

THE WORLD WAR II STAFFORD HOMEFRONT

The Stafford homefront contributed to the war effort with bond drives, victory gardens and recycling campaigns.

Representative of the spirit of the homefront was **Miss Edmo Corbin Lee**. She was a daughter of Civil War veteran Daniel Murray Lee. Born at “Westwood,” she had taken over the running of “Highland Home” after her father’s death. As a child she had contributed her pennies for construction of a Confederate memorial in Fredericksburg. “Miss Edmo” was also the first woman to serve on the Stafford County School Board. During World War II, she “traveled throughout the country in her green 1938 Chevrolet convertible to help monitor rationing for the Office of Price Administration. In 1956 she sold “Highland Home” (now a subdivision). In 1979, she turned 100 years of age. A nephew, remarking on her long and remarkable life, said “This woman is a Victorian and she ought to have gone to the Virginia Military Institute like so many men in the family did.”



John Lee Pratt.

John Lee Pratt, one of Stafford’s most successful residents and preservationists, was born in 1879 in “Aspen Grove,” on the Stafford-King George boundary. The son of a Confederate 9th Virginia Cavalry trooper, Pratt was raised on the Passapatanzy farm, reportedly working year-round except for Easter and July 4th fishing holidays. Educated at Locust Dale Academy (Orange), Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, and graduating in civil engineering from the University of Virginia in 1905, he briefly taught school before going to work for the Delaware explosives and munitions firm of E.I. duPont de Nemours and Company (1906-1919). After World War I, during which he had served in several special assignments, Pratt was one of the DuPont executives who assisted the fledgling General Motors Company. He rose to director by 1923 and was vice-president from 1922 until his retirement in 1937. A “multi-millionaire industrialist,” Pratt was one of America’s wealthiest men. In 1931 he had purchased “Chatham,” Stafford’s most historic home.

During World War II, Pratt served as one of the famed “dollar-a-year-men.” He

generously volunteered and assisted with U.S. Government wartime projects. As a point of patriotism during the war, Mr. and Mrs. Pratt lived in one of Chatham's outbuildings to conserve energy. A philanthropist, Pratt donated large sums to cultural and academic causes, and gave large tracts of land to the National Park Service (NPS), Stafford County, and Fredericksburg. Two parks, named for St. Clair Brooks and Pratt, were donated to Stafford County. He gave "Chatham" to the nation, and it is now the headquarters of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Battlefield Park, NPS, and an important historic site in its own right. Before the war Pratt had helped develop Freon as a refrigerant for General Motors infant Frigidaire division; refrigeration provided the ability to keep food fresh in the military and home front to reduce waste. He also coordinated World War II Lend-Lease assistance to Great Britain. Local historian John Goolrick recorded: "I recall sitting with John Lee Pratt in one of the rooms in the magnificently appointed Chatham Manor and asking him to what he attributed his great success in life." Pratt reflected a minute and said, "I don't really know. I always enjoyed hard work, but much of what happened to me came through the good fortune of meeting the right people...if I had any advice to give young people it would be to always persevere, always believe you can get things done if you keep trying."