THE DAVIDSONS OF RURAL HILL
THE FIRST THREE GENERATIONS

Major John and Violet Wilson Davidson,
Their Parents
and
Some of their Children

by

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Charlotte, North Carolina
August 31, 2012

Researched and Written for Historic Rural Hill
Supported, in part, with funding from the Arts & Science Council

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 5

Isabella Ramsay Davidson Hendry, Mother of Major John Davidson 11

Samuel and Mary Wilson, Parents of Violet Wilson Davidson 15

The First Generation at Rural Hill: Major John and Violet Davidson 23

Holly Bend: Robin and Peggy Davidson 47

The Second Generation at Rural Hill: Jacky and Sallie Davidson 75

The Third Generation at Rural Hill: Brevard and Mary Davidson 83

Rural Hill, the Last Two Generations 107

Farming at Rural Hill 109

Appendices

A Major John's Earliest Land Transactions 121
B. A Marriage Deed of Trust 128
C. Courts and Legal Structure 129
D. The Story of "Plum," Slave and Freedman 130
E. Land Acquisition 131
F. The Value of Money in the Colonial and Early Federal Periods 133
G. A Confusion of Counties 135
H. A Confusion of Names 136
I. Naming Conventions and other John Davidsons 137
J. The Lunacy of Rev. Alexander Caldwell 139
K. Road and River Work 141
L. Deeds of the 18th and 19th Centuries and their Transcriptions 141
M. Iron Making in Eighteenth Century North Carolina 143

INTRODUCTION

Today Rural Hill is a 265 acre Mecklenburg County park containing a portion of the land once owned and farmed by six generations of the Davidson family. Abutting Rural Hill is the Cowan's Ford Nature Preserve, a county park that was also part of the vast Davidson property. The purpose of this study is to give a broader understanding of the Davidson family and the activities that took place on their land. The focus will be on the first three generations from John Davidson's settlement in the 1760s through the 1850s when the property was owned by his grandson Adam Brevard Davidson. Research was conducted using primary sources when possible such as wills, deeds, and census records; and family papers such as journals, letters, etc. Family stories, secondary sources that cannot be thoroughly documented, are noted as such; their reliability is variable.

The works of several historians contributed greatly to this project. Chalmers Gaston Davidson, a family descendant, wrote several histories of the area, and biographies of some of his ancestors. Most were written from the 1940s to the 1970s; some were published, others exist only in manuscript form. Chalmers was a professor and librarian at Davidson College for many years, and had a lifelong interest in early Mecklenburg. His research is well documented, however we must keep in mind that many resources available today were not readily accessible when he did his work. Chalmers died in 1994, and is buried at Rural Hill. An extensive and thoroughly researched Davidson genealogy has been compiled by Dr. Douglas Marion of Chester, SC. Dr. Marion, also a Davidson descendant, has spent many years on this project, and regularly corrects and updates the record when new information becomes available. Mary Boyer has tirelessly researched Mecklenburg history for decades and generously opened her files to us, providing much essential information. Jane Johnson of the Charlotte Public Library gave an extra measure of effort in providing the authors with facts gleaned from Newspapers and other contemporaneous sources.[1] [2]

Summary of the Davidson Family at Rural Hill

In the spring of 1759, when John Davidson was 23, he bought a parcel of land on Coddle Creek, about six miles east of present day Davidson, and began farming. The land had previously been owned by his step-father Henry Hendry. Two years later he and Violet Wilson were married. In 1765, John bought 250 acres on McDowell Creek from his father-in-law Samuel Wilson for 45 pounds. This is the land that became Rural Hill. A year later he and Violet sold the land on Coddle Creek for a nice profit.

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[1] Chalmers Gaston Davidson, *Major John Davidson of "Rural Hill", Mecklenburg County, N.C., Pioneer, Industrialist, Planter* (Charlotte: The Lassiter Press, 1943).
[2] Chalmers Gaston Davidson, *The Plantation World Around Davidson* (Davidson, NC, The Mecklenburg Historical Assn., 1973).

Their first home on the new land was a log cabin they called Rural Retreat. Over the next twenty three years they added rooms and modified the house as their children were born. In 1788, having succeeded in business, John built a grand plantation home, Rural Hill.

John became a Major in the militia, and during his lifetime was customarily called Major John. He will be referred to in this report as Major John in order not to confuse him with his many descendants named John Davidson, or other John Davidsons who lived in the area. His son and namesake will be referred to as Jacky as he was called by the family.

Major John had given a portion of his land to his oldest son Robert, called Robin. Robin and his wife Peggy lived there at Holly Bend built about 1800. Holly Bend still stands in the Cowan's Ford Nature Preserve. Its location, early 19th century architecture, and family connection make it a perfect adjunct to the interpretation of Rural Hill.

Major John's second son Jacky married Sarah Brevard in 1800. They appear to have lived the first several decades of their marriage at Rural Retreat. In 1823 Major John, now widowed, "broke up housekeeping" and moved into Beaver Dam, the home near Davidson College of his daughter and son-in-law, Betsy and William Lee Davidson, Jr. At that time Jacky and his wife moved into Rural Hill. The phrases "breaking up housekeeping" and "went to housekeeping" were commonly used to denote who was in charge of the home, not who was cleaning or tending to the house. Major John became a resident of the home which was firmly under the charge of his son-in-law.

Jacky's son Adam Brevard Davidson, who was called Brevard, married Mary Laura Springs in 1836. They moved into Rural Hill with Jacky and Sarah. A year later Jacky and Sarah moved back to Rural Retreat where they lived out their lives.

Brevard's son John Springs Davidson, who inherited the property, married Minnie Caldwell in 1864. It is unclear whether John Springs' and Brevard's families both lived at Rural Hill, or one of them lived at Rural Retreat. Details of the lives of John Springs Davidson and his offspring will not be addressed in this report.

Rural Hill burned in 1886, although portions of it foundation and its porch columns remain. Rural Retreat burned in 1898. The only historic residence remaining on the property is a log kitchen building which was much modified and expanded to become the home of John Springs Davidson and his family after Rural Retreat burned. John Springs Davidson's son, Jo Graham Davidson, raised his family in this much improved log kitchen. His four children, none of whom married, were Jo Graham, Jr., John Springs, Elizabeth, and May. They were the last Davidsons to live on the property. Jo Graham, Jr. died in World War II; his siblings sold the property to Mecklenburg County in 1992. They have since died, leaving no heirs. Although the last branch of the family to live at Rural Hill has died out, Major John through his many children, grandchildren, and subsequent generations, left thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of descendants.

The Rural Hill mansion and Rural Retreat cabin no longer exist, yet there are significant features of the property that enhance historical interpretation. The modified kitchen that

became the last Davidson home still stands, along with a well house, an ash house, and a granary. Other original buildings are one called the "smoke house" which may have had other uses, and one called the "chicken coop" that was probably claimed by chickens rather than built for them.

A circa 1890 schoolhouse remains where today's children can experience an education similar to that of their ancestors, and the circa 1900 Bethesda School where black children were taught has been moved onto the property. A large reproduction barn now stands on an original barn site. A log cabin was recently built to give an idea of what Rural Retreat may have looked like. This cabin is also used for the demonstration of historic cooking and domestic skills. A Scottish Heritage Center is under construction as this report is being written. The most important old feature of the property is the Rural Hill Burying Ground which is owned and maintained by the Davidson Family Trust. In it are buried Major John and Violet, many of their children and grandchildren, and descendants of later generations. The last Davidsons to live at Rural Hill, offspring of Jo Graham Davidson mentioned above, all lie in this beautiful burying ground.

During the first three generations of the family Major John's original holdings increased as adjacent land was acquired, along with several noncontiguous farms. Brevard kept farm journals spanning over twenty years. From them we can learn extensive details about farming and land use. Cotton was the primary cash crop for Brevard, his father Jacky, and his Uncle Robin; Major John had been an early cotton planter of the region. All of these men were slave owners. The extant records reveal the names, family relationships, and daily activities of many of the black families who were the work force at Rural Hill.

Most modern visitors to Rural Hill are not well acquainted with farm life. The rich interpretative resources of slave and farm records, combined with the vast acreage of the site, allow visitors to better understand 19th century farming. Much of the land is cleared, as it was then for planting, and some of it is actively worked. The site has tools and implements of the time to display and demonstrate. The visual impact of seeing a broad expanse of land, and learning that it was a small portion of the acreage under cultivation in the 19th century, cannot be replicated on other local historic properties in the area due to their smaller size. The nature and the enormous number of seasonal tasks detailed in the farm journals offer opportunities for many interpretive and educational programs.

Hopewell Presbyterian Church and the Hopewell Community

Early Mecklenburg County was rural, and most of its inhabitants were farmers. Charlotte was the county seat where court sessions were held quarterly. Between court sessions it was a small sleepy village. It was inhabited by a handful of families who kept inns and taverns, owned a few shops, and practiced trades. Most citizens of Mecklenburg lived on their farms which tended to be centered on the Presbyterian Churches that surrounded the village. Hopewell Presbyterian Church is located in the northwest corner of Mecklenburg. The Davidsons and most of their friends and relatives were members and

strong supporters of Hopewell. The Church was established in 1762 and was served in its early years by supply ministers, generally men who took turns preaching to the congregations scatted about the county. The first minister of record was Samuel Craighead Caldwell who served Hopewell from 1791-1806. Caldwell also served Sugar Creek Presbyterian Church during this time. [3]

In the early 1800s there was a schism in the church between "New-Siders" and "Old-Siders". This was not a difference in theology, but one of style. Rev. Caldwell was a proponent of the New Side movement and its boisterous, evangelical, fire-and-brimstone manner of preaching. He held frequent revivals where emotional worshipers spoke in tongues, rolled in the aisles, and barked like dogs, until they dropped into stupors of exhaustion. Major John Davidson disapproved of this practice. He apparently preferred the staid and sober services of the Old Side school, and strongly opposed midweek revivals. His deep faith taught that the Sabbath should be devoted to the Lord, and men should attend to their work the rest of the week. He removed himself to Gilead Presbyterian Church on Beatties Ford Road a few miles north of his home. The rest of the Davidsons seemed to weather the brief schism and remained loyal to Hopewell. Gilead Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, along with its burying ground, is still in place at Gilead Road, three miles up Beatties Ford Road from Neck Road.

Rev. Caldwell left Hopewell in 1806 under a cloud of disapproval. He was not formally dismissed, but seemed to realize that his style did not fit the somber congregation at Hopewell. He continued to preach at Sugar Creek where perhaps his energetic sermons were appreciated. There is no record of Hopewell's ministers between 1806 and 1818; they may have been supplied by other county churches. Rev. John Williamson became the minister in 1818, and remained until his death in 1842. He is mentioned frequently in Adam Brevard Davidson's farm journal. Rural Hill Davidsons and their families contributed spiritually and financially for many years to Hopewell's maintenance.

A new brick sanctuary was built in 1834 to accommodate 300 worshipers on the main floor with a gallery around three sides for slaves which was reached by a separate entrance and staircase. After the Civil War the front entrance was modified to allow entrance to both levels. This church still stands today on Beatties Ford Road with modern additions, but almost no change to the old sanctuary.

Davidson College

Davidson College opened its doors to students in March of 1837, although preparations for the college had been underway for some time. In 1835 a committee was formed to establish a college emphasizing Christian education for local men. William Lee Davidson, Jr. sold the committee 469 acres of undeveloped land that he owned two miles from his home on the Charlotte-Statesville Road. He sold it for less than he had paid for it about ten years before which was about half of its 1835 value. William Lee was the

[3] Charles William Summerville, *The History of Hopewell Presbyterian Church* (Charlotte, Hopewell Presbyterian Church, 1939).

son of General William Lee Davidson, the Revolutionary War hero for whom the college was named, and a son-in-law of Major John Davidson.[4]

Work was soon begun to clear the land and build the college. Adam Brevard Davidson, Major John's grandson, provided a great deal of lumber for the new college. He noted in his farm journal on January 15, 1836 "Mr. Owens gave me the bill of lumber for the manual labor school to fill between 35 & 40 thousand feet 16000 thousand ft of 1 ¼ [inch] plank 10,000 thousand of 1 In. 10,400 of scantling. We have now about 20 thousand of it sawed." The inch measurements refer to the thickness of the boards, not their widths. Another entry states that the 1 ¼ inch boards were for flooring. On May 9th he stated he had "hauled 11 loads of lumber up to the college (the Davidsons College)." On May 20th he reported "I rode up to the college and remained there about one hour, and then to Uncle W. Lee Davidson's for dinner, and returned home in the evening." Altogether Brevard sent 114 loads of lumber to the college, and was paid $1,248 in April of 1838.

The school was initially planned to be a manual labor school meaning that students would pay part or all of their expenses by growing crops, chopping firewood, tending livestock, or doing other necessary jobs. It became apparent that sons of planters had no interest in such work, and their fathers were willing and able to pay for schooling. The manual labor concept was quickly abandoned.

Robert Hall Morrison became the college's first president. He had been a minister at Sugar Creek Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church (later First Presbyterian) in the village of Charlotte. He had headed the committee to establish the college. Morrison was married to Mary Graham, a granddaughter of Major John Davidson.

A number of Major John Davidson's descendents were actively involved with the college. His grandson Adam Brevard Davidson was among its early trustees; his son Robin and son-in-law William Lee Davidson, Jr. were two of the six men who pledged $1,000 each to establish a professorship. Two of Jacky's sons were students there; his son William was a member of the first class in 1837, and Constantine became a student a year or so later. Among Major John's many great grandsons, at least two were Davidson students, Robert and E. L. Baxter Davidson, sons of Adam Brevard Davidson. E. L. Baxter Davidson was the single largest donor to Davidson College during his lifetime.

[4] Jan Blodgett and Ralph B. Levering, *One Town, Many Voices, a History of Davidson, North Carolina,* (Davidson, NC: Davidson Historical Society, 2012), 3.

Isabella Ramsay Davidson Hendry
Mother of Major John Davidson

Little is known for certain about the parents of John Davidson and almost all that has been previously published has come from family stories and early histories rather than from documented evidence. The following is based on the best information available today and is followed by a discussion of the evidence that supports this narrative. The John Davidson who later became Major John Davidson is referred to as "Major John" throughout to distinguish him from all of the other John Davidsons of the time.

Henry and Isabella Ramsay Davidson Hendry

Among the few hard facts that we have are these: Major John was born in 1735 in Chestnut Level, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. His sister Mary was born a few years after that. Their parents were Robert Davidson and Isabella Ramsay Davidson. Robert Davidson died a few years after Mary was born.[5]

Given the marriage customs of the time, Isabella was probably about 20 when her first child was born, meaning she was born about 1715. This birth date tallies well with later events. When her husband Robert died, shortly after their second child was born, Isabella Ramsay Davidson was left a young widow with two small children.

There were other Ramsays and Davidsons in the Chestnut Level area and Robert Davidson was related in some way to brothers John and George Davidson. During the next 10 years or so Isabella probably relied on these relatives for support. Between 1750 and 1752 a number of extended families from the Chestnut Level and nearby Thyatira Church areas of Lancaster County moved to the land between the Catawba and Yadkin Rivers in North Carolina. These included the Davidson, Ramsay and Brevard families. The area they moved to was then Anson County, North Carolina, later divided into Mecklenburg and Rowan Counties.

In about 1752 the brothers John and George Davidson moved to the part of Anson County that would become southern Rowan County in 1753. John spent a few years in Rowan County and then relocated to the west, before the Revolution, where he built Davidson's Fort at what is now Old Fort, NC. John and his wife were killed by Cherokee Indians during the revolution. George Davidson stayed in Rowan County and settled on Davidson Creek, near where Davidson, NC is today. Isabella and her children John and Mary settled with or near him. There is no record that she purchased any land or had any other dealings with the local or state courts so she probably lived on land owned by George Davidson and perhaps in his house.

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[5] Davidson, *Major John Davidson*, 1-5.

When they moved to North Carolina John was about 16. He had been trained as a blacksmith and, while he had not yet reached his majority (age 21) and could not inherit property or enter into contracts, he was able to practice his trade and help support his family. His sister was a few years younger and perhaps helped out in some way as well.

Just 10 or 12 miles from the Davidsons lived a well-to-do farmer named Henry Hendry. Hendry had arrived in the area just a year or two before the Davidsons and had settled on Coddle Creek in what is today northwestern Cabarrus County. Hendry apparently had been married before and had young children from that marriage. A property deed of the time records that Henry Hendry, his wife Isabella and John Davidson sold a piece of land in 1765 so we know that the widower Henry Hendry married the widow Isabella Davidson sometime before 1765. Considering their ages at the time, it was probably closer to 1752 than 1765. Isabella was at least 35 when she arrived in North Carolina around 1752 with two teen aged children, and Hendry was probably about the same age with several children. In those days making a living and raising children were two full-time jobs and widows and widowers with young children often remarried as soon as possible. Henry and Isabella were well matched for each other – Henry was well established and Isabella was capable of raising Henry's children. And in the sparsely settled Carolina back country of that time there were few other choices. Being just 10 miles apart they were close neighbors and could easily become acquainted.[6] [7]

Hendry had set up in Anson County in 1751 with land grants totaling 600 acres (about one square mile). He served as Anson County clerk in 1754 and perhaps other years. From December 1754 to April 1756 he was the Register of Deeds for Anson County. These offices were unpaid but each of them involved a variety of fees for performing the various duties of the offices. Court was held for one week every three months in Anson Court House on the Pee Dee River near the South Carolina boundary, and Hendry was away from home for these court weeks. Anson Court House lay about 80 miles from Hendry's property so it took several days for him to get there. At other times he kept the books at home and was busy copying records and performing services for people who brought him deeds and contracts to register. In those early days serving as County Clerk for a few years was often the start of a family fortune. In 1763 that part of Anson County where Hendry lived became Mecklenburg County.[8]

The early histories tell the story that John's father-in-law, Samuel Wilson, gave him a piece of land as a wedding gift in 1761 and that he built Rural Retreat and settled there soon after he was married. However, the county records of the time tell a very different tale. As a matter of fact, John Davidson bought his first piece of land in 1759 not on McDowell Creek, but on Coddle Creek. This was a peculiar transaction including a court

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[6] Brent H Holcomb, *Anson County, North Carolina Deed Abstracts, 1749-1766, Abstracts of Will & Estates, 1749-1795*, (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1980) s.v. "Hendry, Henry."
[7] Herman W. Ferguson, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions 1780-1800*, (Rocky Mount, NC, Herman W. Ferguson, 2000), s.v. "Hendry, Henry."
[8] Robert J. Cain, Ed, *Colonial Records of North Carolina (Second Series),* (New York : AMS Press, 1968-1972), s. v. Hendry, Henry.

case, a land auction, the Rowan County Sheriff, John's future father-in-law Samuel Wilson and John's step-father, Henry Hendry. John started farming on this land and he and Violet lived from there from their 1761 marriage until 1765. In that year John bought a piece of land on McDowell Creek from his father-in-law. Along with Violet and their two small children he moved into the log home they called Rural Retreat. John may have built Rural Retreat, or it may have been on the land when he bought it. A year after he moved to Rural Retreat he sold the Coddle Creek land at a very nice profit. All of this is explained more fully in the Major John and Violet section of this paper. The real estate transactions are documented in the county records and detailed in Appendix A along with transcriptions of some of the deeds.

