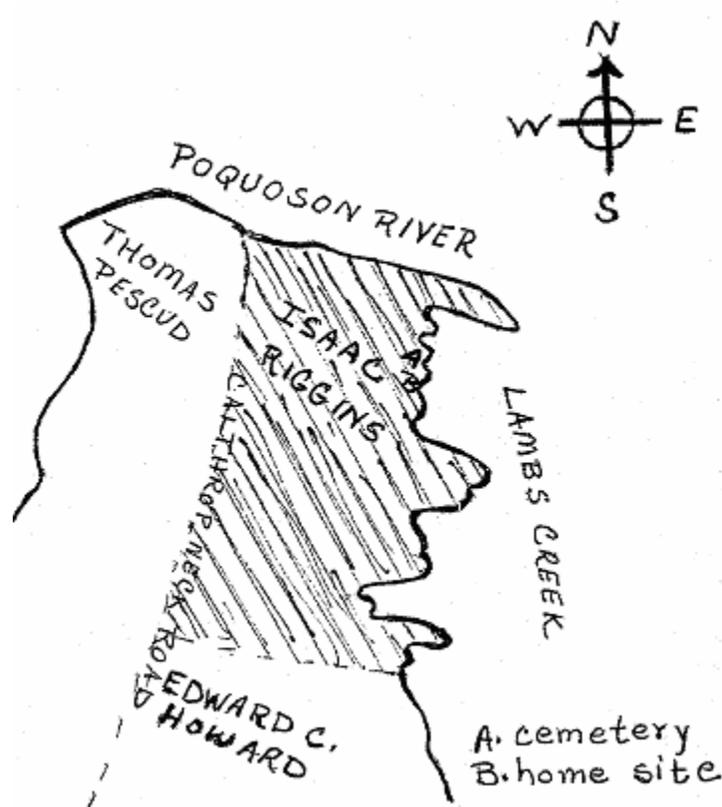


AN INTRODUCTORY STUDY  
OF  
THE RIGGINS FAMILY  
IN  
YORK COUNTY, VIRGINIA



by

HUGH WORNOM

This author, having Riggins ancestry, wishes to present some findings with the hope that future researchers may have a guide to an in depth history of the Riggins family.

## RIGGIN – RIGGINS

The earliest mention of the name Riggins (spelled without an S ) in York County records occurs in the deed dated April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1820, in which John Harwood, Sr. and his wife, Martha Tabb Harwood, sold 81 acres of land to Isaac Riggins.

*...bounded on the East by Lambs Creek  
on the North by Poquoson River  
on the West by lands of Thomas Pescud  
on the South by land of Edward C. Howard*

The Riggins family came from Maryland, as will be seen in census reports from 1850, 1860, and 1870. So it comes as a surprise to read in the 1820 land transaction that both parties, Harwood and Riggins, were all of York County. Possibly Isaac Riggins had come to York County previously in order to find a new place to live. Many families in Maryland and on the Eastern Shore of Virginia were uprooted by the British forces during the War of 1812. Perhaps Isaac Riggins came across the Chesapeake Bay to "visit" some other displaced Marylanders and to "look over the land" a few years before he bought land.

He found a farm at the tip end of Calthrop Neck. Most likely it had a vacant residence on it already, for the census taken in 1820 found him living on his newly acquired farm shortly after August 1820. The Riggins family consisted of nine persons, all born in Maryland. A modern reconstruction of this family may have looked like this:

Isaac Riggins, head of household, father  
Ellen Riggins, wife and mother  
a daughter Riggins (name unknown)  
Elizabeth (called Eliza) Riggins  
Elizabeth Ann (called Ann by her descendants)  
William H. Riggins  
Isaac Riggins, Jr.  
Sarah Riggins (called Sally)  
a male whose name has not been found; but is assumed to be a son

The 1820 census only gives the name of the head of the household, or family unit, i.e. Isaac Riggins, age 45 and upwards. The female, age 35-45, we may assume was Ellen, his wife. Other Riggins family members and descendants help us recall the names of some of the children. There were daughters named Elizabeth, Ann, and Sarah and sons named William and Isaac. The census record also shows that there was a son and a daughter whose names are not known. It is assumed that they died young and unmarried. We can calculate that the eldest daughter, whose name no one can recall, listed as being between the age of 16-26, was born circa 1803 and would have been approximately seventeen years old. For the sake of this narrative, we shall refer to her as "Miss Spinster."

