With the passing away of Chesterville in the fire May 21 another of the landmarks of Virginia's ante-bellum days has departed from her. Chesterville had stood as when built, nearly 200 years ago, on the road from Hampton to Williamsburg, seven and one-half miles from the former. The modern traveler might pass by its crumbling gates overgrown with wild grape and myrtle without seeing them, or if he should, without catching a glimpse through the grove of locusts, elms and poplars of the gray and vine clad walls of Chesterville mansion, one mile distant from its gates.

The house Chesterville was built of English brick by George Wythe, of Elizabeth City county, according to plans drawn up for him by his friend, Thomas Jefferson. It was modeled directly upon the plan of an old border castle, which had taken the fancy of both. Its front entrance, unlike the Colonial style so popular today, was of stone pierced by three arches, the central being the largest and the three opening directly upon the portico. As in other houses of this period, the rooms were immense with very high ceilings, walls paneled with handsome woodwork, specious fireplaces and deep window seats. Its walls of brick, vine clad at the time of the fire, rose straight upward without ornamentation, as the original plan called for wings, which were to have been added by Wythe.

Chesterville estate, some 800 acres, was deeded to Thomas Wythe by George Wythe (deed in clerk's office Elizabeth City county) some years prior to 1780. The reason stated for this action is that the domestic life of George Wythe was very unhappy within these walls. In fact, so strong was this tradition among the ante-bellum negroes of the estate that they frequently spoke of the "ghost of Master George", which apparently haunted the spacious wine cellar, and the negroes of 1860 were afraid to go alone into it. There are other traditions, too, relating to the first owner of Chesterville and his friend Jefferson. Who can say what of "treason" its walls heard in those days of stress with England before both of these names were written on that immortal parch.

By a deed, dated June 15, 1800, 750 acres bounded by the Symes Charity School (now the Symes-Baton Academy of the public school system of Hampton, and the oldest public school in the United States) was conveyed by Thomas Wythe to George Wythe. In 1802 (by deed of December 6) George Wythe conveyed the same and Chesterville estate (which he had again come into possession of through sale for debt by the court against Thomas (see records Elizabeth City county, 1801) to Colonel Houlder Huddins.

Colonel Houlder Huddins, by deed of June 6, 1808, conveyed Chesterville to his daughter, Mary Gwynn, as a wedding gift. Mary Gwynn Huddins married Dr. Haller, who encumbered the property with debt very heavily, and upon his death she married Dr. George Harmonson Hinder, of Maryland, a lineal descendent of Sir George Yeardley, Governor of Virginia 1614-1624, founder of the first Legislative Assembly in America and of Levin Hinder, of Maryland, a general of the Revolution and first Governor of the young State. Of these things Colonel Huddins speaks in his will, dated 1814, an extract from which is given:

"I lend to my daughter, Ariadne, 750 acres of land in Elizabeth City county, adjoining Chesterville in possession of my daughter, Mary Hinder, also 120 acres in the county of York and sixteen slaves.

"I lend to my son, Robert, all the residue of my land in Mathews county except the plantation, Isle of Wight. This I desire to be sold and the money to be equally divided between my sons, Thomas and Robert.

"I bequeath my land in Middlesex county to be sold and after my just debts are paid, the surplus to be given to my son, John."
"With respect to the estate, Chesterville, which I gave to my daughter, Mary Winder, when she married Dr. Haller, that estate having been sold during her lifetime in payment of Haller’s debts, and I having become its purchaser, it is my will and desire that she, my daughter, Mary Winder, should continue to have and to hold the benefits and profits therefrom during her lifetime, etc.

"My lands in Gloucester county I desire to be sold and the money equally divided among my children:

"I lend to my sons, Houlder and Robert twenty slaves each. To my son, John, my negro man, Jack. To my son, Thomas, the negro, Becky, and her children. To my daughter Arianda, twenty slaves as follows (given by name). My man, Charles, I desire should choose for himself which of my children he shall serve.

"I desire that the rest of my property, both real and personal, shall be divided equally."

Colonel Hudgins died in 1815 at his home on Gwynn’s Island, which he had inherited through the Gwynns. His will was probated in the same year in Mathews county.

Chesterville became the centre of many homes in this vicinity (Elizabeth City county), noted for their hospitality and bound to each other by the ties of blood. Thus at Chesterville, lived the Winders; at Cleverdale, which adjoined it, resided Robert Vaughan, the son of Ariadne Hudgins; at Leesburg, Robert Hudgins, III; at Marlbank, Elliott Hudgins, his brother; at Myrtle Grove, out from the Chesterville estate, Dr. John Harmonson Winder; at Shady Banks, Dr. Richard Garrett and wife, nee Winder.

By a deed dated June, 1847, Louisa Haller conveyed her portion of the Chesterville estate to her nephew, Levin Yeardley Winder, who resided at and who owned Chesterville house and 650 acres of the original tract, and who held it until 1878.

During the period of the Civil War Chesterville was deserted. Mr. Winder, the last male of his name in Virginia, fighting with the Old Dominion Dragoons and his family refugeeing in Williamsburg. During this time being in the wake of invading troops, it suffered much. The paneling of its walls was stripped bare, its floors and ceilings were defaced, the furniture used for kindling wood and some hansom oil paintings, too heavy and large to remove, were used by the federal soldiers for targets to test their marksmanship. Among these paintings so prized by their owners were portraits of Colonel Hudgins, of Mary Gwynn, of Governor Levin Winder, of Maryland, and of Judge William Winder, a justice of the Supreme bench of Maryland. Quite a hole was opened in one of the walls of the old house by a stray cannon ball, and its stops of masonry were completely destroyed. These steps led to the portico and were on the outside. A handsome old rosewood harpsichord, belonging to Levin Winder’s wife, a French woman, who had died in 1859, was found years later and restored to her daughter, Mrs. Arthur Sagar, of Hampton. This instrument was discovered in a saloon frequented by soldiers of the fort and home, and had been obtained by the saloon keeper from some of General Butler’s effects.

In 1878 Mr. Winder sold Chesterville to Francis Anton Schmelz, of Hampton, the father of the Schmelz Brothers, bankers of Hampton and Newport News. The family burying ground is still in possession of the Winder descendants, and 150 acres of the original tract of land is owned by A.C. Garrett, of Newport News, a son of Dr. Richard Garrett, of Shady Bank and of his wife, Sue Harmonson Winder.

The last resident of Chesterville was Robert Hudgins, Jr., a son of R.S. Hudgins, of Hampton and his wife who was Miss Frances Schmelz. Mrs. Hudgins was left the property by her father and is interested in rebuilding.