

The Ragland Mansion



Welcome to the historic Ragland Mansion in Petersburg, Virginia. This 10,000 square foot antebellum Italianate, was restored as a Bed and Breakfast Inn in 1998. The Ragland is located in the historic Poplar Lawn district of Petersburg and offers the elegant hospitality of Virginia's plantation region.

The main building is fairly close to Vignola's first design for Villa Lante (1586) north of Rome. The mansion was built in the 1850's by Reuben Ragland, a rich entrepreneur and descendant of high Welsh nobility, linked to the Tudor monarchy.

It survived the siege of Petersburg during the Civil war. Later, the mansion became the residence of Alexander Hamilton, a railway magnate. During World War I, the Ragland served as the first officer's club for the nearby Camp Lee Military Base and was the residence of General Pershing who is said to have slept in the Sycamore Room. Later, it was home to the family of Hollywood actor and Petersburg native Joseph Cotten, Orson Well's alter ego (The Third Man, Citizen Kane).

Ragland offers a ballroom, twin parlors, a solarium and period marble fireplaces. Impressive is the four-story center hall staircase with its over 200 hand carved fleur-de-lys mahogany balusters, leading up to the belvedere or cupola which offers a panoramic view of old Petersburg, the city said to have the largest 18th century housing stock in the U.S. With its exquisite plasterwork, its inlaid floors and its fine art collections, the Ragland is the best kept secret in Petersburg, a must see landmark.

Earls and Druids



Lord Raglan (Fitzroy Somerset) Commandant en chef de l'Armée Anglaise en Orient. Né le 30 septembre 1786. Lith. par Maurin. Lith. de Turgis à Paris.

Paris V^s Turgis, éditeur rue Serpente, 10, et à New York, Broadway 300"

“There was George Kitely, Lord Ragland’s son, went through the Court last week, and was what they call whitewashed, I believe. Lord Ragland would not pay a penny for him and...” William Makepeace Thackeray: *Vanity Fair*, chapter 54, London 1848

One of the early ancestors, William ap Jenkin (1327-1377) was the only child of “Jenkin the Apple Tree”, a clerk to the Lord of Abergavenny at Llanvapley. William married the daughter and heir of Vychan ap Howel, a descendant of the early Welsh kings of Monmouth and Glamorgan. Upon Vychan’s death, William inherited his title and property as Lord of Cerf-Y-Dwy-Gwlyd, his coat of arms and his family name, Herbert (hi-Bert) in Welsh, meaning “very tall”.

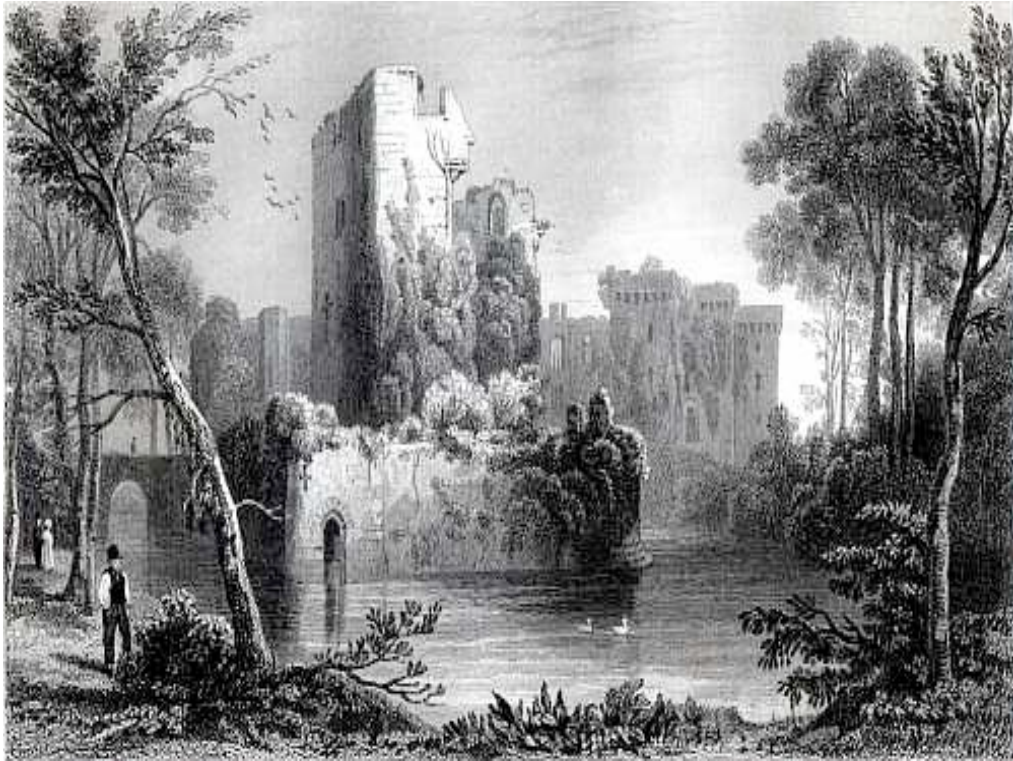
The Ragland name first surfaced in the 12th century when Walter Bloet was granted Rhaglan or Raghelan (1254)—meaning probably in Welsh rhag *‘fore’* and glan *‘bank’*, hence *‘rampart’*, or, in another interpretation meaning *‘border’*, a place in the lordship of Usk in southern Wales. His descendant, Elizabeth Bloet, married Sir James Berkeley who became lord of Raglan in 1399. Shortly after his Death, Elizabeth “the lady of Raggeland” took as her second husband William ap Thomas Herbert, *“a meber os”* a minor Welsh gentry family.”