The male listed as between the ages of 10-16, name unknown, (we assume to be the eldest son), may have been born circa 1805 and would have been approximately fifteen year old.

Elizabeth, called Eliza, who at maturity would marry Richard Callis, was born circa 1807, and at the time of the 1820 census was age thirteen. Elizabeth Ann, called Ann was born April 3, 1809. Being eleven years old, she must be one of the two females who were listed as being between ages 10-16. William (his tombstone reads William H. Riggins, (b.1811 - d.1876) was one of the two males listed as being between ages 1-10. He was nine years old. The female listed as being between ages 1-10 must be Sarah, called Sally, who would at maturity marry William Thomas. We can calculate her age as seven, and assume she was born ca. 1813. This leaves us with the youngest child listed in the 1820 census, a male between ages 1-10. This male was Isaac Riggins Jr. He was approximately four years old, and subsequent census records indicate that he was born in 1816 or later.

When the census was taken in 1830, there was no male Riggins, age 25, listed in York County. It is possible that he had married and moved away, but more likely he died young. Also, there is no female in 1830 who would fit the description of "Miss Spinster." It is assumed that she also died young and unmarried. However, the 1830 census is not proof that she was deceased. If she had married, she could be listed under another name, but family folklore says that Isaac Riggins, Jr. had a sister who never married. If this was "Miss Spinster", we can conclude that she died before 1830, and surely would have been buried on the Riggins family farm in Calthrop Neck.

Isaac Riggins, the elder, was, already dead by the time the 1830 census was taken. Not having any record of his death, we can only speculate that he was about fifty years old or more. He was buried on the same land he had purchased a few short years before.

The land he purchased from the Harwoods was part of a large tract that had been patented by Christopher Calthrop on July 13, 1635, and had been continuously occupied ever since. Many generations had lived on that land and it is possible that there was already an established cemetery on Isaac Riggins's part of the land. Nevertheless, if there were no time-honored burial place, the widow Riggins chose a suitable spot overlooking Lambs Creek and buried him there.

After Isaac Riggins's death, his son William was assumed by the census taken in 1830 to be head of the household. He was nineteen years old. The widowed mother, Ellen Riggins (female aged 40-50), was listed as living with him and his younger brother Isaac Riggins, Jr. (male 10-15). The female, aged 15-20, must be his sister Sarah, who

would then be about seventeen years old We do not know the exact date of her birth. Six years later, when she married William Thomas on July 19, 1836, she was recorded as being a spinster, and her brother Isaac Riggins, testified that she was over the age that required a family member or guardian to give consent.

When the 1830 census was made, Elizabeth (called Eliza), the eldest sister, had been married since May 23 1825 to Richard Callis. They had three children and were enumerated separately.

Ann Riggins, who married on February 28, 1828, is listed as the wife of Robinson Phillips.

It seems that Isaac Riggins, the father, died unexpectedly and had not made a will. Some of his children continued to live on the same land. Since this farm had formerly been a colonial plantation, it is possible that there were other buildings on this 81 acre tract which may have been used to house tenants or slaves. When the Riggins daughters married. They may have converted these into new home places. The census taker for 1840 suggests a family compound and lists the following family units in successive order.