Not much more is known of Henry and Isabella Hendry. It is said that when Hendry died (date unknown) Isabella moved in with Major John or with his sister Mary for the rest of her life. Mary had married James Price and little is known of them. No will for Henry or Isabella Hendry has been found. Mr. Hendry is not identifiable in court records after a deed dated 1770. There is no record of Hendry's service during the revolution and he would have been too old to serve.

Henry Hendry's first family

The evidence that Henry Hendry had been married before and was left a widower with several small children is circumstantial but convincing. Hendry first appears in the Anson County records in 1751. A Mecklenburg deed of June 1770 records that "Henry Hendry, Jr." bought land on the Catawba, in the Hopewell area. It was witnessed by "Henry Hendry, Sr." Apparently this was our Henry Hendry and his son. Since the son had to be 21 years of age to buy and sell property this means that Hendry Junior was born before 1749 and that Henry Hendry, Sr. must have been married, had one or more children and was a widower before he married Isabella. We do not know when Hendry's first wife died which adds another uncertainty to the marriage date of Isabella and Henry Hendry.[9]

The last court records that can be identified as Henry Hendry were in 1770 or 1772. After a gap of 10 years, in 1782 Henry Henry starts appearing in court records associated with jury duty, patroller, road hand, road supervisor and river supervisor. These were activities that a young man engaged in, not a man in his 60s, especially after not taking part in public life since he was county clerk thirty years before. This is most probably the Henry Hendry Junior mentioned above who had decided to change the spelling of his last name. This change in the spelling is very sharp as Henry never appears before 1780 and Hendry never appears after1772. For a discussion of the spelling of names, see Appendix H. A Confusion of Names.

[9] Brent H. Holcomb and Elmer O. Parker, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Deed Abstracts 1763-1779* (Greenville, S.C.: Southern Historical Press, 1979), 155.

Henry Hendry appeared often in the county court records from 1751 until 1772. His sudden disappearance from these records could well signal his death in 1772, at the age of perhaps 65 years.

Untangling the Story of Isabella Ramsay Davidson Hendry

The story of how Major John Davidson's mother got to Mecklenburg has come down in the family and was written in various versions in the standard histories. However, none of those stories match the facts as revealed in court records of the time. Among the major sources for Mecklenburg History of this era are J.B. Alexander,[10] Chalmers Davidson,[11] and Charles Sommerville.[12] A passage from Davidson will serve to represent the others.

"The widow Isabella Davidson is thought to have settled near the present town of Salisbury in Rowan County rather than in the Center Church vicinity. There was an attraction near Salisbury in the person of a teacher by the name of Henry Henry or Hendry. Hendry is credited with a Princeton education by local historians but there is no record of his matriculation at that University….John and Mary Davidson are said to have been educated by Mr. Hendry. Sometime about this period he married their mother"

The problem with this story is that Henry Hendry is present in the Anson and Mecklenburg County records as owning land on Coddle Creek in what is now northwestern Cabarrus County but he is completely absent from the Rowan County and Salisbury records. Plus the fact that school teaching at that time was generally a temporary occupation for young men just starting out in life or for Presbyterian ministers. Mr. Hendry owned and farmed 600 acres, had one or more small children and served in responsible positions in Anson county government.

Other histories have different errors, all equally wrong, such as having Robert and Isabella emigrate to Pennsylvania in 1715 as a married couple (meaning she would have been married for 22 years and was 37 years of age when her first child was born and 54 when they moved to North Carolina) and having Isabella settle in Salisbury in 1740. Many of the stories say that Samuel Wilson <u>gave</u> the land where Rural Hill is located to John and Violet Davidson as a wedding present. Clearly from the court records John bought his first farm two years before he married Violet and <u>bought</u> the Rural Hill land from his father-in-law three years after that as described in detail in Appendix A.

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[10] J. B. Alexander, *The History of Mecklenburg County From 1740 to 1900,* (Charlotte, Observer Printing House, 1902), 24.
[11] Davidson, *Major John Davidson,* 1-5.
[12] Summerville, *Hopewell Church.*

Samuel and Mary Wilson
Parents of Violet Wilson Davidson

Samuel Wilson (b 1711, d 3/13/1778) came from England[13] [14], Ireland[15] or Pennsylvania[16], depending on which family story you read. It is said that he was related to the famous English portrait painter, Benjamin Wilson and the likewise famous English General Sir Robert Thomas Wilson, and that the General or a relative of his visited at Rural Hill at some later date. No documentary evidence has been found confirming these stories, and it remains to be discovered exactly where he and his wife came from. There is no entry for Samuel Wilson in Dictionary of North Carolina Biography.

Various Other Samuel Wilsons

During this period there were a lot of other Samuel Wilsons. Sometimes it can be difficult to determine whether the public record is referring to "our Samuel Wilson" or someone else. A few examples: [17]

- Samuel Wilson had a son Samuel Wilson. Some references to Samuel Wilson, Senior and Samuel Wilson, Junior may refer to those two. Or perhaps not.
- In 1756 Samuel Wilson was listed as a "young man" in the Anson Militia.
- In 1749 there was a Samuel Wilson who received a land grant in Onslow County.
- In 1755 and 1765 Samuel Wilson bought and sold land on Fisher's Creek, Anson County. Fisher's Creek is near present day Brattonsville, SC. This may or may not be our Samuel Wilson, but we left these transactions out of this paper since they do not relate directly to Mecklenburg County.
- In 1768-1779 there was a Samuel Wilson in Rowan County.
- In 1782 there were a Samuel Wilson, Senior and a Samuel Wilson, Junior in Rowan County.
- In 1775 there was a Samuel Wilson, an apprentice, the son of John Wilson.
- And many more such references, especially near the end of our Samuel Wilson's life in 1778

[13] Alexander, *History of Mecklenburg County*, 10.
[14] Davidson, *Major John Davidson*, 6.
[15] Summerville, *Hopewell Church,* 195.
[16] C. L. Hunter, *Sketches of Western North Carolina, Historical and Biographical,* (Raleigh: The Raleigh News Steam Job Print, 1877), 84.
[17] William L. Saunders, Ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina, 10 vols., (*Raleigh; State of North Carolina, 1886-1890), s. v. Wilson, Samuel.

Family and Children

Samuel's first wife was Mary Winslow, daughter of Moses and Jean Osborne Winslow. Their six children were:[18]

- Violet (b. 8/13/1742, d. 12/3/1818) Married Major John Davidson
- Benjamin (1744-1800) Married Margaret, no children
- Mary (called Maria) (1746/8-1791), Married Ezekiel Polk, brother of Col Thomas Polk.
- David. (b ca. 1748). Major David. Married, one son Benjamin. Perhaps other children.
- Samuel(1750-1843) Married Hannah Knox, three children
- John (1752-1795)

Mary Wilson died in 1758 and Samuel soon remarried to Sarah Howard. Their only child, Margaret, was born soon thereafter. Sarah died sometime after January, 1765.

Samuel Wilson's third wife was Margaret Jack (b 1746, d 2/12/1804), daughter of Patrick Jack and sister of Capt. James Jack who carried the Mecklenburg Declaration to Philadelphia, in June, 1775. The date of this marriage is generally given as 1765, indicating that Sarah must have died early in the year and Samuel married quickly thereafter. Samuel was 54, Margaret was 19. When Samuel died in 1778 Margaret was 32 and apparently never remarried since she is buried near Samuel in Baker's Graveyard and the grave is marked Margaret J. Wilson.

Their children were:

- Sarah
- Charity
- Lillie
- Robert
- William Jack (not yet born when Samuel died)

Untangling the Wives and Children of Samuel Wilson

The early histories differ from one another in the names and numbers of the Wilson children. The best and earliest sources are Wilson's will, written at the end of his life, four tombstones in the Baker Cemetery, and public records such as wills, deeds and court records. The names and dates shown above are what we believe to be most probable, but these may be contradicted if other sources are found.

- Baker's Graveyard in the southern edge of Iredell County has marked graves for Samuel, Margaret, John and Benjamin Wilson. These markings establish the birth and death dates for these people.[19]
    - Samuel Wilson – b 1711, d 1778. The death date is confirmed by his will.

[18] Summerville, *Hopewell Church,* 195-98.
[19] Sommerville, *Hopewell Church*, 314-17.

- Margaret Jack Wilson– b 1746, d 1804. Third wife of Samuel
- Benjamin Wilson – b 1744, d 1800
- John Wilson – b 1752, d 1795

  One problem with this is that Samuel's will indicates that John was a minor in 1778 which requires a birth date after 1757.

- Mary Wilson died in 1758 and Samuel soon remarried to Sarah Howard. Early histories and family stories do not give her first name and JB Alexander gives her last name as Potts. These early sources say she died soon after delivering her only child, a daughter named Margaret. However, a deed dated January 16, 1765 says that "Samuel Wilson & wf Sarah" sold 250 acres on McDowell Creek to John Davidson. This was the same John Davidson that had married Samuel's daughter Violet three and one-half years before. From this we know not only the name of Samuel's second wife, but that she lived until at least January of 1765.

- J.B. Alexander and Sommerville both list a 7th child from the first marriage, a girl named Sally. We have found no corroborating evidence of this and have left her off the list.

- Hunter lists a 7th child, a girl named Rebecca. He says she married, had two children and then, while on the way to Tennessee, was murdered along with her husband by Indians. He says that the two children survived. This may be true, but since there is no corroborating evidence, we have left this possible daughter out.

- Both Hunter and Sommerville list a 6th child from the third marriage, a boy named William or William Jack. This is probably "the infant which my beloved wife, Margaret Wilson is now pregnant with," mentioned in Samuel's will and we have listed him as such. Hunter states that William Jack was the youngest son of Samuel Wilson, further confirming this connection. Also William is mentioned in John Wilson's will of 1795 as his half-brother.

Land Ownership – Samuel Wilson

Samuel Wilson was one of the earliest settlers in Mecklenburg County (then Anson County), receiving a large number of land grants starting in 1749 which was the first year that land was granted in the area. Wilson was born in 1711 so he was 38 years old when he received that first land grant and already had at least three children by his first wife, Mary. He was also apparently quite wealthy since he requested and received seven land grants totaling 3,880 acres. Even at the low purchase price of 20 shillings per 100 acres, this amounts to £38..16..0 – a considerable amount at the time. To this must be added the various fees for entering the land, surveying it and recording the deeds. The deeds for the purchase of these grants have not been located but four of the grants are referred to in

later transfers of the land. For an explanation of pounds, shillings and pence, see Appendix F.[20]

Samuel Wilson started out in 1749-1753 with the 3,880 acres in land grants mentioned above. The following is what is found in the public record regarding his land transactions. There were probably other purchases and sales that were not officially recorded at the time or subsequently.

As detailed below, Wilson bought an additional 675 acres and sold 1,717 acres, indicating that at his death in 1778 he still held 2,838 acres – a very large land holding for the time. Almost all of the land he sold went to his sons, at what were probably token sums, or to his son-in-law John Davidson at a fair price. See Appendix E for a discussion of granting, buying and selling land.

1765 – Sold 250 acres on McDowell Creek to John Davidson for £45.
1767 – Bought 315 acres for £40.
1769 – Sold his son David 297 acres on McDowell Creek for the token amount of £5.
1769 – Sold his son Benjamin 340 acres on McDowell Creek for the token amount of £5. These two transactions were on the same day.
1769 – Bought 105 acres for £8.
1769 – Bought 225 acres on Rocky River for £75. May not be our Samuel Wilson.
1770 – Bought lot #3 in Charlotte for £2.
1776 – Sold lot #3 in Charlotte for £30.
1772 – Sold 300 acres on the Catawba to his son "Samuel Wilson, Jr., of Craven Co., SC., Mercht."
1773 – Sold 530 acres for £20 to a widow. Perhaps a token payment?

Land Transactions – Margaret Jack Wilson

Margaret was left a widow at the age of 32 and was well enough off to raise her young children without the necessity of marrying again immediately. Apparently she never did remarry.

In March of 1779 Margaret Wilson was granted 100 acres, at 50 shillings the 100 acres. For a discussion of land grants, see Appendix E.

In August of 1779 Margaret bought lots #129 and 137 on Trade Street in Charlotte for £100. #137 is directly behind #129. These two lots ran along Church Street from Trade St. to Fourth Street and are next door to the two lots owned by Patrick Jack (her father) where Jack's Tavern stood. Margaret sold these lots to Wm. Patterson 1801 for £7..10..0. Note that she originally paid £100 but that was during the revolution and she probably paid in highly inflated NC currency or in even more highly inflated Continental currency. For a discussion of Pounds, Shillings and Pence and of other currency, see Appendix F.

[20] Cain, *Colonial Records, Second Series,* 8: 234, 266, 272, 276.

Violet Marries Major John and Sets Up House Keeping.

The early histories tell the story that when John Davidson married Samuel Wilson's eldest daughter Violet, he received a good piece of land on McDowell Creek as a wedding gift where they built Rural Retreat and set up housekeeping. As stated above, John Davidson bought his first piece of land in 1759 on Coddle Creek, two years before they were married. This is where he and Violet lived until 1765. In that year John bought a piece of land on McDowell Creek from his father-in-law at a fair price and moved there along with Violet and their two small children. A year later John and Violet sold the original farm for a tidy profit. These real estate transactions are documented in the county records and are detailed in Appendix A.

Will and Estate

Samuel Wilson's Last Will and Testament is recorded in one of the Mecklenburg County Will books.[21] It has been abstracted by Holcomb[22] and a complete transcription is available in Sommerville.[23] We checked this transcription against an image of the original and it appears to be accurate. Unfortunately we have been unable to locate his estate papers, if they exist.

Wilson's will is dated March 9, 1778, saying he was "...sick and in a low state of health, but of sound mind and memory…" He died four days later and his will was entered into court on 15 April, 1778. The will appointed his son-in-law John Davidson and his two sons Benjamin and Samuel as his executors. Those men relinquished their rights as executors, and Letters of Administration were issued to Col. Ezekiel Polk and Capt. James Jack. Polk was another son-in-law and Jack was the brother of Wilson's widow, Margaret Jack Wilson. The administrators posted bonds of £10,000 each, indicating an expected value of the estate of £5,000.

At his death Samuel Wilson left bequests to his wife, 10 children and 2 grandsons:

- Those receiving 20 shillings were men who had received land from their father or women who had already married and, presumably, received a dowry of some sort.
- Violet Davidson – 20 s – Violet was the wife of Major John Davidson
- Benjamin Wilson – 20 s
- Mary Polk – 20 s – Mary was the wife of Ezekiel Polk
- John Wilson received a large inheritance including "…a negro man named Plumb, a mare, a horse and a filly generally known as his own creature and the one-half of the plantation on which I now live…" That home plantation was to be divided in half by Richard Barry and Benjamin Wilson and John was to take whatever

[21] *Mecklenburg County Will Books*, F:211-214.
[22] Brent H. Holcomb, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Abstracts of Early Wills, 1763-1790 (1749-1790),* (Greenville, S.C., A. Press, 1980), 72.
[23] Sommerville, *Hopewell Church*, 271.

half he chose. John also inherited half of a 600 acre survey in Burke County which was to be divided by John Davidson and Benjamin Wilson.

- Margaret Wilson, unmarried, was left "…one black filly, two years old with a star in her forehead (come of Samuel horse) a good new saddle and bridle, a good new feather bed and furniture and four cows and the sum of twenty pounds."
- Robert Wilson received the other half of the home plantation and whichever half he chose of the 600 acres in Burke County, plus £20.
- Sarah Wilson, minor, £200.
- Lillie Wilson, minor, £200.
- Charity Wilson, minor, £200
- Samuel Wilson – 20 s
- Samuel C. Polk – Grandson – son of Mary Wilson and Ezekiel Polk – £50
- Samuel Wilson – Grandson - £50. We have not identified the family of this Samuel Wilson. He must have been a son of David or Samuel since Benjamin never married and John and Robert were still minors. He does not show up in the standard genealogies.
- "the infant which my beloved wife, Margaret Wilson is now pregnant with" - £200. We believe that this child was named William Jack Wilson.

All remaining Negroes, good and chattels were to be sold and, after paying all just debts and legacies, divided between his minor children viz. John, Margaret, Sarah, Robert, Lilly, Charity and the infant (total 7 children). The five children who had reached the age of 21 – Violet, Benjamin, Mary, David and Samuel – were not included in this general distribution.

