

Rappahannock News

rappnews.com

146th Year • No. 3

THURSDAY, JANUARY 19, 2023

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From JFK's Oval Office to Flint Hill



Pat Saltonstall, at home in Warrenton, looks through one of many scrapbooks filled with press clippings.

BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER

Pat Saltonstall recalls a remarkable journey

BY JULIA SHANAHAN | Rappahannock News staff

Patricia "Pat" Saltonstall may be 97 years old, but when she recounted the time former President Lyndon B. Johnson swept her into a ballroom dance, the fire in her eyes and pep in her voice resembled her prime.

Saltonstall, a former Rappahannock resident and decorated journalist, moved out of her Flint Hill farmhouse last year and into an assisted living center in Warrenton. Her studio-style room is filled with stacks of newspapers, boxes, and a desktop computer where Saltonstall said

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Boundary change talks on again

How town, county officials quietly salvaged and untangled a potential deal to expand Washington's limits

BY BEN PETERS
Rappahannock News staff

Following months of uncertainty, the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors in the new year have returned to the negotiating table with the Town of Washington in an effort to salvage a boundary line adjustment deal.

Talks surrounding a roughly four-acre boundary change to town resident Chuck Akre's property, backed by the town, that would bring all of the Rush River Commons project within the town limits, had been stalled since last summer after Washington officials balked at the Supervisors attempts to gain concessions in exchange for their support of the maneuver.

In an effort to reframe the conversation, the town at the time vowed in a counter proposal to work with the

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New effort could fund more public transit for county seniors ▶ Page 6



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SALTONSTALL

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she spends some of her day writing, mostly just for herself.

Saltonstall worked as a journalist for the now-defunct Washington Star in Washington, D.C., and wrote a popular column, “Diplomatically Speaking.” She wrote the column for two years, and during that time, she said she “interviewed every ambassador” and got to know President John F. Kennedy fairly well. She said the White House became her “arena,” which eventually led to her work in policy and with various nonprofit organizations.

Many in Rappahannock County know Saltonstall’s name from a sensational murder trial in 1982, where Diane E. Kidwell, wife of a Warrenton insurance broker, allegedly shot and killed Rance Spellman, Saltonstall’s farm manager, in what The Washington Post that year would label a “bitter hunt country land dispute.”

The article also described Saltonstall as a “well-to-do neighbor ...divorcee, heiress and descendant of a prominent New England family.” The Saltonstalls are descendants of the early English colonists and have been described as a “Boston Brahmin family” from Massachusetts.

“Now my family was not one of the richest,” she said. “But I knew all the Rockefellers. I used to date one of them, so I knew them, and I knew how they lived and everything.”

A Rappahannock County Circuit Court grand jury indicted Kidwell on murder and firearms charges surrounding the shooting of farm manager Rance Spellman that took place on Saltonstall’s Points of View Farm on Ben Venue Road. A jury later acquitted the 44-year-old Kidwell of both the murder and firearms charges, ending a long ordeal for Saltonstall and others in Rappahannock County.

“It really affected me,” Saltonstall said of the incident. “I was very, very upset. And it was an interesting thing to try to deal with in Rappahannock, because I didn’t have a lot of close friends in Rappahannock.”

Saltonstall moved to the county in 1970 in an attempt to escape from the public eye and live a more low-key life after a long career in the nation’s capital and after being arrested and put on trial after the 1968 Democratic Nominating Convention in Chicago. Ironically, she said, the exact opposite happened once the Kidwell trial in Rappahannock County began.

After Saltonstall had her charges dropped in Chicago, which she said was a result of her being “in the wrong place at the wrong time,” she saw a “little, teeny” advertisement in The Washington Post for land in Rappahannock County.

She said the beautiful area, along with the price of the farm, led her to Flint Hill, where she would live until 2021. “I can remember distinctly going past Warrenton and saying, ‘Oh, this is gorgeous out here.’”