William Thomas and a female age 20-30 (Sarah)  
Isaac Riggins and a female age 50-60 (Ellen, his mother)  
William Riggins and his family (he married on Dec. 9, 1831)  
Richard Callis and seven family members

A deed recorded at the York County Courthouse dated Jan, 13, 1839, tells us that William Thomas and Sarah sold their interests in the estate to Isaac Riggins. It reads:

*"William Thomas and Sarah, his wife sold and released enfeoffed... said tract that William and Sarah Thomas became entitled to under act of assembly directing the course of intestate estates as one of the legatees of the late Isaac Riffin. "*

It was proved by witnesses William H. Riggins, Richard Callis, and William Edwards.

After William and Sarah Thomas sold their Riggins inheritance in 1839, they may have moved elsewhere, but they are enumerated in the 1840 census as having one male child under 5 years of age. They are known to have had two sons: Edward Lee Thomas and Lewis Taylor Thomas. Isaac Thomas, born ca. 1847 and named in the 1870 census is believed to have been their son, but none of these can be found in the 1850 and 1860 census. Family folklore also tells us that there was a daughter named Ann E. Thomas who was a charter member of Emmaus Baptist Church at its establishment in 1878. Her brother, Edward Lee Thomas, was also a charter member. It has been said that Ann married a Mr. Naylor and that they left York County. William and Sarah Thomas may have had another daughter named Salina.

In 1857, there was a resurgence of religious fervor in the Methodist Church in Poquoson and the many camp meetings during that summer attracted people from far and wide. Long lists of names were added to the Probationers List for Sabbath morning classes. On the list for class No.1 at Tabernacle Methodist Church we find Sarah

Thomas listed among 35 other names. In class No.5 we find Salina F. Thomas, Robinson Phillips, and his wife Elizabeth A. Phillips, Norvella A. Callis, Martha Riggins, and other local names numbering over 40 people.

Perhaps Sarah Thomas and Salina F. Thomas were mother and daughter, but this is only speculation. Salina F. Thomas has not been identified as a daughter of William and Sarah Thomas.

The fact that William Thomas and his family are not found in the 1850 census for York County may, or may not, indicate that William was dead. We know that his wife, Sarah Riggins Thomas, gave birth to Lewis Taylor Thomas on August 30, 1851. Presumably he was the youngest child of William and Sarah Thomas.

A tragic story related by Levi M. Riggins recalls that William Thomas was bitten by a mad dog and he contracted rabies, which caused his death. It happened in mid-winter and the creeks were frozen solid so his coffin was put in a small sled and transported across the creek to the Riggins home place where he was buried in the same family cemetery where his father-in-law Isaac Riggins was buried.

There is a puzzling entry in the 1870 census which names Sarah Thomas, age 65, living with Isaac Thomas, age 23, and Taylor Thomas, age 20. At first glance this would seem to be the mother with two grown sons, and indicates that this woman, born in 1805, was Sarah Riggins Thomas. However, modern reasoning would question whether this woman at forty seven years of age would be giving birth to Lewis Taylor Thomas, who was born August 30, 1851. A more logical explanation would be that the mother of Lewis Taylor Thomas was already deceased by 1870 and an Aunt Sarah Thomas, whose name also happened to be the same as Taylor's mother, was living with the two young motherless men in order to make a home for them.

Without further research, we can only guess that an 1830 census entry for Lewis Taylor Thomas and wife, both born between 1800 and 1830 were blood relatives of William Thomas and his sons and that Lewis Thomas's wife may have been named Sarah. Perhaps Lewis Thomas was dead by 1870 and his widow took the orphaned boys, Isaac and Taylor Thomas to live with her. At this time we have no proof that her name was Sarah, however she could certainly have been 65 years old in 1870, while Sarah Riggins, widow of William Thomas, would only have been about age 57, if she were then still alive.

Levi M. Riggins, grandson of Isaac Riggins, Jr., said that Sarah Riggins Thomas had a tombstone next to Isaac Riggins, Jr., and he thought that there was a tombstone there for William Thomas as well. Nevertheless, they cannot be readily found today. Perhaps, they collapsed to the ground and are buried under the leaves and vines of many years past, and may yet be discovered some day. It is possible that some of their children who did not survive are also buried beside them. ( See note in addendum regarding tombstone discoveries in April 2002.)

