when she owned 28 Smith Street at the time?**

## **Selected Bibliography:**

1878 Deed of the Mt. Carmel Lodge of Ancient Free & Accepted Masons. Written September 6, 1878. Recorded September 11, 1878. Deed Book 69, p. 70 (Fauquier County Court Records, Warrenton, Virginia). ARCH.04651. [Afro-American Historical Association of Fauquier County online database](#).

Ball, George L. Will dated April 30, 1874, Will Book, Vol. 34, 1873-1875; Will Book, Vol. 35, 1875-1876. Fauquier County Clerk of the Circuit Court Records, Virginiana Room, Fauquier Public Library.

Benson, Matthew C. *Fauquier County*. Postcard History Series. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000.

Brooke, Richard Norris to Directors of Corcoran Gallery. April 18, 1881. Corcoran Gallery of Art Archives, Washington, D.C.

Brown, Kathi Ann, Walter Nicklin, and John T. Toler. *250 Years in Fauquier County: A Virginia Story*. Fairfax, VA: Fauquier Historical Society/GMU Press, 2008.

Brooke, Richard Norris. "Record of Work: serving to some extent as a History of my professional Life and as a means of tracing Pictures and Studies painted and disposed of Especially since my departure for Paris in 1878." Facsimile of original manuscript c. 1878-1918. Smithsonian American Art Museum/National Portrait Gallery Library.

Deed for 28 Smith Street. March 15, 1963. Fauquier County Court Records. Found in Vertical Files, Richard Norris Brooke, Fauquier Historical Society, Warrenton, Virginia.

*Gray's New Map of Warrenton [Virginia]*. Philadelphia, Pa.: O.W. Gray & Son, 1878. Virginiana Room, Fauquier Public Library, Warrenton, Virginia.

Henry, Geoffrey B., James C. Massey, and Shirley Maxwell. *Historic architectural survey of the Warrenton Historic District: Warrenton, VA*. Monroeville, PA: GAI Consultants, Inc., 1998., 3 vols. Available in Virginiana Room, Fauquier Public Library, Warrenton, VA.

Hollie, Donna Tyler, Ph.D., Brett M. Tyler and Karen Hughes White. *African Americans of Fauquier County. Images of America series*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009.

*Map of Town of Warrenton, VA, 1970*. Cartographer: Rosser H. Payne. Virginiana Room, Fauquier Public Library, Warrenton, Virginia.

Moffett, Lee. *The Diary of Court House Square: Warrenton, Virginia, USA: from Early Times Through 1986, with 1987-1995 Reflections*. Revised Edition. Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, 1996.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. March 1886. Virginiana Room. Fauquier Public Library. Warrenton, Virginia.

Sprague, Connie. "Corcoran's 'Black Image' show features Warrenton painting." *Fauquier Citizen*. February 16, 1990. 13.

Toler, John T., Cheryl H. Shepherd, and Ann C. Power. *Warrenton, Virginia: A Unique History of 200 Years*. Warrenton, VA: Town of Warrenton/Partnership for Warrenton Foundation, December 2010.

Vess, Claudia, Catalogue Entry on "A Pastoral Visit," *Facing History: Black History in American Art, 1710-1940*, Guy McElroy, editor. Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1990. 93.