If any of these children – 2 boys, 4 girls and the infant –should die before age 21 and having "no heirs of their body" then there share is to be divided between their surviving brothers and sisters.

On July 14, 1778 the administrators submitted an inventory and account of sales for the estate and on the 18th registered the amount of these sales as £4,084.11.4. This was an extremely large amount and it may be that Samuel Wilson died the richest man in Mecklenburg County or perhaps in the entire back country. This amount did not include any of the inherited property such the Negro Plum and the two parcels of land.

The final settlement of the estate, after all credits had been collected and debts and bequests paid was entered into court on 15 July 1779 and amounted to £3,144.6.9.

In the October court session the two executors were appointed as guardians for the minor beneficiaries. At that time the term guardian did not mean what it does today. When a minor inherited a bequest from their deceased father (or other deceased person) the court appointed a guardian, not of the minor person, but of their assets. In almost all cases, the child did not live with the guardian and in many cases the court authorized a guardian to make payments from the child's assets to support the child who was being raised by the widow or another relative. Guardians were bonded in an amount twice that of the inheritance. The court terminated the guardianship when the child reached their majority,

or sometimes if the guardian was not doing a good job. In that case the court appointed another guardian. If a deceased father did not have the assets to leave a bequest to his minor children, those over 7 years of age were often put out to apprenticeship. Frequently these apprenticeships were to learn "the art and mystery of housewifery," or of a spinster or a farmer.

The American Revolution

Samuel Wilson was not a signer of the Mecklenburg Declaration and was age 64 in 1775 when the Revolution started. He died in 1778 and so had no part in the revolution. There is no record of his serving in the militia at any time.

An interesting anecdote connected to Samuel Wilson's family and the American Revolution occurred after his death.[24]

"After General Davidson was killed at Cowan's Ford, on the morning of the 1st of February, 1781, Major David Wilson, and Richard Barry, Esq, both of whom participated in the skirmish at that place, secured the body of their beloved commander, and carried it to the residence of Samuel Wilson, Sr., to receive the usual preparatory attentions for burial. Mrs. Davidson, who resided about ten miles distant, in the vicinity of Center Church was immediately sent for; she came as hastily as possible in the afternoon, under the charge of George Templeton one of her neighbors, and received, on that solemn occasion, the heart-felt condolence and sympathy of numerous sorrowing friends and relatives. In consequence of this necessary delay, those true patriots and friends of the deceased (Wilson and Barry) moved with the body late in the evening of the same day, and committed it to the silent tomb, *by torchlight*, in Hopewell graveyard."

Samuel Wilson had died in 1778 and by 1780 his widow, Margaret Jack Wilson was still living at the home place with her minor children. The family story is that General William Lee Davidson was found naked, stripped by the British soldiers, and was clothed by Mrs. Wilson in clothing that belonged to her brother, Captain James Jack, who had carried the Mecklenburg Declaration to Philadelphia in 1775.

The term "naked" in the 18th century could mean, as we think of it today, completely stripped of all items of clothing. However, it also was used to refer to someone who was without a coat or without a coat and waistcoat. In any event, clothing supplied by Mrs. Wilson to cover the General was most probably clothing that had belonged to her recently departed husband rather than belonging to her brother, Captain Jack, who was very much alive and probably needed all of the clothing he owned. Their father, Patrick Jack, had owned a tavern in Charlotte which is said to have burned in the fall of 1780 when the British occupied Charlotte.

[24] Hunter, *Sketches,* 85.

The Story of Plum

Samuel Wilson's will included a bequest to his son John of the Negro Plum. John died 17 years later and his will freed Plum and left him both land and personal property. John's half-brother William contested the will but a jury found the will to be valid and the court officially manumitted Plum. For a full description of this interesting and illuminating story, see Appendix D.

A Family Story Explained – Perhaps

As mentioned above, the family story holds that Samuel Wilson was related to the famous English portrait painter, Benjamin Wilson and the likewise famous English General Sir Robert Thomas Wilson, and that the General or a relative of his visited at Rural Hill at some later date. No documentary evidence has been found confirming these stories and it seems clear that neither of these famous Wilsons ever visited the US. However, there is an account regarding a famous North Carolina Spa that may explain at least part of this story.

In the first half of the 19th century the spa "Catawba Springs" on the South Fork of the Catawba River was famous and well patronized in the summer by well-to-do patrons from South Carolina and Alabama as well as many from the surrounding area. Several of the guest books from 1838 to 1854 are in the Davidson College Library archives. In addition to many famous names, these books list some names which are perhaps too famous. It seems that students from Davidson College often stayed at Catawba Springs on their way too or from the college. Each guest signed in with his name and home address. Several of those showing "Davidson College" as an address seem suspect such as General Wm. Lee Davidson (who died in 1781), Gen. Harrison of Tippecanoe, and so on. One that is clearly suspect is from 1847. It is "Major General Thomas A. Wilson, Esquire, of Davidson College." There was no one of that name at Davidson at the time but there was a student named Thomas A. Wilson, and it might have been he who signed in as a famous person and started this family story.[25]

[25] Typescript, box 1, folder 20, Davidson Family Papers, Special Collections, Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina.

The First Generation at Rural Hill:
Major John and Violet Wilson Davidson

John Davidson, Born December 15, 1735,
Married June 2, 1761 to Violet Wilson (born August 13, 1742, died December 3, 1818)
Retired, Fall 1823, age 89
Died January 10, 1832, age 96

Introduction

John Davidson arrived in the Carolina back country around 1752. He was about 16 and was a trained blacksmith. Over the next 80 years he was to make his mark on history and leave a legacy in north Mecklenburg County that would endure for ages. He arrived with his widowed mother and younger sister, along with a number of Davidson relatives, from Lancaster County Pennsylvania and settled near the Catawba River in what was then Anson County. Later this area would be Northern Mecklenburg and Southern Iredell Counties. As young John Davidson reached his maturity he began to acquire land, first on Coddle Creek, then later on the Catawba River. Eventually his land holdings would exceed 1,000 acres. He established himself as a blacksmith and planter, married Violet Wilson, who lived nearby, and raised a family of 10 children, all of whom lived to maturity and many of whom rose in prominence and prosperity. John, along with two of his sons-in-law pioneered the manufacturing of iron across the river in Lincoln County and later on he was an early adopter of cotton cultivation which, if it did not make his fortune, did ensure its continuation. As a young man he took part in public life, serving two terms in the Colonial Assembly, and being one of the patriots who met in the courthouse in Charlotte on May 19, 1775 and adopted the famous Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. During the Revolution he served as a Major in the Mecklenburg Militia on campaigns in the Carolinas and in opposing the invasion of North Carolina by the British army under Major General Charles, Lord Cornwallis in 1780 and 1781. Davidson continued as an active farmer until 1823 when at the age of 89, having been widowed for 5 years, he "broke up house keeping," distributed most of his property to his children and retired to a life of ease, living with his daughter Elizabeth and son-in-law William Lee Davidson at their plantation Beaver Dam near present day Davidson College. He died at the age of 96 in 1832.

The Early Days

The only verifiable fact we have about the origins of John Davidson is that he was born in Chestnut Level, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania on December 15, 1735. The following paragraphs are based on family stories, the customs of the times and the experiences of other families as they migrated to the Carolina piedmont.

John Davidson arrived in the Carolina back country in 1752 at the age of 16 with his widowed mother and younger sister. He had been trained as a blacksmith and, while he

had not yet reached his majority (age 21) and could not inherit property or enter into contracts, he was able to practice his trade and help support his family. His sister was a few years younger and perhaps helped out in some way as well. They came from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania along with other families from that area and settled with or near the George Davidson family in Anson County (later Rowan County, today Iredell County). They were on Davidsons Creek near the Catawba River, near the present-day town of Davidson, NC. John's deceased father, Robert is thought to be either a brother or a cousin of George and John Davidson who came to the back country about that time.

Just 10 or 12 miles from the Davidsons lived a well-to-do farmer named Henry Hendry. Hendry had arrived in the area just a year or two before the Davidsons and had settled on Coddle Creek in what is today northwestern Cabarrus County. Hendry apparently had been married before and had a number of young children from that marriage. Isabella and Mr. Hendry were married probably shortly after she arrived in the back country.

Getting Started in Life

The early histories tell the story that John's father-in-law, Samuel Wilson, gave them a piece of land neighboring his on McDowell Creek as a wedding gift in 1761 and that they settled there and built Rural Retreat. However, the county records of the time tell a very different tale. As a matter of fact, John Davidson bought his first piece of land in 1759, two and one-half years before he was married, not on McDowell Creek, but on Coddle Creek. This is where he started farming, where he and Violet lived for three and one-half years and where two of their 10 children were born. In 1765 John bought 250 acres of land on McDowell Creek from his father-in-law for £45, where he built Rural Retreat and moved his family. These real estate transactions are documented in the county records and detailed in Appendix A.

The Country Records show that John Davidson bought 300 acres on Coddle Creek in 1759 when he was 23 years old. This was land that had originally been granted to Henry Hendry and had been auctioned off to settle a law suit. Another party to the suit was Samuel Wilson, John's future father-in-law. John paid £50..0..0 for the land and the deed was witnessed by Henry Hendry.

John Davidson and Violet Wilson were married on June 2, 1761 when she was 19 and he was 25, and they set up housekeeping on his land on Coddle Creek. Their first child, Rebecca was born 9½ months later, on March 20, 1762. For the next 25 years Violet had a child about every 2½ years until her 10th child, Benjamin Wilson, was born on May 20, 1787 when she was 44 years old.

In January 1765 John bought 250 acres of land from his father-in-law, Samuel Wilson. John, Violet and their two daughters moved onto this land where John had built a log cabin which he christened "Rural Retreat." A year later they sold the land on Coddle Creek for a very tidy profit. For the detail of these deeds and other related transactions,

see appendix A. For an explanation of the various forms of money used in colonial times, see appendix F.

The Children of Major John and Violet Wilson Davidson

Major John and Violet had ten children. Robert and John are treated extensively elsewhere in this paper. The others are profiled below.[26]

Rebecca was born on March 20, 1762 and died November 24, 1824 at the age of 62. She married Captain Alexander Brevard in 1784 and moved to Lincoln County. In the Revolution Capt. Brevard had served in the militia in the Snow Campaign, then as an ensign under Col. Thomas Polk in the 4th Regiment of the NC Continental Line. He was promoted to Lieutenant and was in the battles of Brandywine and Germantown. After spending the winter at Valley Forge he returned home as an invalid. After recovering he served as a Militia Captain, as Quartermaster under General Gates and commanded a company at the battle of Eutaw Springs – a thoroughly distinguished military career. In Lincoln County, with his brother-in-law Joseph Graham and his father-in-law Major John he established and operated a blast furnace and foundry which produced pig iron and cast iron goods of various types. He also owned mines for the required iron ore and limestone and land where he produced charcoal for the furnaces. Rebecca and Alexander were the parents of eight children. For a discussion of iron making in Lincoln County see Appendix M.

Captain Alexander Brevard and Rebecca Davidson Brevard were the parents of eight children. The information below on three of these children is from the journal that Keziah Brevard kept from July of 1860 through April of 1861. The <u>underlined</u> name is the one most commonly used.[27]

> 1. Alexander <u>Joseph</u> Maclean Brevard (9/22/1801 – 6/1/1842) married Keziah Goodwyn Hopkins of South Carolina on 4/26/1827. Keziah and Joseph settled in Lincoln County, and he served one term (1827 – 1828) in the Assembly. Then the marriage quickly fell apart. Joseph began drinking heavily, and Keziah left him and fled to her father's home, Oldfield Plantation, near Columbia, SC. Joseph followed after her, but failed to convince her to come home so he stayed at her father's plantation. Joseph was admitted to the SC State Hospital, commonly called the "lunatic asylum," in 1835 for "monomania," a mental disorder where the mind is focused on a single theme. He was obsessed by jealousy and the idea that Keziah had a paramour. Joseph was released two months later apparently not much improved, as Keziah's father and brother were appointed by the court as his legal guardians. In September, 1841 Joseph was hospitalized again. According to hospital records he had been deranged for some time, but had been kept at home.

[26] Davidson, *Major John Davidson*, 72-9.
[27] Keziah Goodwyn Brevard, *A Plantation Mistress on the Eve of the Civil War,* ed. John Hammond Moore (Columbia, The University of South Carolina Press, 1993). Keziah kept this journal from July of 1860 through April of 1861.

He was in poor health, and believed people were trying to poison him. His health seriously declined and he was released in 1842 and died June 1 at Oldfield Plantation. He and Keziah had no children.

2. Theodore (or Theodorus) Washington Brevard (9/24/1804 – 1877) graduated from South Carolina College and began practicing law in Columbia. He married his sister-in-law, Keziah's younger sister Caroline, in 1826. In their short marriage they had two sons, both of whom died young. Caroline died soon after the birth of her second son in 1828. Three years later Theodore married again, this time to Caroline Mays of Edgefield, SC. In 1833 they moved to Alabama, and then to Florida where he served as state comptroller from 1855 – 1860. Brevard County, Florida, established in 1855, is named in Theodore's honor. Cape Canaveral and the town of Melbourne are located in Brevard County.

3. John Franklin Brevard (12/5/1788 – 2/13/1827) married Margaret (Peggy) Conner on August 15, 1820. During their brief marriage Peggy had four children, three of whom died in infancy or early childhood. The family genealogy makes her 41 years old when they were married, but this is probably in error since it would have her bearing four children between the ages of 42 and 47. Peggy was left a widow with one child after seven years of marriage. It was two months after Franklin died that his brother Joseph married Keziah Hopkins (see above). The two sisters-in-law became great friends and their exchange of letters is mentioned in Keziah's diary.

A woman named Juliana Conner of Charleston kept a diary in 1827 as a bride. She wrote of visiting her new husband's family in Mecklenburg, as well as several Alexanders and Brevards in Lincoln County, and Robin and Peggy Davidson at Holly Bend. Her husband's name was Henry Conner.

Peggy had a brother named Henry Connor He lived in Charleston, but his family were North Carolina Presbyterians. Was Peggy's brother the husband of Juliana Connor? It is an intriguing thought but conclusive proof does not exist. However Juliana's colorful diary paints a wonderful picture of Mecklenburg and Lincoln during the early summer of 1827. A transcription of her journal is in the Southern Historical Collection at UNC.[28]

Isabella, born September 21, 1764, died January 15, 1808, age 44. She married General Joseph Graham in 1787 and moved to Lincoln County. Joseph Graham was born in 1759, raised in Mecklenburg County, educated at Queens College and witnessed the reading of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence on May 20, 1775. From 1778 to 1791, aged 18 to 21, Graham served in the militia, taking part in 15 engagements and rising in rank from private to Major. Perhaps the height of his career was in commanding the militia at the Battle of Charlotte where he was wounded by three gunshots and six sabre cuts and left on the field for dead. He recovered and continued to serve his country to the

[28] Journal of Juliana Conner, transcription, Connor Papers # 174, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

end of the war. After the war he continued his public service as County Sheriff, land commissioner, delegate to both conventions to ratify the Federal Constitution, and later as State Senator and on the founding board of the State University.

After he married Isabella in 1787 they moved to Lincoln County where he went into the Iron business with his father-in-law and his brother-in-law, Alexander Brevard. This industry made each of them a very rich man. For a discussion of iron making in Lincoln County see Appendix M.

Graham served as a General in the War of 1812 and many public offices throughout his life. After 1820 he wrote his reminiscences of the Revolution which, though not published at the time, provides the only eye-witness accounts of many of the seminal events of that era, including the writing of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. Notable among their eleven children was Mary, who married Dr. Robert Hall Morrison, the first president of Davidson College. She was the mother of Anna Morrison who married Confederate General Stonewall Jackson, and Isabella who married Confederate General Daniel Harvey Hill. Another notable child of this union was William Alexander Graham who served as Governor of North Carolina from 1845-49 and as a US Senator and Secretary of the Navy.

Mary, (Polly) born December 13, 1766, died March 12, 1862, age 96. Married Dr. William Maclean (sometimes spelled McLean) in 1792. Dr. Maclean, born in 1757, attended Queen's College and served in the Mecklenburg militia at the beginning of the Revolution. From 1779 to the end of the war he served as Surgeon's Mate (an officer and a doctor) in the 5th Regiment, NC Continental Line. After the war he trained as a doctor in Philadelphia and became a member of the American Medical Society. He was active in politics in Lincoln County, serving in both Constitutional Ratification Conventions, in the Assembly and the State Senate and as a Justice of the Peace and militia officer. William and Mary were married at Rural Hill in 1792 and lived at Willow Plain in Lincoln (now Gaston) County, where they raised ten children.

Robert, Born April 7, 1769, died June 14, 1853, age 84. Married Margaret Osborne in 1801. Known as Robin and Peggy they made their home on land given to Robin by his father, just to the west of Rural Hill. Robin built a magnificent house for his new wife which they called "Holly Bend." Robin and Peggy had no children and the legend is that Peggy had no toes. They took in and educated numerous nieces and nephews and left many of them handsome inheritances. Robin was a very successful farmer and planter and was among the richest men in the county when he died. Peggy outlived him by 11 years, dying during the Civil War. Details of their lives are covered elsewhere in this study.

Violet, born August 27, 1771, died October 26, 1821, age 50. Married William Bain Alexander in 1791. Alexander appears in court records as Wm. B. Alexander or as William Bean Alexander. He was a Justice of the Peace and was appointed Register of Deeds in 1792, replacing his father John McKnitt Alexander who had resigned the post. They had 14 children.