After Emmaus Baptist Church was built on Yorktown Road in Poquoson (1888), the eldest son of William and Sarah Thomas, Edward Lee Thomas and his wife, Rose Ellen, were buried in the church yard near the road, but their graves are not marked.

It seems possible that Isaac Thomas, who is believed to be a son of William and Sarah Thomas, also may have been buried near his father and mother on the Riggins farm on Calthrop Neck. This may be the last resting place for any unmarried daughters that are believed to have been born in this family.

On Christmas Eve 1891, the youngest son of Sarah and William Thomas, Lewis Taylor Thomas, married Camilla Ann Moore, the youngest daughter of Edward B. Moore and Ann Holloway Moore. They had one child, a son named Emmett O. Thomas, who was born February 28, 1893. Sadly, his mother died one month after he was born. Camilla Ann's mother was deceased, but she had an older sister Sarah Elizabeth (called Sallie Bett) who took the infant in to care for him. Sallie Bett Moore was already making a home for her aging father, Edward P. Moore. Two years later he, too, died leaving the spinster aunt rearing Emmett Thomas, a motherless infant. The boy's father, Lewis Taylor Thomas (called Taylor) asked Sallie Bett to marry him. On September 29, 1895, the boy's aunt became his step-mother. However, this satisfactory arrangement lasted only a short while. Taylor Thomas, the infant's father fell ill and died one month later on October 25, 1895. Sallie Bett Moore Thomas lived three years longer and died on August 7, 1898, when Emmett was only five years old. Once more the family rallied together to find a home for the boy.

Elkanah J. Moore was the eldest brother of Sallie Bett and Camilla Ann. Thirty years previously he had married Mary Riggins, a first cousin to Taylor Thomas. Elkanah and his wife, Mary Riggins Moore, took the orphaned boy and raised him along with their children.

Elkanah L. Moore bought a large family burial plot just to the rear of Emmaus Baptist Church. He and his wife are buried there. The nephew, Emmett O. Thomas, who never married, is buried near his parents in the church yard at Emmaus Baptist Church in a row headed by his grandparents, Edward B. Moore and Ann Holloway Moore.

It is noteworthy to mention here that Edward B. Moore and his wife, Ann Moore, were charter members of Emmaus Baptist Church on July 14, 1878 along with six of their children: Elkanah, Andrew, Edward B. Moore, Jr., Thomas Benjamin Moore, Sarah E. Moore (believed to be Sallie Bett) and Camilla Ann. Edward Lee Thomas was also a charter member and Ann E. Thomas, who is believed to be his sister, was also a charter member.

Lewis Taylor Thomas and his two wives are buried in the church yard of Emmaus Baptist Church, one on each side of his grave, and all three have tall upstanding grave markers.

Ellen Riggins, the wife of Isaac Riggins, who came to York County from Maryland in 1820, was surely the matriarch of the Riggins family in 1860 when the census taker recorded her age as 82. This indicates that she was born in 1778, at the end of the Revolutionary War. She was listed as living alone, but her youngest son, Isaac Riggins and his family of seven were her close neighbors. Isaac Riggins, Jr., had probably built a new home beside the old home place. We can feel certain that when she died, she was buried beside her husband and her children and grandchildren, who had been laid to rest there over the many years she had resided on this family land in York County.

Elizabeth Riggins, called Eliza, her eldest surviving daughter, was born 1805-1807 and married Richard Callis on May 23, 1825. They were living in 1870, but Richard Callis, whose age was given as 69, probably died before the 1880 census was made, and it seems possible that he and his wife, Eliza Riggins Callis, may have been buried near her brother, Isaac in the family burying ground near the Riggins home place at the end of Calthrop Neck Road.