Saltonstall said she couldn’t understand why the news media covered the trial in Rappahannock so heavily, referencing coverage from The Post and The New Yorker magazine. But for a woman whose earliest memory is playing dolls with the late Queen Elizabeth, and who spent her teenage years living through World War II, Saltonstall’s standard for sensationalism is higher than most.

A childhood at war

When Saltonstall’s mother divorced her father, her grandfather gifted them a trip to Hawaii where they would take “a rusty old boat called the President Johnson” from Boston through the Panama Canal, which at the time had just opened. Saltonstall said she was five years old, and within a year her mother



PAT SALTONSTALL, IN HER OWN WORDS



I don’t feel as though I had a special relationship with [President Lyndon B.] Johnson.

We were friends. I mean, he liked me. He liked to dance with me. That’s one of my best memories. Oh, they had a big party and he wanted to dance with me, because he loved to dance and there was an orchestra playing in the East Room. And he grabbed my hand and – I mean, there were people all around us, you know, maybe a thousand people in the White House all crowded around, but he wouldn’t let go of my hand. And including the Secret Service who were right – these huge guys – they were right in front of me and I said, you know, ‘take a walk,’ he’s got my hand. So anyway, he pulls me into the East Room where we dance. He didn’t care about me. He was talking to everyone, but he was dancing with me.”



► To listen to an interview with Pat Saltonstall, scan the QR code above or go to rappnews.link/4yr

would remarry in Hawaii where the family would put down roots.

Saltonstall had a happy early childhood in Hawaii — she learned how to dance the Hula, saying she became quite good at it, and she had a strong interest in science and the world around her. At 11 years old, Saltonstall wrote a letter to Child Life magazine, which she said was featured prominently in print and was also published in the local Honolulu newspaper.

She had a microscope, and would write about the things she studied underneath it.

“Every time I wrote a letter to a magazine or anything, it was always published, so I must have been a pretty able writer for my age,” she said.

World War II began during Saltonstall’s early teenage years, and her parents sent her to a boarding school in San Francisco, California, because Honolulu became crowded with soldiers. Saltonstall described that formative time as being extremely lonely, and at times traumatic, having to navigate life without her family and under constant threat of nuclear war.

She said she doesn’t remember her mother and stepfather as “individuals,” but rather her time growing up in Honolulu, where Saltonstall and her brothers were mostly taken care of by nannies.

“I really never saw my mother or stepfather much again, because there was no plane travel, there was no travel of any kind,” she said. “And so I would be sent to a different place for every [holiday]. I’d be a guest in someone’s house or a distant relative or something like that. So I didn’t have a normal teenage life at all, and it was very lonely.”

During one train ride from San Francisco to Boston before Christmas, Saltonstall, who was 15 at the time, was thrown out of her sleeping quarters and into the aisle, on top of the other passengers who had also just experienced the train’s

➔ aggressive halt. Saltonstall had been in a train wreck in Cheyenne, Wyoming that sent dozens to the hospital. (There is no digital record of this train crash, but people close to Saltonstall said her recollection of the event has remained consistent over the years.)

She said the train's passengers mostly consisted of men in uniform, which was what her train rides looked like most of the time. She said they sat in the broken-down train for two days with no heat, and she said the only doctor around had made unwanted sexual advances toward her.

"I was cut pretty badly via broken mirrors and stuff like that, and so [the doctor] came in to check my bunk, and I had to throw him out," she said.

Saltonstall's loneliness rarely got in the way of her ambition. After her sophomore year at Smith College, she spent the summer in a lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), working with 16 men and two other women. Saltonstall said she later learned the work they were doing contributed to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which would effectively end the war for the U.S.

The scientists "knew I hadn't been home for four years," she said. "And so they said, 'you're going to get to go home.' And they were right."

When the war ended, Saltonstall was still attending Smith College studying psychology, but she wanted nothing more than to go back to Hawaii, which she considered her home. She took a train to San Francisco, where she met up with her brother who had been serving in the U.S. Navy and had since been married.