Sarah, born June 13, 1774, died February 3, 1842, age 68. Married Rev. Alexander Caldwell in 1794. Alexander Caldwell was pastor of the Rocky River Presbyterian Church from 1793 to 1797 when he was removed from the pastorate because he had become mentally deranged. In October 1798 a jury appointed by the Mecklenburg court found him to be in "a State of Lunacy as not to be able to take care of his own property, and further that he has lost property for the want of that capacity," and recommended that his brother, the Revd. Samuel. C. Caldwell, be appointed as his guardian to take charge of his property.

The 1800 census indicates that Sarah and her three small children were living at Rural Hill, confirming the family tradition that Sarah lived there the rest of her life.[29] [30] [31] For more details see "The Rev. Alexander Caldwell" in this section and Appendix J.

Margaret, born February 8, 1777, died July 30, 1830, age 53. Married Major James Harris December 10, 1813 at the age of 36. We have not researched Major Harris of Cabarrus County extensively but do know that he was well off. When they married in 1813, her father gave Margaret a sizable dowry consisting of seven slaves plus cash, bonds, notes, cattle, horses and furniture to the additional value of $1,250. An indenture registered in the Mecklenburg County Deed Book ensured that Margaret would retain the slaves and their natural increase and would have the power to dispose of them at her death according to her wishes. Moreover, Major Harris posted a bond to ensure that "…he permit his wife to enjoy a personal estate valued at $1,250." See appendix B for the details of these agreements. Marrying so late in life, they had only one child, a daughter named Violet. [32]

John, born November 12, 1779, died April 26, 1870, age 91. Married Sarah Harper Brevard, 1800. Known as "Jacky" he lived and farmed with his parents until his father retired from farming. He and his wife lived most of their lives at Rural Retreat. Later their son Adam Brevard Davidson inherited Rural Hill. See separate sections on these two descendants of Major John.

Elizabeth, (Betsy) born September 15, 1782, died April 27, 1845, age 63. Married William Lee Davidson, Jr. in 1805 and had no children. William Lee Davidson was the youngest son of General William Lee Davidson of the North Carolina Militia who died at the head of his troops in the battle of Cowan's Ford in 1781. Son William Lee was born

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[29] Ferguson, *Mecklenburg Minutes, 1780-1800,* 4:129,130.
[30] J. B. Alexander, *Biographical Sketches of the Early Settlers of the Hopewell Section* (Charlotte, Observer Printing and Publishing House, 1897).
[31] Thomas Hugh Spence, *The Presbyterian Congregation on Rocky River,* (Concord, N.C., Rocky River Presbyterian Church, 1954).
[32] *Mecklenburg County, Deed Books,* 20:31.

after his father's death. During the latter part of Major John's life William Lee was his trusted advisor and the executor of his will. After Major John broke up housekeeping he moved in with Betsy and William Lee and lived there the rest of his life.

Benjamin Wilson, born May 20, 1787, died September 25, 1829, age 42. Married Elizabeth Latta in 1818. They lived at Oak Lawn Plantation which he bought from his father. He served as a Justice of the Peace. Benjamin died in 1829, leaving six sons under the age of 11. His widow married Major Rufus Reed of Mount Mourne in 1835. Oak Lawn was originally near Cedar Grove, but today has been moved a short distance away, off McCoy road. It is privately owned.

Independence Ben?

Benjamin Wilson Davidson was born on May 20, 1787. Family tradition is that he was often called "Independence Ben" as he was born on the 12th anniversary of Mecklenburg's famous proclamation. Historian Chalmers Davidson in his biography of Benjamin Wilson states that local people did not make much note of this historic date until 1818 – more than forty years after the event – when Thomas Jefferson and John Adams disputed whether Mecklenburg had declared independence a full year before the Continental Congress did so. Therefore he doubts that "Independence Ben" was attached to the boy in childhood. There is also some doubt as to whether he was called "Ben" at all. In 1828 Benjamin Wilson's sister-in-law Nancy Latta married Rufus Reid. Benjamin Wilson's niece Mary Graham Morrison wrote to her brother: "Nancy Latta is married to Rufus Reid. All the friends are pleased, but Uncle Willson. He went and heard the ceremony and left the house." "Uncle Willson" is believed to be Benjamin Wilson Davidson, so it is quite possible that he was called by his middle name. The use of middle names was common during this time when many extended family members shared the same names.[33]

Service in the Colonial Assembly[34]

In 1772 John Davidson was elected as one of two Mecklenburg County representatives to the North Carolina Colonial Assembly and took his position in January 1773. Martin Phifer of Rocky River was the other representative. During this session Mr. Phifer introduced a bill "praying a Law may pass for establishing a public Seminary of Learning in the Western part of this Province." This was just after the King had dis-allowed the bill authorizing Queen's College in Charlotte. This bill did not pass.

In this session Mr. Davidson introduced a bill that "a Law may pass for establishing a court house in the Town of Charlotte in Mecklenburg County and other purposes." This bill was passed by the Assembly and sent to the council but was not passed into law.

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[33] Davidson, *Major John Davidson.*
[34] Saunders, *Colonial Records*, s. v. Davidson, John.

Since the bill did not become law, we have only the title of the bill and do not know what was in the bill.

Throughout the session John Davidson is mentioned many times as carrying bills and other messages to and from the Assembly and the Council. This was a task of some honor and speaks to his place in the greater society. For attending this session of the Assembly John Davidson received an expense payment of £23..11..8.[35]

In December of 1773 John Davidson was again elected to the Assembly. This time the other member was Thomas Polk. Davidson and Polk were late in arriving at the Assembly and were sworn in separately from other members on December 16th.

On December 21st Thomas Polk presented a bill "for establishing a court house in the Town of Charlotte in Mecklenburg County and for regulating the said Town." This may have been the same bill that Davidson had proposed in the previous session. This time the bill was passed, sent to the Council, approved by the Governor and became one of the laws of 1774. The complete text of this law is recorded in the NC Colonial Records.[36]

This is an interesting omnibus law as it tells us something about life in the village of Charlotte at this time, just prior to the revolution. As the title indicates, the main purpose of the law was to establish a court house in Charlotte, or rather, to ensure that the court house would stay in Charlotte. When a law was passed in 1768 forming Tryon County from the western part of Mecklenburg, it was recognized that the court house in Charlotte would then be in the western part of the county, so a provision was made that after seven years the court house could be sold and a new one built in the center of the county. The law of 1774 says that the court house shall stay in Charlotte for moving it "would be inconvenient to many of the Inhabitants of the said County and discourage the Trade and Commerce of the said Town." Probably the leading men had come to realize that the area around Charlotte represented most of the wealth and political power in the county. Also, moving the courthouse would involve taxing the county population to buy the land and finance the new courthouse. They could try to sell the old courthouse, but it is hard to see that anyone would pay very much for a single room log cabin, with no fireplace, on ten-foot brick pillars, located in the middle of the intersection of Trade and Tryon Street. Thus cooler heads prevailed and they decided to keep the courthouse in Charlotte.

Other sections of the law provide for:

- The prohibition of actions that disturbed the peace including horse racing, firing guns (except to butcher pigs and cattle) and "playing at long bullets." Long bullets was an ancient and popular British sport which involved two contestants throwing cannon balls on a set course of several miles. The winner was the man who required the fewest throws of the cannon ball to cover the distance. This was

[35] Saunders, *Colonial Records,* 9:588.
[36] Saunders, *Colonial Records,* 23:966, Acts of the North Carolina General Assembly, 1774, Chapter XIV.

a sport which probably seemed much more enjoyable if it followed a few noggins of flip or some other spirituous drink.[37] [38]

- The original charter required every lot owner to build a house of minimum specified dimensions within three years of buying a lot which seems to have been honored more in the breach than in the execution. This provision eliminated the requirement except for lots fronting on either Trade or Tryon Street.
- The streets must have been in pretty bad shape for the law required that every taxable person (white males 21 and over) in the village be required to put in 6 days of labor on the streets each year.
- Some of the original four Town Trustees had died or moved away so four more trustees were added to the board.
- Finally, all fines arising from this act (for engaging in a public nuisance or for refusing to work on the city streets) will be applied to repairing the city streets.

Also on December 21, 1773 John Davidson (spelled Davison in the minutes of the Assembly) presented "a Bill for altering the dividing line between the Counties of Rowan, Mecklenburg and Tryon."[39]

Governor Martin prorogued the Assembly on 21 December to re-convene on 1 March 1774. John Davidson apparently did not return for that session but his bill had already passed and was approved by Gov. Martin and issued in the laws of 1774. It provided for the building of a courthouse in Tryon County and established the Catawba River as the boundary between Mecklenburg and Tryon Counties. This was the same line as specified in the law establishing Tryon County, but apparently there was some sort of confusion that needed to be resolved by law.[40]

Court Activities and Public Service

The earliest existing records for the Mecklenburg County Court date to July of 1774. The records from the creation of the county in 1763 up to 1774 have been lost so we have no record of Major John's activities in court up to that point except as recorded in the deeds and wills which exist for that period. See Appendix C for a discussion of the courts and legal structure during the colonial period.

Mecklenburg County Court Records

The family tradition is that Major John served as a Justice of the Peace for Mecklenburg County, a lifetime appointment on good behavior. The Justices of the county conducted the quarterly county court and adjudicated minor matters on their own. Because of these

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[37] David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed, Four British Folkways in America*, (New York, Oxford University Press,1989), 738

[38] Flip was a popular 18th century drink made of beer and rum with sugar and egg and served hot.

[39] Saunders, *Colonial Records*, 9:783

[40] Saunders, *Colonial Records*, 23:964

missing records we do not have any proof that he served as a JP. When the Assembly met in 1776 and passed laws establishing the government as a state rather than as a British Colony, they reappointed all of the Justices of the Peace in the various counties. John Davidson of Mecklenburg was one of those so appointed. However, the county records, which start in July of 1774 and extend to 1868, do not mention him as ever having being sworn in or as serving as a JP. If he had been a serving JP, his name should have always appeared with the honorific "Esquire" or "Esq." and they do not. He also should have appeared in the county court records at least at the annual meeting where all of the JPs voted to appoint persons for such offices as sheriff, clerk and Register of Deeds and to decide which of them would preside over the quarterly court sessions.[41]

Family tradition has it that Major John served on the Mecklenburg County Committee of Safety just before the Revolution. Although there was probably such a committee, it is not mentioned in state or county record so we have no record of the members or activities of such a committee.

On the subject of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, we are on much firmer ground. In a signed affidavit published in The NC pamphlet of 1831 Major John testifies that he was a delegate to the convention that adopted the Declaration, so he was obviously taking an active part in the political affairs of the county and state. Being a signer of the Meck Dec is something for his descendants to be proud of. Probably the most complete description of this important event is in *Chain of Error* by V.V. McNitt, New York, 1960.[42] [43]

In the earliest extant Mecklenburg County court records, starting in July 1774, the name John Davidson appears from time to time as most leading citizens did. However, at that time there was a prominent merchant in Charlotte named John Davidson, and others of the same name in the county, so in many cases it is not possible to tell which John Davidson the court entries refer to.

A man named John Davidson often served on juries both at the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions in Charlotte and at the District Court held in Salisbury. He declined to serve as executor of the will of Andrew Bowman in 1775 but did serve as executor of the will of Margaret Bowman in 1777. He also was the executor of the will of Henry Walls in 1777 and of Samuel Cowen in 1789. And he served in other public capacities such as a tax assessor and as a juror to value and apportion property and resolve real estate disputes. These entries may have referred to Major John, or to the Charlotte merchant, or to someone else.

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[41] Saunders, *Colonial Records*. 23:994.
[42] David L. Swain, Ed., *North Carolina State Pamphlet on the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence*, (Raleigh, NC General Assembly, 1831).
[43] V. V. McNitt, *Chain of Error and the Mecklenburg Declarations of Independence*, (New York, Hampden Hills Press, 1960).

In 1778 Major John's father-in-law Samuel Wilson died. The will listed John Davison as one of the executors but he declined to serve and the will was executed by Col. Ezekiel Polk, Samuel Wilson's son-in-law and brother of Col. Thomas Polk, and Capt. James Jack, Samuel Wilson's brother-in-law, the brother of his third wife and widow Margaret Jack Wilson.[44]

In 1782 "Major John Davidson" was elected as one of the Overseers of the Poor.

In 1793 Major John and 23 of his neighbors issued a Public Notice that was registered in the deed book. "The following freeholders forbade all persons from driving, hunting, and killing deer with dogs or otherwise on any of their lands…" Other notable names on this Notice include James, William B. and J. McKnitt Alexander, and James Knox. Copies were posted at Crocket's Mill, Allison's Mill and John McKnitt Alexander's gate.[45]

In 1802 Major John and 68 of his neighbors issued a Legal Notice and registered it in the deed book. "Every person without exception is hereby prohibited from hunting in any manner or way for game on the lands of the Subscribers without a written permit from the owner under the penalties inflicted by Law." These notices were posted at Major Davidson's Mill, Robeson's Mill and Wm. Prices Blacksmith Shop.[46]

In 1795 John Davidson was an executor of the will of John Wilson who lived in the Hopewell community, and this was almost certainly Major John. The will was challenged in court by other family members regarding the manumission of the Negro Plum. This is a most interesting case for this early time. See Appendix D for a discussion of this case.[47]

The Rev. Alexander Caldwell

In October of 1798 Major John served on a jury to determine the mental situation of Alexander Caldwell, his son-in-law who had married his daughter Sarah in 1794. Alexander Caldwell had been the pastor of Rocky River Presbyterian Church but had been dismissed from the pastorate in 1797 because he had become "deranged."

The jury found that they "…Do believe him in such a State of Lunacy as not to be able to take care of his own property, and further that he has lost property for the want of that capacity…" and appointed his brother, the Revd. Samuel C. Caldwell his guardian. Evidence from the US Census indicates that Sarah and her three children moved to Rural Hill by 1800. Either her husband was not capable of taking care of them or providing for them or perhaps he was violent or abusive to her or the children.

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[44] *Mecklenburg County Will Books,* F:211-214.
[45] *Mecklenburg County Deed Books,* 14:449.
[46] *Mecklenburg County Deed Books*, 18:21.
[47] *Mecklenburg County Will Books,* G:34.

Sarah's three children were

Martha "Patsy" Caldwell, born July 28, 1795
John Hancock (or John D.) Caldwell. His birth date is not known, but the evidence of 1800 census indicates that he must have been born between Patsy and David in order to have been less than 10 years old in 1800. He was probably born in 1797.
David Alexander Caldwell, born January 17, 1799
For more detailed information on the lunacy of the Rev. Caldwell, see Appendix J.

A Marriage Agreement

In 1813 Major John's last remaining single daughter Margaret married Major James Harris of Cabarrus County. She was 36 which was quite old for a first marriage and Major John, being very well off, made provision for his daughter to live the life she was accustomed to. He gave her 7 slaves and a long list of personal property valued at $1,250. In the ordinary course of events anything a wife brought into a marriage or acquired thereafter immediately became the sole property of her husband to do with as he wished so legal and binding agreements were required to safeguard this property and make sure that Margaret retained full title and was able to dispose of it on her death as she wished. This type of agreement exists today as a pre-nuptial agreement.

Major John signed a deed of trust with his son-in-law William Bain Alexander and his son Robert Davidson to give to his daughter Margaret seven slaves and their increase "for & in consideration of the natural love & affection which the said John Davidson hath for his daughter Margaret Davidson, for the purpose of making a Suitable provision for her on her Marriage intended to be had & Solemnized with Major James Harris of the County of Cabarrus, and for the purpose of securing to her the absolute right of disposing of the property hereafter mentioned…"

The document also specified that Margaret, "during the joint lives of her self and James Harris her intended husband shall receive and have all the benefit & advantage which may arise from the use, hire or labor of the said Slaves and their future increase." Then the agreement specifies how the slaves should be disposed of under the variety of possible conditions of Margaret dying with or without issue, with or without a will and before or after the death of her husband.

In a separate document dated the next day James Harris bound himself to the same two men in the amount of $2,500. The condition of this bond is that since James Harris has received a considerable personal estate of the value of $1,250 in cash, bonds, notes cattle, horses and furniture in consequence of his marriage, that he is to allow Margaret, his intended wife, to enjoy the use of that property during their joint lives and that he permit his wife to enjoy a personal estate valued at $1,250; that James Harris shall leave this property to Margaret in his will and will give such property to beneficiaries of her will. If she dies without children and intestate he is to give 2/3 of the amount to her brothers and sisters. In addition to this he must abide by the obligations of the preceding deed of trust.

From the terms of these agreements it is clear that no one expected that, at the advanced age of 36, Margaret would have any children. However they did have one daughter, named Violet after her grandmother.

For additional detail regarding these two deeds of trust, see Appendix B.[48]

Military Service

John Davidson served as a Major in the Mecklenburg Militia in 1775 and 1776. On September 9, 1775 he was appointed 2nd Major of the Mecklenburg Militia under Col Thomas Polk[49] and on April 22, 1776 was appointed First Major in the Mecklenburg Militia under Col. Adam Alexander.[50]

This is further verified by the pension application of Samuel Wilson, Jr. In 1832 Wilson, age 82, filed an application for a Federal pension for his Revolutionary War service. He stated that he served for six months in the militia against the Cherokees as a Captain under Col. Alexander, Col. Phifer and Major John Davidson, confirming that Major John served in the militia in the Cherokee Campaign.[51]

In 1775 British agents raised up the Cherokees to attack the back country settlements in coordination with the British Naval attack on Charleston in 1776. The Cherokees attacked settlements in North and South Carolina with limited success. State authorities called out the militia for a punitive campaign in the summer of 1776. Major John Davidson served in this campaign in the North Carolina Militia which was commanded by General Griffith Rutherford. Although the Militia was not successful in bringing the Indians to a decisive battle, the campaign was nevertheless a success as more than 50 Cherokee towns were destroyed, leaving the Indians without food or shelter the following winter.