Daniel G. Callis, the son of Richard and Eliza Callis, married in 1866 and had a large family. He established his own cemetery on land he purchased at Hunt's Point in Poquoson. It was beside a hallowed burying place used by many families in the past. William Riggins, eldest surviving son of Isaac Riggins was born in 1811 and married Sarah E. Phillips on Dec. 9, 1831, when he was twenty years old. They had several children and after Sarah died he married Charlotte Edwards. William and Charlotte Riggins had several children of this second marriage and William Riggins was known to have a very large family when he died. Some of the children from the first marriage may be buried in the Riggins family cemetery on Calthrop Neck, but William was apparently buried across Lambs Creek on land he had purchased. His daughter, Octavia Riggins married Daniel Dryden and some of their children were buried in this family plot where William Riggins was buried. His tombstone reads:

William H. Riggins  
born 1811  
died 1876

Within recent memory (1997-1998) his grave, along with the graves of three of his grandchildren and all of the infant Dryden children were moved to a cemetery at the rear of Emmaus Baptist Church. His son George Riggins, and his wife Jane Callis Riggins, were reported to have been buried in the Dryden family plot also, but no stones or markers could be found when the other graves were moved.

Daniel Webster Riggins, son of William H Riggins, bought land to the rear of Emmaus Baptist Church and established the Poquoson Cemetery in 1920. He and his wife, Margaret Ann Hopkins, are buried there. They wanted to make it possible for members of the Baptist Church to purchase family plots to serve the needs of a growing membership. At least two of William Riggins' sons, Alexander (1869-1924) and Edward Sylvester Riggins (1857-1925) were buried in the new Emmaus Cemetery, as well as Daniel Webster Riggins (b. Jan 1, 1856-d. July 25, 1921).

Levi Riggins, the son of William Riggins, died before his brother Daniel Webster Riggins had bought the land and established the Emmaus Cemetery. He and his wife, Ara Jane Phillips Riggins, were buried in the church yard of the newly built Emmaus Baptist Church. Levi Riggins appears to be the first person to be buried in this church yard situated on Yorktown Road in Poquoson. His tombstone reads as follows:

Levi Riggins  
born May 3, 1841  
died Aug. 23, 1890

Possibly there may have been a few earlier burials whose graves are not marked with stones.

This earliest burial suggests that the older practice of burying loved ones in a family plot had given way to interment in the more accessible church yard after 1890.

Elizabeth Ann Riggins (called Ann by her grandchildren but known as Elizabeth A or Elizabeth Ann in official records) was born on April 3, 1809. The family Bible, which she and her husband bought, records that she was the daughter of Isaac and Elinor Riggins. She married Robinson Phillips on Feb. 28, 1828. He was the eldest son of a Phillips family long established in Poquoson. They had lived on the same farm at the end of Pasture Road for many years, and that was where he was born. It was at the mouth of Bennett Creek and overlooked the Chesapeake Bay. Robinson Phillips's father and mother were buried there, and thereafter it became the burying ground for this Phillips family.

Isaac Riggins, Jr., the youngest child of Isaac and Ellen Riggins, was born in Maryland and came to York County with his family in 1820. He was then about three years old. He married Elizabeth Topping circa 1846 and they had six children:  
Pocahontas 1847 -?

Mary Virginia 1850-1915

Hance Lawson 1853-1908

Sarah E. 1855-1893

Elizabeth B. 1857-1891

Ann Pocahontas 1860-1899

Pocahontas, the eldest daughter, died young. There is no tombstone marking her burial place, but she must surely have been buried in the Riggins family cemetery on Calthrop Neck circa 1860. The census for 1860 gives her age as thirteen, but another daughter was born to Isaac and Elizabeth Riggins on July 18, 1860 and they named her Ann Pocahontas. Her eldest sister evidently had just recently died and she was given her name to commemorate her memory.