In 1428, William ap Thomas was knighted by King Henry V and in 1432, he acquired Raglan Castle (Castell Rhaglan in Welsh) from his stepson James, Lord Berkely, for 1000 marks (almost £667). Sir William ap Thomas fought with King Henry V in France, becoming known as *Y marchog glas o Went*, the Blue Knight of Gwent. In the 1430’s he enlarged and modernized the castle which became a huge fortress. In 1418, Sir Williams’s nephew, a ten year old boy, Robert ap Jevan whose father died early, and two more of his siblings, came to live at Raglan Castle. Robert was the first family member to take the Raglan/Ragland name (both versions used indiscriminately).

Sir William ap Thomas was a Welsh nationalist, a hero and a military genius admired and praised by the bards as the knight who would free Wales from the English yoke. Neither Sir William ap Thomas nor his son, Sir Herbert, Viceroy in Wales during the War of the Roses, would fight to regain Welsh independence. Quite to the contrary, they helped to integrate Wales with England. One might speculate that the campaign in France convinced both

knights of the need for England and Wales to be united on the struggle with Normans and other Gauls.

Castell Rhaglan



Raglan Castle, Raglan, Monmouthshire, Wales
Henry Gastineau (1791-1876, Artist)

Source: Woodward, B.B, History of Wales (1853)

Sir William Herbert added a palatial double-courtyard mansion to the moted Yellow Tower with its double drawbridge. He also served in France and became rich by trading and importing Gascony wine. King Edward IV made Sir William Baron Herbert of Raglan. In 1462 “the young Henry Tudor, the future King Henry VII, was placed in the custody of Sir William and his wife, and was brought up at Raglan Castle. “In 1465, Raglan became an independent lordship” with a weekly market and a fair, held twice a year.”

‘Not fame thence, a famous castle fine That Ragglan hight, stands moted almost round... The stately tower that looks ore pond and poole, The fountaine trim, that runs both day and night, Doth yield in showe, a rare and noble sight.’ (15th century poem)

In 1468, King Edward elevated William Herbert to the rank of earl of Pembroke. “The remarkable feature of the honour was that Earl William had become one of the first members of the Welsh gentry to enter the ranks of the English peerage.”

Already then, poets praised Raglan’s exceptional size and beauty:

“Hundred rooms filled with festive care, its hundred towers, parlours and doors, its hundred chimneys for men of high degree...” Dafydd Llwyd, 15th c.

The Earl of Pembroke’s son, William Herbert, himself named Earl of Huntingdon, married Mary Woodville, sister of the future queen. In 1502, Sir Walter Herbert, Earl Williams’s brother, entertained his sister-in-law, the wife of King Henry VII, at Raglan.

“Mae Rhaglan yn fwy o ddatganiad o gyfoeth nac o bresenoldeb milwrol by gythiol”.. “Raglan is more a statement of wealth than an intimidating military presence” (CADW: Castell Rhaglan)

In 1670, Evan Ragland from Somerset—the ancestor of all American Ragland—arrived in Virginia. He, 14 years old, and his cousin John Davis had been abducted (“shanghaied”) from the dock of the port town of Watchet in Somerset, a crude but common practice at the time. The Raglands lived in Stogumber and St. Decuman’s parish near Watchet, and the boys had taken a stroll on the Dock.

They were thrown on a ship that took them under harsh conditions to Virginia. Evan was sold as an indentured laborer (serf) to Stephen Pettus, owner of a plantation along the Chickahomny River in New Kent County. After five to seven years, due to his superior education, Evan was able to

buy his freedom. He married Susannah Pettus, his former master's daughter, inherited the 500-acre plantation and acquired wealth.

Very few among the old Virginia families are as well documented as the Raglands who can look back on a genealogy of more than seven centuries. Reuben Fenton Ragland, born in 1818 on Owingsville, Bath, Kentucky, was a direct descendant of the legendary Evan who in turn was a direct descendant and member of the highest Welsh nobility with close ties to Tudor royalty. Reuben's grandfather Gideon was a grandson of the involuntary immigrant Evan Ragland.