They were all on stand-by for a ticket to take a ship back to Hawaii and "had to be ready to move" on any given day, because they never knew who was going to be on the ship's passenger lists. When describing the end of the war, she said "you can't

imagine how strange the whole time was."

"I got home and I can remember the first thing I did was get in my bathing suit and go swimming in our saltwater pool," she recalled in vivid detail.

A woman with conviction

Saltonstall is a woman who knows what she stands for, even while pursuing career paths in male-dominated fields.

Saltonstall's political column for The Star sometimes landed her in White House meetings where diplomats and policymakers hashed out important decisions. Sometimes Kennedy or

Johnson were also in the room.

"One of my first assignments was to cover the Irish Ambassador [at the White House]," she said. "...I was ushered in without any problem at all and went right into the Oval Office, sitting in front of that famous desk and then that's when I met Kennedy."

Saltonstall would go on to have several more meetings with Kennedy up until he was assassinated, where she then became even closer with his successor. She said, "LBJ turned out to be the most amazing person."

"I was in the White House with him and some of

Continued on the next page ➔



Above right: Saltonstall was there to cover the Beatles first show in the USA in February 1963 and an event after, hosted by the British Embassy: "George was the most talkative of them."

Left: Saltonstall looks at a clipping of when children were invited to a press conference at the White House South Lawn during President Lyndon Johnson's administration.



PHOTOS BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER



→ *Continued from the previous page*

the staff and having fun after some event in the East Room, where we designed part of the anti-poverty program, and I was into that all the way," she said. "And they used to throw ideas at me, I would throw them back, and I just had a great privilege."

Saltonstall and Johnson also bonded over their shared passion for civil rights, saying she was one of the "early people to be shocked at what I didn't know about civil rights." During her time covering the Johnson administration, she became keenly aware of the injustice that faced Black Americans, which she was not aware of previously due to her own privilege and isolation in Hawaii, and then at her boarding school.

While she was active in various causes during the Civil Rights movement, she said her husband at the time started to struggle with alcohol abuse, which led Saltonstall to chair the Washington Area Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse for nine years, and eventually serve on the board of the National Institute of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse under the National Institute of Health for four years.

Saltonstall said she testified before Congress as a part of her role at the institute, and was later hired by U.S. Sen. Howard Hughes, a Democrat from Iowa, who chaired a subcommittee on alcoholism and narcotics. Saltonstall worked in Hughes' D.C. office for two years. "Not many people knew it as a disease," she said. "No one looked at it that way."

Saltonstall's habit of activism did not end when she moved to Rappahannock County in 1970.

Upon moving to the county, she said she was "appalled" to see what is now the Scrabble School being used as a landfill. Saltonstall raised about \$15,000, she said, to help kickstart restoration of the



BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER

Saltonstall in the library of her residence in Warrenton.

historic Rosenwald school and ensure it wouldn't be torn down. Saltonstall is listed on their website as president emeritus of the Scrabble School Preservation Foundation.

"I probably borrowed part of [the \$15,000] and put part of my own cash into it," she said. "I had enough money to be able to live with that kind of thing. But I just went ahead and went into debt a little bit."

Even though Saltonstall currently resides in an assisted living facility in Warrenton, she gets regular

visits from members of Rapp at Home — and has stacks of boxes that hold photo albums, newspaper clippings and other keepsakes from Saltonstall's long life and career.

Through Mountainside Memoirs we hope to document the stories of our residents, especially seniors, from the sensational to the mundane. If you know someone who you think should be featured, please send an email to julia@rappnews.com or call 540-675-3338.

BOUNDARY

From Page 1

county to address a number of the Supervisor's concessions requests, while still opposing others. The catch was those issues must be completely unencumbered from a boundary change deal.

But county officials never formally replied to the proposal.