The youngest daughter, Ann Pocahontas, lived to be 39 years old and died on July 11, 1899. By that time the Riggins family was using the church yard at Emmaus Baptist Church for burial and she was buried there. Apparently she was the aunt that her nieces called "Missie" In the 1870 census, she is listed as Pocahontas, age 12. She died unmarried. Her tombstone gives the date of her death:

Ann P. Riggins - died July 11, 1899

Mary Virginia Riggins, who is listed in the 1850 census as being six months old, was born on June 4, 1850. She married Elkanah James Moore. Among their nine children was Diana Elizabeth Moore, who married John Gibbs Wornom.

Hance Lawson Riggins was the only son of Isaac Riggins, Jr. and Elizabeth Topping Riggins. He was born April 18, 1853 and died May 12, 1908. His wife, Polena Poindexter Moore, was the daughter of Levi Moore, who had come to York County from the Eastern Shore. Hance Riggins and his wife are both buried in the church yard at Emmaus Baptist Church and have individual tombstones.

Sarah E. Riggins, the third child of Isaac and Elizabeth was born Sept. 12, 1855 and died August 28, 1893 when she was not quite 38 years old. She married Andrew Tyler Moore, a brother of Elkanah J. Moore. Their wives were Riggins sisters. Andrew and Sarah had five children. They selected a grassy knoll on their farm at Hunt's Point for a family burying ground.

Another sister of Mary, Hance, and Sarah Riggins was named Elizabeth B. Riggins, but she was called Bettie. She married Wallie Smith. The Smith family had a special burial place near their home. It is on a small creek (now called Oxford Run) where several members of the Smith family lived. Bettie and her husband have tombstones there. They read:

C.W. Smith Elizabeth B. Smith  
born May 2, 1856 born Dec. 11, 1857  
died Jan. 7, 1926 died Feb. 13, 1891

This concludes the story of Isaac Riggins and his wife, Ellen and their seven children. This narrative also attempts to identify each child and tell of their marriages, but does not list the names of all of the grandchildren of Isaac and Ellen Riggins. Since the purpose of this study was to identify only the family members buried in the privately-owned Riggins family burying ground, the aspect of this paper being a genealogy falls by the wayside.

### Shedding Some Light on Unsettling Questions

During the earliest queries about the history of the first Riggins family in the Poquoson area, Mr. Levi Riggins (1883-1971) stated knowingly that his grandfather, Isaac Riggins, Jr., had a sister Sally who had married William Thomas and that they were buried to the rear of where he lived, in an old cemetery overlooking Lambs Creek. There were standing tombstones there marking their graves when he was young, but the stones had fallen down.

When asked about Ann Riggins, who had married Robinson Phillips, he was not certain that she was a full sister to Sally and Isaac Riggins. He knew that William Riggins (1811-1876) was related, but was not sure of the exact kinship. This vagueness may be attributed to the fact that their elders died young and the orphaned children had not been exposed to genealogical information before marrying and going their separate ways. The census records seem to indicate that they were all members of the same family.

In the family Bible of Robinson Phillips, it was recorded that he was married on March 1, 1828, to Elizabeth Ann Riggins, the daughter of Isaac and Elinor Riggins. In this same family Bible is recorded that Sarah Phillips (sister of Robinson Phillips) married on Dec. 9, 1831 William Riggins, son of Isaac and Elinor Riggins. This proves that Elizabeth Ann and William had the same father and mother, but the name of the mother is spelled Elinor, not Ellen. Riggins family folklore tells us that the wife of Isaac was named Ellen. The only published record of her name is found in the 1860 census of household No. 152 and is spelled Elen by the census taker. This is not the sensational proof we would hope for, but it may mean that Elinor and Ellen were two different people; on the other hand, there is a strong possibility that Elen (Ellen) was only an endearing nickname for Elinor.