Major John Davidson was 40 in 1775 and 48 when the Revolution ended. Being of a mature age, he was probably not ambitious for blood and glory or military or political advancement. He undoubtedly served in the militia before the revolution, since this was required for all males between the ages of 16 and 60 but involved merely attending militia musters and drills once or twice a year. From time to time Major John may have volunteered or been called out when the Mecklenburg Militia accompanied Royal Governor Tryon to negotiate a boundary treaty with the Cherokees in 1767 or for the Regulator campaigns of 1768 and 1771 . He may have served in the Snow Campaign in late 1775 or marched for Moore's Creek Bridge early in 1776 but there is no written record of such service. It is highly probable that Major John served with the

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[48] Ferguson, *Deed Books 15-23,* 15:23, 20:31-32.
[49] Saunders, *Colonial Records*, 10:206.
[50] Saunders, *Colonial Records*, 10:531.
[51] Pension application of Samuel Wilson S7915 fn36NC, Transcribed by Peggy Reece Bruckner 10/24/10 supp. 1/20/11 on http://revwarapps.org/s7915.pdf accessed 5/30/12.

Mecklenburg Militia during the time when the British Army was in the area, in the fall of 1780 and the early spring of 1781, but again, no evidence of this service exists.

Building a Plantation

From 1765 to 1784 the Davidsons lived on their 250 acres on McDowell Creek near her parents plantation, in a cabin they called Rural Retreat. Five years after moving to Rural Retreat, John bought 100 acres on the Catawba River near his property. He bought no more land until 1784 when he started on an acquisition spree, claiming or buying 8 parcels near his farm. In the next 20 years he acquired 1,084 acres (1.7 square miles) of farm land. In 1795 he gave his son Robert 430 acres for "love and affection." This is the only land Major John ever gave away and included that land where the 1800 plantation house Holly Bend stands today. Counting his original plantation, the land he acquired and that he gave away, by 1804 Major John Davidson owned a total of 995 acres.

Other men named John Davidson bought and sold property in the area during this time. Examination of the names of wives and family members and the localities involved has led us to eliminate those transactions which are probably not those of Major John. For information on some of these other "John Davidsons" see Appendix I.

In those days it was not legally required that a deed be registered, and a great many were not. The acquisitions listed below are just the ones that were recorded in the Mecklenburg Deed Books and there were undoubtedly many more of which we have no record. A complete determination of the lands Major John owned could also be approached by tracing the land ownership backwards from the present time. However, this is beyond the scope of this current research. These acquisitions are in addition to those of 1759-1765 mentioned above and in Appendix A. For the differences between claiming land and buying land, see Appendix E. For information on types of money and their values see Appendix F.

1784 – Purchase of 304 acres on both sides of the south fork of McDowell Creek, including "the house and other improvements" and "a good spring at the old house meadow."
1789 – A State Grant for 200 acres at £10 per 100 acres adjacent his own land and the wagon road.
1794 – A State Grant for 93 acres at 30s (shillings) per 100 acres on the Catawba adjacent his own land.
1794 – Purchase of 100 acres on both sides of McDowell Creek from Adam Alexander
1795 – A State Grant for 165 acres at 30s per 100 acres on McDowell Creek adjacent his own land, that of Samuel Wilson and the "high ridge road."
1795 – On the same day, February 23, Major John bought a tract of 31 acres from his son Robin and gave to Robin "for love and affection" 430acres in two tracts. The 31 acres was part of a land grant that Robin had received just 6 months before. The 430 acres is the only land Major John ever gave away. It included the land where Holly Bend stands today.

1796 – A State Grant for 70 acres at 30s per 100 acres on both sides of McDowell Creek adjacent his own land.
1804 – Purchase of 425 acres on McDowell Creek.[52]

The Iron Business

By 1792 Major John had accumulated sufficient capital to not only purchase the Mecklenburg County land shown above, but also to enter the iron business with his sons-in-law Alexander Brevard and Joseph Graham in Lincoln County. A very large ridge of good quality iron ore ran northeast-southwest through Lincoln County and supported a thriving iron-making industry from 1790 to 1880. Reminders of that industry survive today in place names such Vesuvius Furnace Road, Brevard Place Road, and the town of Iron Station. NC Colonial Records indicate that iron-making was an active industry in various parts of North Carolina well before the Revolution.

In April 1792, in Lincoln County, 12 men were appointed to a jury to examine two pieces of land, one owned by Alexander Brevard, John Davidson & Co., and the other by Peter Forney, Esqr. Pursuant to a State law passed in 1788 to encourage the building of ironworks, they were to see whether any of the land was fit for cultivation. They were also to lay out and mark a road "from the Duch Meetinghouse past the forge now abuilding by Brevard, Davidson & Co." This was the beginning of the industry which would make Major John, Alexander Brevard and Joseph Graham very rich and prominent members of the community.

The law of 1788 granted 3,000 acres of vacant land, free of all state and local fees, and free of all taxes for ten years, to anyone who would build an iron-works. The only requirement was that the land had to be unfit for cultivation and they had to produce 5,000 pounds of iron within three years.

An iron-works required a good bit of land for quarrying the iron ore and limestone and a great deal more for raising the trees which are cut and made into charcoal to run the blast furnace. A good sized blast furnace produced about 340 tons of iron in the five-month winter production season. This required 170,000 bushels of charcoal which consumed the trees on 120 acres of woodland. New trees were planted as the old ones were cut, but it took 25 years for those trees to grow big enough to use for making charcoal. It took about 3,000 acres of woodland to sustain a substantial iron-making operation. For a detailed description of iron-making the 18th century, see Appendix M.[53]

Eventually Brevard and Davidson brought Joseph Graham into the business and merged with Peter Forney. Graham and Brevard built their homes in Lincoln County where they built blast furnaces and forges at Mt. Tirzah Forge and Vesuvius Furnace on Leeper's Creek. In 1795 Forney sold his interest in the enterprise which continued under the name

[52] Ferguson, *Deed Books, 15-23,* s. v. Davidson, John

"Joseph Graham and Company." In 1798 and 1799 they added at least 296 acres to their holdings.

In 1804, when Major John sold his interest to his sons-in-law, the business owned 5,000 acres, nine slaves, $8,876 in cash and notes and other property valued at $5,000. When Davidson left the business it continued as Graham and Company until 1814 when Graham left the business. Brevard continued and expanded the business, selling his iron products as far away as Camden, SC. After Brevard's death in 1829 his family continued the business until 1870.[54]

Rural Retreat and Rural Hill

In 1765, when John bought 250 acres on McDowell Creek from his father-in-law, he and Violet and their two little girls moved to this property where John built a two room log cabin which became known as Rural Retreat where the rest of their children were born and where they lived until he built Rural Hill in 1788. When Jacky married Sarah Brevard in 1800 they set up housekeeping at Rural Retreat where all of their children were born. Over the years John and Jacky added on to Rural Retreat until in the end it had a total of eight rooms. Rural Retreat burned in 1898 and those that remembered it described it as a story and a half high, covered on the inside and outside with wide boards.[55]

Such cabins were the usual residences of the early settlers as they required little skill and very few nails to build. In *Albion's Seed, Four British Folkways in America*, David Hackett Fischer describes the cabins and methods of construction used in the southern back country by Scots-Irish settlers. It is likely that this is the kind of cabin that housed the Davidson family in those early days. In this method of construction the first structure is a simple "single-pen" one-room log cabin 19 or 20 feet long. The logs are notched at the corners in half-dovetails that grows stronger as the building settles. The structure is supported by a large stone at each corner. Doors are cut in the front and rear walls, there is a fireplace at one end and perhaps a window or two. As the family grows the owner keeps adding on to the original cabin. Adding an identical cabin to one end sharing a common wall, with a second fireplace at the far end, makes it a "double-pen" cabin. Removing the roof and raising the structure makes a low-ceilinged second floor for children's bedrooms. Finally a second identical cabin is built behind the first one, again sharing a common wall. Thus the original single room cabin becomes an 8-room family home.

The construction was all of hewn logs, usually oak, with half-dovetailed corners and a cypress shake roof. The log walls were daubed or chinked with clay, mud and straw in a

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[53] Kay Moss, *Journey to the Piedmont Past, Source Book*, (Gastonia, NC, Schiele Museum of Natural History, 2001), 119.
[54] W. S. Powell, Ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, c1979), 6: 218, s. v. Brevard, Alexander.
[55] Davidson, *Major John Davidson,* 41:2.

futile attempt to keep the winter winds out. As the chinking dried out and the logs shrunk in the dry winter air, the chinking soon fell out. As soon as nails became available and there was a sawmill in the neighborhood the owner covered the outside with lap siding and the inside with vertical planks.[56]

By 1788 the country had recovered from the ravages of the Revolutionary War and Major John had prospered mightily. All of his 10 children had been born and it was time – and he had the money – to build a fine new manor house for his family. He built it of timber cut on his own land and from bricks made by his slaves from local clay and sand. Because of the time it takes to cut and season timber, make bricks and order nails, doors and windows etc. from far away, it generally took two or three years to build such a house. Built in the Georgian or Federal style on a hill top not far from Rural Retreat it became known as Rural Hill. It consisted of two stories with a full basement and a high attic, making four floors in all. With a hipped roof and two brick chimneys on each end, it was an imposing edifice.

In *Major John Davidson of "Rural Hill"* Chalmers Davidson gives a description of Rural Hill, based on family letters and other sources: "The floor plan of the homestead in the days before the Civil War was as follows: the basement contained the dining room on the east (entire length), a hall, and a kitchen, a pantry and a store-room on the west. The last was the only room in the house without a fireplace. The first floor was divided by a central hall about ten feet wide. To the west was the great parlor with a smaller room at the north which was separated by a folding partition. When the partition was folded to the walls the west side of the first floor was thrown into one large apartment. To the east of the central hall were two bed chambers. The second floor was divided by a similar hall with two bed rooms on either side. The rooms to the west of the upstairs hall could be thrown together by raising a hanging partition to the ceilings. Ceilings on both main floors were about ten feet high. The garret was one great room with windows only in the gable ends."[57]

At the time that Rural Hill was built it was not common to have porches on front or back. Many years later the house was improved by adding single-story porches with round, cement covered brick columns on both the north and south sides and bringing light into the garret by extending the roof line to make it a peaked roof with windows in the gable ends. Many of these improvements were probably made in 1848 –1849.

An entry in Brevard Davidson's farm journal for October 14, 1849 reads "Finished Raising my porch to the north side of my house to day, and putting the Rafters up." Brevard also wrote that the previous August he made about 34 thousand bricks, and in November he bought 15 thousand shingles in Cheraw. In September, 1849 he hired three hands "to cover & repair my house." A grandson of Major John who lived in Florida visited Rural Hill in 1853 and wrote to his wife that the house had been much improved including the gabled roof. He had last visited Rural Hill in 1838.[58] [59]

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[56] Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 655.
[57] Davidson, *Major John Davidson*, 45.
[58] Rural Hill Journal 1834-1854, Box 1, unfoldered, Davidson Family Papers, UNCC, 113-124.

Major John Davidson's Wills

Major John wrote two wills plus a deed of trust which are all important to understanding how he distributed his property among his children. The first was dated September 6, 1823. This will was never probated, was not recorded in the county will book and a copy has not been found. It is important because it is the only record of how he divided his property when he "broke up house keeping" in 1823. A deed of trust, dated November 22 of the same year directed his son-in-law, William Lee Davidson to distribute most his property, following the will of September 6. A copy of that agreement was recorded in the County Deed Book and is described below. Major John wrote a final will on September 23, 1831 which was probated after his death of January 10, 1832 to accomplish the final settlement of his estate.

Major John was 88 years old in 1823 when he decided to "break up house keeping & to retire from the cares of the world & spend the reminder of my days with my Children." Feeling, from "age and infirmity" incapable of handling the disposal of his assets himself, he appointed his son-in-law William Lee Davidson, Jr. as his trustee. He was the youngest son of General William Lee Davidson, born shortly after the General's death at the battle of Cowan's Ford during the revolution, who had married the Major's youngest daughter, Elizabeth in 1805.

Major John directed William Lee Davidson to sell all of his "Negroes, horses, cattle, corn, cotton, household furniture, blacksmith tools, a still and vessels, & farming equipment." He was to distribute the proceeds from this sale according to the will of September 6, 1823. Major John reserved for his own use three Negroes (named), two horses (named), one bed and furniture, his bedroom in his house and a corn crib.

Although he reserved a room at Rural Hill for himself, along with a corn crib to feed his horses, we know that at the end of his life he was living with Elizabeth and William Lee Davidson at their plantation, Beaver Dam near present day Davidson College. We do not know exactly when he moved from Rural Hill to Beaver Dam, but it could have been a gradual move. At 88 he was still physically active and loved to ride his horses. It may be that he kept a room at each house and rode back and forth frequently. The two plantations are about 15 miles apart and it was usual in those times to stay overnight when visiting someone even just a few miles away. Or it may be that the Major found living in a house with ten children, the youngest ones being 1, 3, 6 and 8, was not as relaxing as living with a childless couple. In any case, by the time he died eight years later he was living full time at Beaver Dam.

From the Deed of Trust it is apparent that certain Negroes were to be given to particular persons and that most or all of his land was to go to his two sons Benjamin W. Davidson and John Davidson. William L. Davidson was compensated with a 5% commission on the proceeds from the sale. The Deed of Trust was entered into the court minutes and recorded in the County Deed book, but since it was not the probate of a will there were no further court entries regarding it and none of the records have yet been found. Thus

[59] Letter Book of John Mathew Davidson, Davidson Family Papers, Southern Collection.

we have no way of knowing the value of his estate at this time or how it was distributed to his children. Probably Major John had done as nearly everyone else did and settled property on his girls when they married. He had given Robert a sizable piece of land in 1795 so he probably divided the balance of land, and the slaves who worked the land, between his two other sons, but this is all conjecture.

Eight years later, Major John died on January 10, 1832, at the age of 96. Most of that time had been spent living with his daughter and son-in-law, Elizabeth and William L. Davidson. He wrote another will on September 23, 1831 which was entered into court for probate in February, 1832. That will is recorded in the county will books and the probate documents still exist. This, however, only documents the assets he had left after giving away the great bulk of his estate eight years before.

The essence of the will was that all of his property was to be sold and one-seventh given to each of the named legatees. Two of his daughters – Rebecca Brevard and Isabella Graham – had pre-deceased him. His grandchildren by those two daughters received nothing as he said "for I have given them more than I will be able to bequest to the rest of my children." His youngest son Benjamin Wilson Davidson had died two years before.

The puzzling thing about this will is that in it he disposes of his land, leaving it to his son Jacky and the children of his son Benjamin W. Davidson. His will of 1823 must have made that distribution and his trustee William L Davidson must have distributed the land as ordered. Perhaps in this will John was just reinforcing the previous provisions. This will describes his plantation in some detail although it did not specify the acreage of the various plots: The land that went to John was "the land on which I formerly lived where he now resides including the mills, mansion house, and other improvements, sd land being adj Robert Davidson, the Indian Ford [Tools Ford], the canal, the [Catawba] R, Hugh Berry, other property of the sd John, and Benjamin Wilson, including 100 A purchased from Adam Alexander and all the other property I have given him heretofore." The children of Benjamin W. Davidson received land "bounded by Robert Davidson on the north, the river on the west and south, on the north by the land of my son John and other property given to Benjamin heretofore."

None of the deeds transferring any of this land – in 1823 or in 1832 – were entered in court or recorded in the deed books. Perhaps someday the original 1823 will or some of the original deeds or will turn up and solve the mystery of exactly how much land Major John Davidson owned and where it was located.

Who Lived at Rural Hill? – The US Decennial Censuses[60]

Starting in 1790, as mandated in the US Constitution, a complete census was held every 10 years. This was originally for the purpose of apportioning the US House of Representatives among the various states. By this reckoning a slave was counted as 3/5 of a person and Indians were not counted. As the years went on, however, the US Census asked more and more questions until finally in 1850 there was a complete agricultural census listing the amount of land and various crops for each household. Each of these censuses is available for North Carolina so we have 10-year snapshots of who lived where at those intervals. However, this data often raises more questions than it answers.

1790 – This census enumerated each household only as to number of white males under 16 and over 16, number of white females, and number of slaves. No names are listed except for the head of household – the names and dates shown below are derived from other records. Listed for "Maj'r John Davidson" were:

- 2 free white males 16 and up – Major John, age 55 and Robert, age 21
- 2 free white males under 16 – John, age 11 and Benjamin Wilson, age 3
- 6 free white females – Violet, age 48, Mary, age 24, Violet, age 19, Sarah, age 16, Margaret, age 13, Elizabeth, age 8. The two older girls, Rebecca, age 28 and Isabella, age 26 had married and left home by 1790
- 26 slaves – no other information. Of the slave population in general approximately half were female and about one-third were young children so there were probably 8 or 9 "full hands" on the plantation. The young boys and some of the women were "half-hands" capable of doing light work like weeding, carrying, housework, etc. and helping out at planting and harvesting time.

1800 – In this census white males were counted in five age ranges, white females in five age ranges, and slaves.

- 2 free white males age under 10 – These were the two sons of Sarah Davidson Caldwell, John age 3 and David, age 1. See below
- 1 free white male age 10-15 – Benjamin Wilson, age 13
- 1 free white male age 16-25 – John (Jacky), age 21
- 1 free white male age 45 and over – Major John, age 65
- 1 free white female age under 10 – Martha "Patsy" Caldwell, age 5, Sarah's daughter, see below.
- 1 free white female age 16-25 – Margaret, age 23 or Elizabeth, age 18. There were two girls of this age range living at Rural Hill at the time. This may have been an error on the part of the enumerator or perhaps one of the girls was off at school or gone from home on the day the enumerator made his count.

[60] Census data is from Ancestry Institution accessed at the Charlotte Mecklenburg Public Library at the Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room. These records were verified against the originals via microfilm in the Carolina Room and via Heritage Quest Online through the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library. Conclusions as to the persons counted in the census are the authors based on other information in this report.