And soon thereafter Hampton Supervisor Keir Whitson, who represents the area comprising Rush River Commons and who has been at the forefront of the county's bargaining with the town over the boundary change proposal, suffered a heart attack, rendering him unavailable during the many months that followed as he recovered.

Meanwhile, the town was in the midst of leadership changes following the November General Election with transitions on Town Council and a succession of mayors. Those forces all left the proposed boundary change in a state of limbo. And Rush River Commons leaders were confronting a more immediate challenge: gaining the town's approval of site plans for the development's first phase to begin construction following months of delays.

Whitson, after spending months in Wisconsin where he suffered the heart attack, returned to Rappahannock County in early November and asked County Administrator Garrey Curry to brief on where the boundary change negotiations stood with the town.

Curry shared with him the last

counter proposal sent from the town over the summer that had arrived around the time Whitson collapsed. Reading the letter, Whitson said, left him with "some hope" they could get the boundary change done.

Also, former Mayor Fred Catlin, who at the time remained mayor, called a private meeting in late December with then-mayor-elect Joe Whited, Chair and Wakefield Supervisor Debbie Donehey (who did not return a request for comment for this report), Whitson, Curry, and Town Administrator Barbara Batson, to hash out how the boundary change could move forward, according to Whitson.

What propelled the talks was the county confirming they were willing to accept the town's counter proposal to address many of the concessions sought by the county, but outside the purview of a boundary change negotiation, Whited said.

"Basically, I just cut to the chase," Whitson said, recounting the meeting. "I said, 'look, we would like to just find a path forward and be done with this.' And I just said, 'What do we need to do so we're not going back and forth any longer?'"

He continued, "We owe the landowner a decision. Obviously this is something that's been floating out there for quite a while and I'm mindful of people who are trying to do businesses, and when they ask governments to make a decision to allow them to do what they want to do in their private endeavors, I feel like it's an obligation on the part of

a local government, or whatever level of government, to just do what needs to be done."

In the counter proposal, the town said it would be open to accommodating the county's request to relinquish town control of the building that houses the Rappahannock Association for Arts and Community theater.

The town, in most cases, would also agree to approve applications submitted by the county to reconfigure existing lots owned by the county in Washington and agree to dismantle and relocate at the county's request its historic memorial obelisk located at the corner of Jett and Gay Streets to provide ingress and egress to the county courthouse as part of the efforts to renovate the building that's located on county-owned property in town. The town said it would also work to extend sewer access to Washington Volunteer Fire and Rescue, which it took steps toward in July.

But even outside the boundary change agreement, the town still declined to revisit the county's requests for a number of other concessions. Those included a 10-year moratorium on future boundary adjustments, a revenue sharing agreement between both jurisdictions on potential developments, and a requirement that the town amend its zoning ordinance to no longer require the Architectural Review Board to approve the exterior appearance and design of real estate owned by the county, as it seeks to renovate the government complex (to enshrine the ARB's authority, the town last week took steps

toward ensuring that all property in the town's historic district remain subject to its review).

"I wouldn't consider any of these things quote unquote concessions, I would just consider them things that we would be happy to have a conversation with — we're just not going to do it in a BLA," Whited said in an interview. "Because, you know, there's no reason not to have a clean BLA and deal with these other matters independent of that." The town feels these requests are "perfectly reasonable" to have a conversation about, Whited said.

The Board of Supervisors in January subsequently unanimously agreed to separate its list of concessions they requested from the town from the boundary line adjustment proposal. "The Rush River Commons team is encouraged to hear that the Town and County are engaging in preliminary conversations," project spokesperson Betsy Dietel said in a statement. "This is a hopeful development."

Whited is also hopeful that a deal is on its way to being sealed

"I was pleasantly surprised that our discussions with the town went as well as they did and that we all seemed to agree that it's time to get on with this and be done," Whitson said. "I'm not saying that in the end they'll agree to everything that we've requested, but it seemed like the next step was just for us to bifurcate the agreement into boundary line adjustment language and then our separate requests."