We ought to explore the possibility that Isaac Riggins married twice in Maryland, and that when he came over to Virginia in 1820 he brought his second wife Ellen. the first wife Elinor having died in Maryland We have no evidence that at all of his children

had the same mother. This could explain why some Riggins family members were not sure of their relationship to each other. Possibly, Sally Riggins Thomas and Isaac Riggins were the only children of Ellen, and Eliza, Elizabeth Ann and William were of the first marriage to Elinor.

Hugh Wornom  
March 10, 2002

## ADDENDUM

September 2002

Since writing all the information I have learned about the Riggins family and their burial places, new information has been found.

The discovery of the tombstone for Sarah (Riggins) Thomas had recently added exciting new information. In cleaning off the knoll of Grave Point, which had become the hallowed burial ground started by the first generation of the Riggins/Riggins family, the Riggins family members located field stones and bricks indicating the burial spots of several long deceased family members. By accident, they hit the flat tombstone for Sarah Thomas. It was found buried under the surface of the soil. It had become broken off at the base and lay hidden for many years, but the inscription could still be deciphered, in spite of some erosion. It reads as follows

Sarah Thomas  
born Dec. 12, 1811  
died Sept. 4, 1884

Sarah was the daughter of Isaac Riggins and the wife of William Thomas. The discovery of this new information adds proof to what had heretofore been speculation and guesswork. We must now retrace our steps and make some corrections in the old theories.

Hugh Wornom  
September 5, 2002



Gravestone of Sarah Thomas, daughter of Isaac Riggins [B. Dec. 12, 1811, D. Sept. 4, 1884] was discovered in March 2002 in the old family cemetery near the site of the Riggins home on Lambs Creek.



**A portion of Map III-24. U.S. Coast Survey, No 57 [Ca. 1854] showing the approximate Boundaries of the Riggins farm where Lambs Creeks joins the Poquoson River.**

Clippings from the newspaper Hampton Monitor  
Contributed by Brenda Thomas Watson of Hampton, Virginia

## YORK'S LARGEST BOAT

W. W. Riggins Building  
Large Gasoline Yacht-  
Rev. E. P. Parham Has  
Been Returned to  
His Circuit.

*HAMPTON MONITOR - 17 NOV 1910*

While the shipyards of York, and especially Poquoson, are not large they have a reputation which would be a credit to much more pretentious institutions. A vessel with the pedigree of "Built in Poquoson" attached to it stands high in the waters of Virginia and Maryland if not beyond. In years gone by their sailing craft were the most able and at the same time the swiftest. Attention is now directed largely to gasoline craft. What is said to be the largest boat ever built in Poquoson in recent years is a gasoline yacht which has nearly been completed by Mr. W. Riggins at his yard on Lambs Creek. She is built for Capt. R. M. Jordan of Norfolk and will be propelled by a 40 h-p "Automatic", furnished by The Wallace Bros. Southern distributors, of Norfolk.

*HAMPTON MONITOR - 29 APR 1916*

## ORANGE BLOSSOMS.

Miss Irma Lee Riggins the Bride of Mr. Thomas Benjamin Riggins.

The home of Mr. M. F. Riggins, 274 Chapel street, Hampton, was the scene of a pretty home wedding last Sunday afternoon at 8 o'clock, when Miss Irma Lee Riggins was united in marriage to her brother, Mr. Thomas Benjamin Riggins, the Rev. Mr. Seay, of the Memorial Baptist Church, officiating.

The bride is the daughter of Mrs. Polena Riggins and the groom is a well known young merchant. Both parties are popular young people of Poquoson. A very delightful wedding supper was served in their honor.

Monday morning the young couple left for Poquoson, where they will make their future home.

Hampton Monitor Newspaper

*10 JULY 1913*

Miss Rebecca Edwards, 15 years old, and Archie Riggins, 17 years old, eloped from their home in Poquoson last Saturday and were married at Elizabeth City, N. C. Returning to Hampton they registered at the Augusta hotel. Monday they left for Poquoson expecting to ask for and receive parental forgiveness. The young couple are popular young people of Poquoson.