- 1 free white female age 26-44 – Sarah Davidson Caldwell, age 26. This was their daughter who had moved back home with her three children after her husband, the Revd. Alexander Caldwell had been declared a lunatic by the county court. See "The Rev. Alexander Caldwell," above and Appendix J.
- 1 free white female age 45 and over – Violet, age 58
- 19 Slaves – This is an interesting number. By this time Major John had greatly expanded his land holdings and also become involved in iron-making in Lincoln County with his two sons-in-law. It may be that some of his slaves were across the river working at the iron-works or perhaps they were on another of his properties on the day the count was made.

1810 – The categories for this census are the same as the 1800 census. However, in addition to the federally mandated counts, it appears that various localities also counted other things. In Mecklenburg County and elsewhere in North Carolina they counted the number of looms and yards of cloth produced for the year. In the Hopewell district of Mecklenburg they counted 14 other things that were not counted elsewhere in Mecklenburg, including the number of stills and gallons of whiskey produced during the year. In other counties they counted various other things.

- 2 free white males age 10-15 - John Caldwell age 13 and David Caldwell, age 11, the two sons of Sarah Davidson Caldwell. See 1800 census above.
- 1 free white male age 16-25 – Benjamin Wilson, age 23.
- 1 free white male age 45 and over – Major John, age 75.
- 1 free white female age 10-15 – Patsy Caldwell, daughter of Sarah Davidson Caldwell, age 15. See 1800 census above.
- 1 free white female age 16-25 – This may have been Margaret, age 33 and still unmarried.
- 1 free white female age 26-44 –Sarah Davidson Caldwell, age 36 – see 1800 census, above.
- 1 free white female age 45 and over – Violet, age 68.
- 30 slaves.
- 1 loom.
- 600 yards of cloth made during the year.
- 1 Still.
- 30 Gallons of whiskey made during the year.

1820 – The categories in this census were the same as in 1800 for white persons. It also counted Foreign and Naturalized persons and persons engaged in Agriculture, Commerce and Manufacture. However, the biggest change was that slaves and free colored persons were counted by sex and age range (under 14, 14-25, 26-44, 45 and up).

- 1 free white male age 16-25 – David Caldwell, age 21 son of Sarah Davidson Caldwell. See 1800 census above.
- 1 free white male age 45 and over – Major John Davidson, age 85. Violet had died in 1818.

- 1 free white female age 16-25 – Patsy Caldwell, daughter of Sarah Davidson Caldwell, age 25. See 1800 census above.
- 1 free white female age 26-44 – Sarah Davidson Caldwell, age 46 – see 1800 census, above. Sarah's oldest son, John Caldwell, was 23 and no longer living at Rural Hill.
- 5 slaves, male, age under 14
- 2 slaves, male, age 14-25
- 4 slaves, male, age 26-44
- 4 slaves, female, age under 14
- 3 slaves, female, age 14-25
- 5 slaves, female, age 26-44
- 2 slaves, female, age over 44
- 25 total slaves
- 2 persons engaged in agriculture – This would be David Caldwell, age 21 and his grandfather, Major John, age 85.

Changes in the family structure at Rural Hill

As revealed by the various censuses and other records, we can trace how the family structure changed over the years.

- By 1790 Major John had built Rural Hill and the family was living in great style. The two oldest girls, Rebecca and Isabella had married and lived in Lincoln County. The other eight children were still at home including Robert who was 21. Major John was 55 and Violet was 48.
- By 1800, there were only three Davidson Children at home plus Sarah Davidson Caldwell and her three young children.
    - Rebecca was married to Alexander Brevard and living in Lincoln County
    - Isabella was married to Joseph Graham and living in Lincoln County
    - Mary was married to Dr. William Maclean.
    - Robert was living on his own with nine slaves. He received a large piece of property from his father in 1795 and the Holly Bend mansion house was built around 1800 so he may have been living in that house, in another cabin on that land, or on some other piece of land he owned that we have no knowledge of.
    - Violet was married to William Bain Alexander.
    - Sarah had married Rev Alexander Caldwell but returned home with her three infants after the Rev. became a Lunatic. See the 1800 census above.
    - John and Benjamin Wilson were at home along with Margaret or Elizabeth or both. Both girls should have been living at Rural Retreat, but the 1800 census shows only one female in this age range.
- By 1810 John and Violet, at ages 75 and 68, still had two children at home – Benjamin Wilson was 23 and Margaret, still unmarried, was age 33. Sarah Davidson Caldwell still lived with them with her three children, ages 11, 13 and 15. John "Jacky" and his young family had set up housekeeping at the old home, Rural Retreat not far from Rural Hill.

- By 1820 John was 85 and his family consisted of his daughter Sarah and two of her children. Sarah's oldest son, John Caldwell, was 23 and no longer living at Rural Hill. Violet had died two years earlier and was buried at what was to become the family Burying Ground.

In 1823 Major John broke up housekeeping, gave almost all of his property to his children, and eventually went to live with his daughter and son-in-law, Elizabeth and William Lee Davidson at Beaver Dam Plantation. He died in 1832.

Holly Bend:
Robert (Robin) and Margaret Osborne (Peggy) Davidson

Robert Davidson, born April 7, 1769, Died June 14, 1853, age 84
Margaret Osborne Davidson, born April 7, 1776, died January 9, 1864, age 88
Married January 1, 1801. Robin was 31, Peggy was 23.

Robert Davidson, known as Robin, was the oldest son and fourth child of Major John and Violet Davidson. Little is known of his childhood and education although it is certain that he was literate and wrote a fine hand. He was probably educated at Hopewell or another of the academies kept from time to time by the local Presbyterian churches.

On January 1, 1801 Robin Married Margaret Osborne, called Peggy. In their long life together they were to have no children and the family story is that Peggy had no toes. Without children of their own they raised and/or supported a great number of their nieces and nephews, putting many of them through school and leaving bequests to them in their wills.

Peggy Osborne was the daughter of Colonel Adlai Osborne of Belmont Plantation on the west branch of Rocky River in Iredell County, just north of the Mecklenburg line. Colonel Osborne's parents had been among the earliest settlers of the Carolina piedmont and his father was a leader in public life. Adlai attended Crowfield Academy with his cousin, Ephraim Brevard. It must have been a good education as Brevard went on to be a doctor and to write both the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence and the Mecklenburg Resolves. Peggy's father was a successful farmer, lawyer and politician, serving as the clerk of Rowan County, member of the Rowan Committee of Safety before the Revolution and as a Colonel in the Rowan Militia during the war. His parents died in 1776 and, as an only son, he inherited not only Belmont, the family manor house, but over 8,000 acres of fine farmland to go with it. As the country recovered from the Revolution he went from strength to strength increasing in land, wealth and political influence.

Peggy was one of 11 children in this rich and important family and when she married at the age of 23 she was surely accustomed to having the finer things of life. Her move to Holly Bend as a newly-wed may have been a step down, but not very far down as this newly built house was one of the finest in the back country at the time.

In contrast to his father-in-law, Robin took very little part in public and political life. Instead, he concentrated on improving his land and increasing his holdings. In doing so he became perhaps the richest man in the county by the time of his death in 1854 at the age of 85.

Mecklenburg County Court Records

The first mention of Robert Davidson in the public record was in the April Court of 1795 when he was 26 years old. There were other men in the county named Robert Davidson so some of these records may not apply, but Robert did serve actively on juries in the Mecklenburg County Court and in the District Superior Court in Salisbury. Also in these early years he served as a patroller in his local militia district, as on overseer of Roads in his neighborhood and as an overseer of the Catawba River.

Patrollers, an unpaid position, were appointed for each of the militia districts. They were to patrol the country-side occasionally after dark looking for lawbreakers such as men hunting by fire-light, slaves traveling without a pass from their master, escaped horses and cattle, or houses or barns on fire.

Was Robin a Justice of the Peace?

Some of the family stories refer to Robin as having been "a magistrate" or Justice of the Peace. Justices of the Peace were appointed by the Assembly, based on local recommendations, and served for life on good behavior. They decided minor cases themselves and presided over the quarterly Court sessions. At times Mecklenburg County had 20 or 30 Justices of the Peace.

In court records when a man was called "Esquire," "Esq," or "Esqr." it indicated that he was a Justice of the Peace. In the Mecklenburg County Court Minutes there are two instances of Robin being referred to as "Esquire." In the County Court session of August, 1813: "Saturday 28th Met according to Adjournment, Joab Alexander, Robert Davidson, John Rea, Esquires." In August, 1827: "Ordered that Robt. Davidson & Wm. L. Davidson, Esqrs., be a Committee…"

Since there are only two of these records, out of the scores of times Robin is mentioned, these are probably errors in the original entries or in the transcriptions. If Robin was, in fact, a JP there would be many more entries in the record including when he was appointed and sworn in and at the annual JP meetings.[61]

Road Building and Repair

An overseer of roads was responsible for the upkeep of a particular section of the public road. Once a year, and more often if needed, he was to organize and lead a group of local property owners to clean and maintain that section of road. A road was made by cutting down trees and clearing brush without moving any dirt except to knock down the banks where the road crossed a stream. Each land-owner in the vicinity was obligated to give a certain amount of labor to this effort every year – either his own labor or that of his

[61]Herman W. Ferguson, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions Volume II: 1801-1820*, (Rocky Mount, NC, Herman W. Ferguson,1997), 5:308, 7:211.

slaves. In 1797 Robin was appointed Overseer of the section of road from "Barry's Bridge to Amos Alexanders."[62] In 1801 he was appointed "Overseer of the Road from the Middle of the Catawba River at Tools ford to Andrew Barrys."[63]

Fisheries and River Keepers

Based on County Court records, it appears that Robin Davidson was the original "Catawba River Keeper."

A number of laws were passed in North Carolina under the colonial government requiring the rivers to be kept open for the free passage of fish. From county records we know that these laws were enforced here in the back country as well as nearer the coast. The fish these laws were designed protect and encourage were undoubtedly the shad which migrated upstream to spawn in huge quantities in February and March. The shad is not found in the Catawba today as hydro-electric dams have blocked the spawning runs, but they still run in some eastern rivers such as the Hudson in New York, the St. Johns in Florida and the Delaware River in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and have returned to other streams when dams were removed.

From recorded deeds we know that Robin owned at least two fisheries on the Catawba. He purchased one with Samuel Wilson in 1796 when he was 26. He bought another in 1825 when he was 56. That same year he bought several islands in the Catawba, just below Cowan's Ford to the north of his land. This may also have been for a fishery.

As various colonial and state laws indicate, and as verified by county court records, it was important to keep the river channel clear of trees and other blockages so that the fish would be free to migrate upstream to spawn. One example among many is the law passed in 1787 "An Act to Enable the County Courts to Appoint Commissioners to Keep Open Rivers and Creeks at Their Several Falls so far as They Think Necessary, for the Passage of fish Up the Same."[64] This law allowed the various counties to appoint commissioners to examine the rivers, allowing dams to extend only three-quarters of the way across the river with the open one-fourth part to be in the deepest water. At mill dams they are to ensure that there are slopes, or fish-ladders which were to be kept open during the spawning runs.

There are at least ten "fisheries" on the Catawba River mentioned in the county records.[65] They were bought and sold and seemed to demand a good price. Robin Davidson owned several of these as did James Latta and other leading planters who lived near the river.

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[62] Ferguson, *Mecklenburg Minutes, 1780-1800,* 4:19.
[63] Ferguson, *Mecklenburg Minutes* Vol. II, 4:295.
[64] Saunders, *Colonial Records,* 24:902-3.
[65] Banks R. Cates, Jr., "Mecklenburg Fisheries," in Olde Mecklenburg Genealogical Quarterly, Vol 20, No 2, p 18, 2002.

A fishery was generally a place where the river narrows and diversion dams can be built. These are built on both sides of the river slanting upstream. When the fish are running in their spring upstream migration they are forced to the gap between the two dams or weirs in the middle of the river and can be easily caught in nets stretched across the river. The migrating fish swim right into the nets and simply have to be lifted out of the water. The Indians had fished in the same way, using woven fish traps instead of nets. Some of the fish could be sold fresh in the neighborhood and in Charlotte, but most were salted down in wooden barrels to be used to feed the plantation and to be sold throughout the year. During the fish runs in the late winter there was not much activity on the plantation. Running a fishery put the hands to good productive use during this down time.

Throughout the early history of America there are accounts of great runs of Shad up all of the rivers on the eastern seaboard. The American Shad spends its life in salt water but like the Atlantic salmon, returns to the fresh waters of its birth to spawn. Some die after spawning, but some, unlike the Salmon, live to return to the ocean and come home to spawn again. It is said to be a delicious fish, either fresh or salted. The shad runs in colonial times were described as blackening the rivers or a boiling of the waters and contained millions of fish. In some cases the catch was limited only by the amount of salt and barrels available for preserving the fish.[66]

In the July session of 1797, when Robin was 28, the court appointed him one of the "Overseers and Commissioners appointed to remove obstructions in the navigation of the Catawba" for the segment from Dutchman's Creek to Tools Ford. This was the first instance in the court records when such river commissioners were appointed. As a commissioner he was entitled to draw labor from those who lived on the river, just as the overseer of a section of road could draw on the residents to work to keep the road clear. The river was divided into four segments with overseers appointed for each segment.

These segments were

- From the South Carolina Line to the Mouth of the South Fork River.
- From the Mouth of the South Fork River to the Mouth of Dutchman's Creek.
- From the Mouth of Dutchman's Creek to Tools Ford.
- And from Tools Ford to Lord Granville's Line which is today the Mecklenburg-Iredell County line.

Tools ford was at the big bend in the Catawba at the western end of Robin's land. The road to Tools ran from John McKnitt Alexander's plantation Alexandriana, in front of Rural Hill and past Holly Bend to the river. They were to work with Peter Forney of Lincoln County who had been appointed by his county court. They were not only to make sure the dams were proper but were also to remove fallen trees and other snags that blocked the stream and prevented the fish from migrating.[67]

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[66] A Natural and Cultural History of Shad, http://www.brandywineconservancy.org/shad-history.html, accessed 7/20/12.

[67] Herman W. Ferguson, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions 1774-1780,* (Rocky Mount, NC, Herman W. Ferguson, 2007), 4:57.

Apparently some of the appointed commissioners did not do their jobs well enough and 18 months later, "On a petition of Sundry of the inhabitants of the County of Mecklenburg" the court appointed three commissioners to examine the river to make sure that the citizens were complying with the law and keeping the river clear for the "free passage of fish up the Catawba River." Robin was one of these commissioners.[68]

In 1812 Robin was appointed one of three commissioners to superintend the entire Catawba River in Mecklenburg County and remove obstructions.

In 1816 three commissioners were again appointed to examine the Catawba to ensure that the dams did not block more than three-fourths of the river. Robin was one of these commissioners.

A close examination of the transcripts of the Court Records, using the index "Catawba River" revealed many entries regarding river overseers. All of these listed Robin Davidson. From 1801 to 1820 Robin was the only appointed river keeper for his section and it is probable that he performed that function on a continuous basis.

The Mystery of Tools Ford

In the 19th century Tools Ford was an important landmark in Mecklenburg and Tryon/Lincoln Counties. 18th century maps showed only the most significant fords such as Nations Ford and the Trading Ford but by 1808 Tools and other important fords were also shown. However, sometime between 1882 and 1911 Tools Ford and the road leading to it disappear suddenly from the maps and are never seen again. How can such an important landmark and river crossing just disappear?

Early maps, starting with the Price Strother map of 1808 show a ford in this area. A later map, in 1833, gives it the name of Tools Ford. The road to Tools ford ran due west from John McKnitt Alexander's plantation, Alexandriana, and passed through the land of Major John Davidson and of Robin Davidson. In fact the ford itself lay on land owned by Robin.

Tools ford was well known and referenced to divide the river into sections for maintenance (see above). It was used during the Revolution as a crossing place for several groups of militia going to defeat the Tories at the Battle of Ramseur's Mill near present day Lincolnton. [69]

The Kerr-Cain Map of 1882 shows the same road and ford location but by 1911 Tools Ford had disappeared from the maps. Recent searches on the ground have failed to find any evidence of the road. The ford itself today lies under the waters of Mountain Island Lake, the Charlotte water supply. The land is low and swampy on both sides of the river

[68] Ferguson, *Mecklenburg Minutes, 1774-1780,* 4:148.
[69] William A. Graham, *General Joseph Graham and His Papers on North Carolina Revolutionary History*, (Raleigh, Published for the Author, 1904), 216 footnote.

near where Tools ford probably lay, so there is no evidence to be found on the banks of the river. Our best guess is that the road to Tools Ford lay where the straight stretch of Neck Road lies today in front of Rural Hill, and extended on in a straight line to the river. Such a line would pass just a few yards north of Holly Bend and connect with some other old farm roads, but this is not conclusive evidence of the original location of the Tools Ford Road.

How did Tools Ford come to be abandoned? As the population of Mecklenburg County increased so did the number of ferries across the river and the use of fords declined in proportion. This accelerated in the late 19th century as bridges were built crossing the river.

Moore's Ferry was established as early as 1859, and crossed the river just north of Tools Ford. This was replaced later in the 19th century by Alison's Ferry. Today Alison's Ferry Road runs from Neck Road north to the river and there is a small settlement there. The Allison family claims connections to this area dating back to 1761. After Moore's Ferry was established, Tools Ford was probably used less and less and only for very local traffic such as an occasional herd of cattle. Eventually the road fell into disuse and was abandoned. The construction of Mountain Island Dam for a Duke Power hydroelectric station in 1924 flooded the land and put a final end to Tools Ford.

The Children of Rev. Alexander Caldwell

In October of 1798 Robin served on a jury to determine the mental situation of Alexander Caldwell. He was Robin's brother-in-law who had married his sister Sarah in 1794. Alexander Caldwell had been the pastor of Rocky River Presbyterian Church but had been dismissed from the pastorate in 1797 because he had become "deranged."

The jury found that they "…Do believe him in such a State of Lunacy as not to be able to take care of his own property, and further that he has lost property for the want of that capacity…" and appointed The Reverend Samuel C. Caldwell his guardian. Reverend Caldwell was Alexander's brother and the highly respected pastor of both Hopewell and Sugar Creek Presbyterian Churches. Evidence from the US Census indicates that Sarah and her three children moved to Rural Hill by 1800. Either her husband was not capable of providing for or taking care of them or perhaps he was violent or abusive to her or the children.

Sarah had three children under the age of five when she moved back home to Rural Hill. They were Martha "Patsy", John H., and David Alexander Caldwell. It is probable that these three children spent considerable time at Holly Bend, not only visiting but living there for extended periods, as was the custom of the times for orphans.

- David Alexander became one of the executors of Robin's will and received a bequest of 15 Negros and 500-600 acres of land (see Robin's will, below). When a man or a couple had no children and expected that they would not have any,

sometimes they took into their home a male relative, usually a nephew. They raised this person as their own child and made them heir to the bulk of their estate.

- Patsy received 10 shares of stock of The Bank of the State of North Carolina and three Negroes. Being raised at Rural Hill, she may have lived at Holly Bend for some time, learning the arts of spinning and housewifery from her Aunt Peggy. At the time of Robin's death she had married Col. John H. Davidson and lived in Alabama.
- John H. Caldwell is not mentioned in either Robin's or Peggy's will. From court records we believe that he was alive at the time. He is a mystery to be investigated another time.

In 1822 the Revd. Samuel C. Caldwell turned over the guardianship of his brother "Alexander Caldwell, Lunatic" to David Alexander (who had just turned 21), John H Davidson (husband of Patsy), and to John H. Caldwell. For more detail, see Appendix J.

Other Court Records

In the October Court of 1802 Robin and Peggy took in an Orphan. "Ordered that Jean Price, an Orphan of John Price, Decd. Now about nine years old, be bound to Robert Davidson until she is of Age, to learn the Art & Mystery of a Spinster and Seamstress, & the Said Davidson is to Comply with the Law." When a man died his children were considered orphans even though their mother still lived.

The institution of apprenticeship was in full force and widely used at this time. It made provision for situations such as this where an orphan needed to be taken care of, although most apprenticeships seem to have come from intact families where the children were put out to learn a trade. Often the trade they learned was "the art and mystery of a farmer" or of "housewifery." To us it sounds oppressive, but in that day it was a good deal for both master and apprentice. There were state laws protecting the rights of the apprentices and stating that at the end of their apprenticeship they were to receive such things as a suit of clothes, a sum of money, tools of their trade, etc. There are a number of court cases in the record where a master has an apprentice taken away from him because he abused them or was not providing properly for them. Also from time to time a master was brought into court to force him to provide the suit of clothes, cash, tools, etc. the law required to be paid at the end of the apprenticeship.

This is the only instance in the court records of Robin and Peggy taking an apprentice. They took in a number of their nieces and nephews for varying periods of time and taught them the skills of house and farm, but either did not feel the need for a formal agreement or did not register the agreement in court.

A Robert Davidson was appointed as an election judge a number of times. This may or may not have been Robin. Election judges were appointed to attend at the polling places to receive, count and tally the votes for these elections. The US used a verbal outcry

voting system, as did almost all other countries at the time. The Judges called out the names of the voters who said who they voted for and the judges wrote the selection down next to their names. For more detailed information of this method of voting and on the court and judicial systems, see Appendix C.

Building his Plantation - Property owned by Robert Davidson.

Robert Davidson first appears in recorded Mecklenburg deeds with a state grant of "93 A on the east bank of Catawba R. adjacent Bailey and John Davidson." This grant is dated July 9, 1794 when Robin was 25 years old. The cost was 30 shilling per 100 acres. For more information on land grants, see Appendix E.

In February 1795 Robin sold 31 acres of this tract to his father John Davidson for the token sum of 5 shillings. On the same day, his father gave him 430 acres in two tracts on the Catawba River "for love and affection." This was the only land that Major John ever gave away until he broke up housekeeping and went into retirement in 1823.

This was the beginning of a steady stream of land acquisitions which, in the end, made Robin one of the largest land owners and most prosperous planters in Mecklenburg County. As far as we know he did not practice a craft such as blacksmithing like his father. Nor did he operate as a merchant although he apparently did have a Shad fishery which gave him some seasonal income. He also had a number of grist mills and lumber mills and a cotton gin, so he may have had some income from these enterprises in later years. However, during the early years when he was building his plantation all of his land purchases must have been primarily funded by his farming profits. For an explanation of how land was transferred see Appendix E. For a discussion of types and values of money, see Appendix F.

This is a chronological list of Robin's land acquisition:

- 1794, age 25, 93 acres on the Catawba next to his father. A State Grant costing 28 shillings.

- 1795, age 26, sold 31 acres of this same plot to his father for 5 shillings.

- 1795, age 26, on the same day, his father Major John gave him 430 acres "for love and affection." This was the beginning of Robin's plantation and was the parcel of land where he was soon to build Holly Bend, his magnificent plantation house.

- 1796, age 27, in partnership with Samuel Wilson, 23 acres for 26 shillings, 7 pence. This was a sheriff's auction of a fishing place on the river just below Tools Ford. "…a certain piece or parcel of land covered with water lying on the Cataba river below Tools ford including a fishing thereon…"

- 1798, age 29, 375 acres on McDowell Cr. from the Univ. of N. C. for £200. The law establishing the University gave it title to all abandoned land. When someone died without living heirs or left the area without disposing of their land, their property "Escheated" to the University which then sold the land to support itself.

- 1801, age 32, 303 acres from Adlai Osborn for $140.

- 1801, 51 acres on McDowell Cr. near Hugh Torrence from William Waddle for $50.

- 1807, 155 acres on the Catawba River from Isaac Alexander for $1,000.

- 1807, 175 acres on McDowell Cr. from Francis and Jane Bailey for $2,700.

- 1819, Granted 70 acres on the Catawba River. A State Grant costing 35 shillings.

- 1819, Robin gave 40 acres on the river to his brother Jacky "for love and affection."

- 1821 10 acres on McDowell Cr. from the estate of J. McK. Alexander for $10.

- 1824, 130 acres on the headwaters of McDowell Cr. from John Kenmer of York, SC for $400.

- 1825, 177 acres on the Catawba River from Abner Franklin of Iredell Co. for $1,200.

- 1825, 29 acres containing the big island and several small islands in the Catawba River at Cowan's Ford from Abner Franklin of Iredell for $50, This was probably a fishery.

- 1825, 300 acres including fisheries on the Catawba River in four surveys from the estate of Wm. Henderson for $7740 in three equal annual installments. This amount seems extraordinarily high but the amount is very clearly written in the deed.

- 1836, 169 acres from Solomon Sifford for $597.

- 1843, A parcel of land on the Catawba for $4,000. The recorded deed does not state the acreage but it was purchased from William Johnson of Lincoln County and in his will Robin states that the "Johnson tract" was 200 acres.

- 1846, 115 acres on McDowell Creek from David A. Caldwell for 200.

Some of the significant aspects of his land acquisitions are:

- He started at the age of 25 by filing for a land grant and receiving a very large gift from his father.

- By the age of 32, shortly after he was married, he owned 1,221 acres, more land than his father owned at the time.

- He continued to build his plantation up to the age of 77 when it reached a total of 2,615 acres. This is four square miles of land.

- Just once, at the age of 26, he went into a partnership to buy land. This was with Samuel Wilson, who may have been one of his mother's relatives, to buy a small parcel of land at Tools ford. The deed is faded and very hard to read but it seems to indicate that it was for 23 or 25 acres and was mostly under water. It was a fishery located on the Catawba below Tools Ford. This was probably a fishing partnership rather than a farming partnership or land speculation. We do not know when or how this partnership was dissolved as there is no recorded deed for such action.

- At the age of 56 he bought one large island and several small ones in the Catawba below Cowan's Ford. He may have turned these into another fishery. The same year he bought a tract of 300 acres on the Catawba with a fishery.

- In 1819, at the age of 50, he gave 40 acres to his brother Jacky, "for love and affection."

The Building of the Holly Bend Plantation House

Little is known of the building of the plantation house known as Holly Bend. No records remain from the time and the actual construction date is unknown. Fortunately this magnificent Manor House still exists today. Additions were added to the north side of the house in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but the basic fabric of the original house has been very little changed over the years. Today (2012) it is owned by Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department who are maintaining and safeguarding it as they decide what to do with the house. There are no records indicating whether Robin and Peggy named their house and if so, what they called it. In 1933 Chalmers Davidson called it "Hollywood." In 1968 he called it "Holly Bend." Various reporters have called it each of these names plus "Holly Wood." Today it is universally known as "Holly Bend," presumably because of the holly trees that grew on this piece of land in the bend of the Catawba River.

In 1795, when Robin was 26, his father gave him a parcel of 430 acres near Rural Hill. Major John may have also paid for the construction of the plantation house although Robin was doing quite well as a farmer by that time. In those days it took 2 or 3 years to build a house. We know from tax and census records that Robin was living on this land as early as 1798 and we think the house was finished before his marriage on January 1,

1801, so the house can be dated ca. 1800. At the time it was built the house was magnificent. Perhaps not as grand as his father's Rural Hill, but it remains one of the finest and best preserved antebellum homes in the area.

Today there is a broad front porch across the south front of the house from end to end. Photographs taken in the early 1900s show a slightly narrower porch ending just below the outermost windows. When Edwin Osborne visited his Aunt Peggy in 1859 he remarked on "the long front porch." Such porches were not common in 1800, and it may have been added subsequently; we do know that it has been a feature of Holly Bend for quite a long while.

After Robin's death in 1853 Peggy continued to live there until her death on 1864. At that time, according to Robin's will, it went to his nephew Robert F. Davidson, son of his brother Benjamin Wilson Davidson.

After Peggy's death in 1864 the house passed through a number of hands and was sold by the courts during the reconstruction era after the Civil War. The house was again sold by the courts during the Great Depression. Finally, in 1970, L. Garner Eakes bought the property as a place to hunt, fish, and entertain his friends. He initially considered pulling the house down, but fell in love with it and decided to restore it. Guided and directed by the great architect and restorations specialist, Jack Boyte, Mr. Eakes carefully restored the house. He changed the house as little as possible while preserving it from deterioration and making it comfortable to spend time in. He and his hunting friends enjoyed the house and his family spent Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays in the old house.

Slave Records

In addition to tax lists and the US Census, county court records give us a small amount of information on the slave population. As with the registration of deeds, it was not required that sales of slaves be recorded although it was usual for the buyer to receive a bill of sale. Except for a few court records of slave sales, the only information we have on the slave population comes from wills and gifts and those few original documents which still exist. From time to time lists of slaves were kept by some of the larger planters but if Robin made any they have not survived, except for the bequests in his will.

The County Court records show only two transactions for Robert Davidson regarding slaves. On February 1, 1801 Robin bought two slaves, Hannah, 16 and Dilce, 13 from his father-in-law Adlai Osborne for $550. This was just one month after his marriage to Margaret Osborne. She had been raised in great wealth and may have brought her own slaves into the marriage. These two may have been particular favorites of hers which were still owned by her father and perhaps she convinced her new husband to buy them for her.

The other transaction was in 1824 when Robin and his brothers and sisters, the "expected heirs & legatees of Jno. Davidson, Sr.," released to Sarah Caldwell "their interest in the Negro Cyrus." Their sister Sarah had been living at Rural Hill ever since her husband Alexander Caldwell had been declared a Lunatic in 1798. Their father Major John had broken up housekeeping and distributed much of his possessions the previous year and this appears to be a gift to Sarah from the other children. Major John's will distributed the land to his children in some way (the documentation has not been found) and all other property, including the slaves, was to be sold by the executors. This agreement probably saved Cyrus from the auction block and ensured that he would belong to Sarah.

Nephews and Nieces who lived with Robin and Peggy

Over the years Robin and Peggy took in a large number of their nieces and nephews. Some may have spent only a few months, others a number of years with them. It was usual at the time to send a child to live with a relative to learn a craft or to learn farming or housewifery in exchange for their labors. When a man died his children were considered orphans even though their mother still lived. Often these orphans went to live with relatives or were put to an apprenticeship because their widowed mother could not support them. These "orphans" were usually much better off in their new situation: If their mother did not remarry life was hard. If and when she did remarry they were in the position of a step-child to their mother's new husband without any legal rights or privileges.

Among the orphans, nieces and nephews who lived with Robin and Peggy were

- James W. Osborne, who inherited land and slaves from Robin and was one of the executors of his will. In that will Peggy received 32 Negroes and their families which went to James W. Osborne after Peggy's death. Osborne also received 303 acres of land in two tracts. James Walker Osborne was the son of Edwin J. Osborne, Peggy's brother. After his father died in Alabama as a young man, the orphan James W. came to live with Robin and Peggy as a young child.

- David Alexander Caldwell was also an executor of Robin's will. He received 650 to 700 acres and 12 Negros. After Peggy's death he received three old slaves (to provide a comfortable living for them) plus a Clock and a Scots Bible. See details of these bequests, below. He and his brother and sister had grown up at Rural Hill after his father had been declared a lunatic. See "The Children of the Rev. Alexander Caldwell," above and Appendix J. The Lunacy of Rev. Alexander Caldwell.

- Ben H. Davidson received five Negroes from Robin's estate. He was the orphaned son of Robin's brother, Benjamin Wilson Davidson.

- Edwin Osborne (see below). Edwin and James W. Osborne were cousins. Both of their fathers were brothers of Peggy.

- There were a number of others mentioned from time to time who may have been relations, hired hands, overseers or apprentices. There were a total of 16 nieces, nephews, and other extended family members who received bequests in his will plus 19 more extended family members mentioned in Peggy's will. Many of those may have lived at Holly Bend from time to time and certainly all of them had visited frequently.

Most of what we know about these nieces and nephews comes from family stories, but in one case we have more solid documentation. One of the nephews who stayed with Peggy and whose education was provided by her was Edwin Osborne. In later life he became an Episcopal priest and the founder of Thompson's Orphanage in Charlotte. In 1924 he wrote his autobiography which touches briefly on his connection to "Aunt Peggy" just before and during the Civil War.[70]

The Osborne family was prominent in early Mecklenburg and Rowan Counties. Some of them stayed in North Carolina and their descendants live here today. Many, however, joined the great western migration and Edwin Osborne's family was one of those. Edwin was born in Alabama and raised in Texas. He desired an education which could not be obtained where he lived in Texas so he wrote to his Aunt Peggy Osborne Davidson who was by then a widow still living at Holly Bend. Aunt Peggy wrote back and promised to give Edwin an education if he could get himself to Mecklenburg. Having very little money, Edwin proceeded to Mecklenburg, walking most of the way, and arrived in March of 1859.

In his autobiography Edwin Osborne describes arriving at his Aunt Peggy's plantation.

> <u>In Sight of Home – My Journey's End</u>
>
> After leaving Shelby, I continued my journey leaving Lincolnton to the left and going through the town of Dallas. The second day I came within sight of the Catawba River just opposite my Aunt's farm, but the sun was down and it was too late to cross the river. I spent the night at the home of Mr. Fite who lived within a few hundred yards from the river on a ridge that overlooked his farm and afforded a fine view of both the river and my Aunt's field, known as "Penny's Bottom," which is a fine body of valley land in the bend of the river. Mr. Fite and his wife entertained me very kindly and hospitably and the next morning, which was clear and bright, I was sent across the river in a canoe and landed on my Aunt's farm in the Penny's Bottom mentioned above. This was to save time as the distance around the bend of the river by the road ferry is several miles, while the farm was little more than a mile.

[70] Edwin Augustus young Osborne, *Autobiography*, transcribed by Josephine A. Osborne, Charlotte, 1947, in the authors' collection.

I think this was the first part of March, 1859. The overseer of the farm at that time was Mr. Robert Kerns, a hunch-back man of fine sense and a kind heart. He was in the field at the time I landed, directing the laborers who were Negro slaves. Some of the hands were plowing while others were doing other kinds of work.

I introduced myself to Mr. Kerns, who greeted me cordially, and informed me that my aunt had been expecting me and would be glad to see me. He escorted me up to the house and introduced me to my aunt, whom I found sitting near the open fireplace in her living room in the east end of her large, two-story house where, afterwards, I learned she spent her time when at home. My aunt rose from the chair and greeted me with almost the affection of a mother and almost instantly I felt that I was indeed at home in her house.

My aunt, Mrs. Margaret Davidson, was when I met her a well-preserved person of about eighty years of age. She was my father's eldest sister and reminded me of him in many respects, especially in her features and intelligence. She was very low of statue but very robust, with large prominent grey eyes, a short but well shaped nose, a good mouth and chin, good complexion and a fairly good suit of grey hair – almost white – and a smooth, gentle voice, slightly feeble from age.

She was a pious member of the Hopewell Presbyterian congregation. She owned a life interest in the home place, consisting of some fifteen or seventeen hundred acres of land, well stocked with Negro slaves, mules, and horses and farming implements. She was…known and called by all alike, "Aunt Peggy."…I was not at home when my aunt died. I was in the army at that time…Her remains were buried near the grave of her deceased husband Mr. Robert Davidson, in the family graveyard on the east of the residence, not far from the land leading from the said residence to that of the late Brevard Davidson. There was a strong brick wall around the graveyard at the time which I am sorry to hear has since been removed, but the marble tombstone is still there to mark the place….

When I first reached my aunt's residence I met there a number of her late husband's young relatives who according to the custom of the country at that time, had come to spend the day. I do not now remember them all, but I do remember Miss Sally Moore, daughter of the late Warren Moore, and I think her brother James was there...I think Miss Sallie Caldwell, afterwards Mrs. White, was there also and her brother Ed Caldwell. She is still living and was the daughter of the late Alexander Caldwell. John Springs Davidson son of the late Brevard Davidson was there and perhaps a few others.[71] After remaining and conversing with my aunt for some time I went out on the long front porch with the young people who were present and soon someone proposed that we should have some physical exercise in the yard. We agreed to see which one of the young men could jump the farthest.

[71] Brevard Davidson was still alive in 1859. He was "late" in 1924 when Osborne wrote his autobiography. Alexander Caldwell was David Alexander Caldwell, also still alive in 1859.

A line was drawn on the bare ground and the young men, one after the other, "toed the mark" and made one jump. When all had jumped, I, who must have presented rather a sorry appearance, for I was rather thin and had on my traveling apparel – not having a fresh suit with me – was invited to try my skill. I "toed the mark" and made a spring and outdistanced them all. After several trials it was proposed to try a running start and make a single leap. In this I also surpassed them all.

We then tried several other methods as "half-hammond," three successive leaps, in all of which I proved quite a match for the best and soon all reserve was thrown off and we were all on easy and familiar terms and the day passed very pleasantly. A splendid dinner was served and in the afternoon the young people departed for their homes and I was glad to be left alone with my dear aged aunt, whose kind and motherly treatment completely won my heart.

I was made to feel perfectly at home, which feeling remained with me during her life.

First Trip to Charlotte – Cousin James and Mary Ann Osborne

After one or two day's rest, I went with my aunt in a carriage driven by the faithful Negro coachman Ben and purchased some much needed clothing. We spent part of the day with the family of my cousin James Walker Osborne a son of my father's brother Edwin Jay Osborne. Here I had the great pleasure of meeting my said cousin and his noble wife who was a most splendid woman and daughter of Mr. John Irwin, a man of large wealth (and the father of the late Mr. James Patton Irwin of Charlotte).

My cousin the Hon. James W. Osborne was a judge of the Superior Court and a man of splendid ability, a lawyer of distinction and a noted orator. Judge Osborne and his wife Mrs. Mary Ann Osborne received me kindly and we dined with them that day. The Judge was the adopted son of the late Mr. Robert Davidson and my Aunt Peggy and sole legatee of the remainder of the estate (in fee simple) on which they lived….

After a short period of rest with my Aunt, I was sent to visit a number of her neighbors and friends and some relatives of ours. Then I began to prepare for school. Those whom I met during this time – or about this time I shall mention a few and shall probably mention them again in the course of this narrative.

I also met Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Caldwell the parent of Mrs. Sallie White and her brother Ed. Mr. A. Brevard Davidson, wife and family…Mr. and Mrs. Constantine Davidson one of their sons Dr. J. Z. S. Davidson, now lives on Tenth Avenue, Charlotte, a practicing physician. Mr. and Mrs. Warren McLean and Dr. William McLean who lived across the river in Gaston County. Miss Jennie McLean, his daughter….A very striking figure in the community was "Uncle

> Jackie" Davidson (the father of Brevard and Constantine and also Mrs. Warren Moore). He was then very old[72] but quite active in looking after his farm. He was the only surviving brother of Uncle Robert Davidson my aunt's deceased husband.

Aunt Peggy Davidson took him into her home and enrolled him at the Statesville military school, starting the next fall. Also that fall Peggy wrote a codicil to her will which left Edwin a bequest of $500.

When the Civil War broke out, Edwin, along with most of his schoolmates and professors, enlisted. He was at first a Lieutenant, but was soon appointed Captain and eventually to the rank of Colonel. He commanded troops in a number of important battles in the Eastern theater, was wounded three times, coming back to his duty each time after recovering from his wounds. Finally when he had several fingers shot off, he petitioned to be returned to duty in some capacity rather than to be discharged and was given the command of a Court Martial. While he was recovering from several of these wounds he came back to Holly Bend to recuperate rather than taking the long trek to Texas. In fact, his autobiography does not indicate that he ever returned to Texas, even for a short visit.

After the war he settled in Charlotte although his Aunt Peggy was dead by then. He became a lawyer, then County Clerk, then after marrying an Episcopalian girl, a priest in that church. After struggling to make a living as an itinerate preacher, Osborne conceived of establishing an orphanage, found land and buildings that had been donated to the church and begged from door to door and around the state to raise enough money to open the orphanage in 1887.

Thompson's Orphanage was named for the original benefactor and Edwin Osborne continued to manage the orphanage the rest of his life. In 1924 he wrote his autobiography which is unpublished, and gives us a feeling for what it meant for a poor boy to be related to Robin and Peggy Davidson.

The Thompson organization continues today in Charlotte as Thompson's Child and Family Focus. The orphanage land became a shopping mall and Greenway. Only one original building from the orphanage, Saint Mary's Chapel, still stands on its original site, on the Little Sugar Creek Greenway near uptown Charlotte.

The Will of Robert Davidson

When Robin died on June 14, 1853, at the age of 84 he left a very complete will. Since he was a very rich man with many assets including three plantations, and since his wife Peggy survived him and they had no children of their own, the will is long and complicated. By the laws and customs of the time Peggy was entitled to a "widow's

[72] Jackie was 79 in 1859.

third" during her lifetime or until she remarried. At her death or remarriage her inheritance was to be distributed according to Robin's will.

In the July, 1853 session of the County Court Robin's last will and testament was brought into court, recorded and admitted to probate. David A. Caldwell, Warren Moore, and James W. Osborne were appointed executors of the will. Caldwell and Osborne were nephews that had lived with Robin and Peggy for long periods. Moore was the husband of Jacky's daughter Isabella.[73]

The will was recorded in the Mecklenburg County will book I, page 214.[74] The following analysis is based on the Ferguson abstract. All of the Negroes are named in the will.

Summary:

- The usual phrases found at the beginning of wills at this time, such as "Being of sound mind and a low state of health," "Knowing it is given to man once to die," or "commending my soul to God and my body to the ground," are not present in the will. After stating that this is his last will and testament and giving the date, Robin jumped right into listing the bequests.
- 114 named Negroes. All of these Negroes are individually named. 13 of these include "and family," or "and her child," or "and her children." Nearly half of the Negroes (47) are to go to Peggy or to David A. Caldwell on the date the will was written.
- 2,637 to 2,737 total acres of land in 24 tracts. One tract is "500-600 acres" and the size of "the long creek mill tract" is not specified.
- 90 shares of stock in "The Bank of State of North Carolina." From the evidence of Peggy's will there may have been an additional 10 shares that he gave to Peggy but this is not shown in this transcription.
- 1 cash bequest of $1,500.
- $500 is to be spent on tombstones for himself and Peggy.
- All unwilled property, both real and personal is to be sold and his just debts paid. The residue is to be divided equally among his legatees. The unwilled real estate totaled an additional 388 acres making his total holdings at his death 3,052 to 3,152 acres.
- Legatees include his wife Peggy, 14 nieces and nephews, 3 other individuals who are probably Peggy's nieces and nephews, 1 son of a nephew, Davidson College, and Hopewell Presbyterian Church.

Bequests to Peggy:

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[73] Herman W. Ferguson, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions Volume IV: 1831-1840*, (Rocky Mount, NC, Herman W. Ferguson, 2002), 10:407.
[74] Herman W. Ferguson, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Will Abstracts, 1791-1868, Books A-J, and Tax Lists,* (Rocky Mount, NC, Herman Ferguson, 1998), I:214.

- Thirty two Negroes plus their families. She is to take complete control of these Negroes as of the date of the will. On her demise, even if Robin is still living, these Negroes are to go to James W. Osborne and thence to his children.
- Household and Kitchen furniture and Negro Charles, farming tools, livestock, etc. and library. A clock and a Scots Bible to go to David A. Caldwell on her demise.
- "The land on which I now live" of some 430 acres, the 200-acre Johnston tract, the 150 acre Alexander tract and 12 Negroes, blacksmith tools, cotton gin machine and press, threshing machine and straw cutter, all during her lifetime. After her demise to go to his nephew Robert F. Davidson (the son of his brother Benjamin Wilson Davidson, deceased). "I especially commend the Negro Humphrey to the special care of my nephew Robert, hoping that by attention to his comfort he may be rewarded for his faithfulness to me for many years."

Other Family Bequests:

- To his nephew David A. Caldwell, the Bailey tract of 325 acres, the Knox tract of 80 acres, half of the Waddel, Kinmore and Martin tracts and 15 Negroes. The Waddel, Kinmore and Martin tracts totaled some 500-600 acres. Caldwell was the son of his sister Sarah (deceased) and the Rev. Alexander Caldwell who was declared a Lunatic in 1798. David had been raised at Rural Hill and may have lived at Holly Bend for some time, learning the art of farming from his uncle Robin. He was to receive the property listed above at the time of the writing of the will. By the time of this will David was married and had several children. At Peggy's demise he was also to take three old servants "for whom he is to provide a comfortable living." Also the clock and bible mentioned above. The disposal of the clock and bible have not been traced as they are outside the scope of this study.
- To his nephew Robert D. Alexander the other half of the three tracts mentioned above and 7 Negroes. Robert Alexander was the son of his sister Violet (deceased) and William Bain Alexander.
- To Robert Davidson Graham, son of his nephew William A. Graham, the Henderson tract of 318 acres, the Sifford tract of 169 acres and 6 Negroes. William A Graham was the son of Isabella (deceased) and General Joseph Graham of Lincoln County.
- To his Nephew John R. Davidson, son of Benjamin Wilson and Elizabeth Latta Davidson, the Cowan place of 162 acres and 6 Negroes. Benjamin Wilson Davidson had died in 1829.
- To Robert Davidson Osborne the Long Creek Mill tract of several small parcels and one Negro. We do not know whether or how this man was related to Peggy.
- To James W. Osborne the Thompson and Farrar places totaling 303 acres which Peggy had inherited from her father Adlai Osborne.
- To his nephew Dr. Wm. B. McLean, son of his sister Mary, 8 Negroes.
- To his nephew Robert A. Brevard, son of his sister Rebecca, deceased, 8 Negroes.
- To his nephew Edward Constantine Davidson, son of his brother Jacky, 10 shares of stock in The Bank of the State of North Carolina and one Negro.
- To his niece Martha (Patsy). Davidson, 10 shares of stock in The Bank of the State of North Carolina and three Negroes. Martha was the daughter of Robin's

sister Sarah Davison Caldwell, deceased, and the Rev. Alexander Caldwell who was declared a Lunatic in 1798. She had been raised at Rural Hill and may have lived at Holly Bend for some time, learning the arts of spinning and housewifery from her Aunt Peggy. She had married Col. John H. Davidson and lived at that time in Alabama.

- To his niece Isabella Moore five Negroes. Isabella was the daughter of Jacky who had married J. Warren Moore.
- To his nephew Robert McLean, son of his sister Mary, 5 Negroes.
- To his Nephew Benjamin H. Davidson, son of his brother, Benjamin Wilson Davidson, deceased, 5 Negroes.
- To Margaret Madeline Osborne, one Negro.
- To Davidson Brevard, one Negro.
- To nephew Theodore Brevard, son of his sister Rebecca, deceased, 10 shares of Bank Stock.

Other Bequests:

- To Davidson College, 10 shares of bank stock to endow a professorship.
- To Hopewell Presbyterian Church, 40 shares of bank stock, with conditions. These conditions would cause a law suit many years later. See "Robin's Bequest of Bank Stock causes a Law Suit" below for the details.

Expenses:

- $500 for the executors to buy suitable tombstones for himself and for Peggy.
- 10 shares of the Bank Stock to be sold to purchase a full suit of clothing for each of his Negroes "of such quality according to the merit of each."

All unwilled property, both real and personal is to be sold and his just debts paid. From the balance his niece Mary Brumby is to get $1,500 and the rest is to be divided equally among his legatees. Mary Brumby was the daughter of his sister Rebecca Davidson Brevard (deceased) and was married to Richard T. Brumby.

There are a total of 90 shares of Bank Stock listed in the will. However, in settling the estate one of the items is the July dividend on 100 shares of bank stock. According to the Ferguson transcription, Peggy did not receive any bank stock but in her will of 1855 she left her bank stock to James W. Osborne, not specifying the number of shares. It is probable that Robin owned 100 shares of stock and left 10 of them to Peggy but that this item is missing from the transcription. This needs to be verified by examining the original wills.

The 90 or 100 shares of bank stock were in the Bank of the State of North Carolina. The bank was dissolved in 1859 and the outstanding shares were redeemed for $100.00 each.

Listed above are 18 legatees, not counting Davidson College, Hopewell Church and Mary Brumby, so the residual estate was divided between the 18 legatees unless the executors decided to give a share to the other three.

Estate Papers

Robin Davidson's estate papers reside at Archives and History in Raleigh and on microfilm in various locations. A microfilm copy was accessed at the Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library and printed copies were made of the 120 pages for Robin and 2 pages for Peggy. After working with the microfilm copies we contacted Archives and History and they sent us Xerox copies which were much clearer. Transcriptions were made of all of these papers and double checked against Genealogical abstracts (unpublished) made by Herman Ferguson.

As soon as the will was admitted to probate, the executors announced in the local papers that all debtors and creditors of Robert Davidson, deceased, should come forward and settle with the estate. These settlements make up the bulk of the documents in the estate file. They range from a bill for $0.75 for shoeing some horses, $2.00 for a tree for a mill shaft (Robin was building a new mill at the time), $66.50 for a doctor's bill dating back nine months and a bill for $13.00 from Dr. Wm. B. Maclean for calling on and attending Robin five times, including the day he died.

Other receipts in this file include expenses of settling the estate such as newspaper advertisements, lawyer's fees, selling the bank stock, running the auctions, making a coffin, etc.

Estate Totals:

Cash on hand	$634.03
Estate Sale (on 12 months credit)	2,949.00
1852 note on Jasper & Larkin Stowe (of doubtful value)	800.00
July dividend on 100 shares of bank stock	500.00
Three lots of land sold (part cash and part on 24 months credit)	5,828.78
Corn and Cotton sold in 1854	222.83
Total	$9647.64

Clothing for the Slaves

In accordance with Robin's will each of his Negroes was to have a full suit of clothing "of such quality according to the merit of each." On November 15 D. A. Caldwell bought of Davidson & Moss clothing for 26 slaves, totaling $148.26. This ranged from 6 yds of domestic cloth for Rachael and Martha costing 42 cents, to a fur hat, blanket coat, pants, shoes and socks for Dick costing $10.77. "Quality according to the merit of each." Most of the clothing was in the form of cloth yard goods, pins, and thread plus such things as hats and caps, shoes and socks. This bill was settled on January 3, 1854.

In January, 1857, J. W. Moore spent another $70.00 on clothing for the slaves.

Auctioning off the unwilled real and personal property:

The key document in the estate papers is the account of the estate sale which was held by his executors on August 16, 1853. The listing of the items sold runs 11 pages. For each transaction it lists the person it was sold to, the item and amount, and the price. Terms were credit for 12 months. Reading the inventory in detail gives a good feeling for Robin's plantation and its operation. This estate sale raised a total of $2,949.00. Apparently there were three sales – at the home place, at the Wadle place and at the Long Creek farm. Most items were sold at the home place with smaller quantities at the other two places.

Three pieces of land were sold in a separate auction. James Williamson bought one lot of 38 acres and R. F. Davidson bought two lots totaling 350 acres.

Peggy bought a number of items at the sale including Robin's gold watch for $75, two bay mares for $65, 3 shovels, 1 pr steelyards (a balance for weighing things such as cotton, corn and wheat), a scythe and crad1e, and a carryall (wagon).

Listed below are a few other items of interest:

85.5 lbs of sole leather, 1 side of upper leather
1788 lbs of Iron
21 barrels and hogsheads
Blacksmith Tools
2 Canoes
A great deal of cloth
Medicine, medicine scales in box, salts, lime
5 wagons, 1 Gig, 1 buggy, 2 carryalls (total 9)
1 Rifle Gun
1 Musket
1 Saddle
1 Windmill
1 lot of Timber and 1011 feet of Lumber at Mantz Mill
House furniture at the Long Creek place

Tools
12 axes and lots of hand tools, grindstones, etc.
Lots and lots of plows, hoes, scythes, etc.
6 spinning wheels
2 churns
2 log chains
Brick molds
2 pr Steelyards
2 Looms
1 Still and worm
2 Cotton gins

Livestock
68 Bulls, calves, cows, heifers and steers
73 Sheep
29 Mules, mares, fillies, horses and colts
123 Hogs, sows, pigs, and shoats

Grain and other foodstuffs
Large quantities of corn, rye, hay, cotton, cotton seed, straw, wheat, peas, and flour
At Long Creek, "All the Hay in the barn loft"
Lots of bacon (salt pork)

Robin's Bequest of Bank Stock causes a Law Suit[75] [76]

When Robin died he owned 100 shares of stock in the Bank of the State of North Carolina. Of this, he left 10 shares to Davidson College to endow a professorship and 40 shares to Hopewell Church. The bequest to the College was outright but that to the church was contingent and lasted only "So long as the s^{d} church abides by the Confession of Faith, the Longer and Shorter Catechisms of the Westminster Assembly and continues its connection with the (old school, General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States); the proceeds of the shares are to be annually appropriated by the church in the support and extension of the gospel. Should the s^{d} church cease to abide by the aforesaid doctrines the shares are to revert to the trustees of Davidson College."

This meant that the church did not receive the stock itself but received the dividends paid by the Bank from time to time. The executors of his will were responsible forever to monitor the theology practiced at Hopewell Presbyterian Church and to transfer the stock to Davidson College if the church did not abide by the terms of the will.

In 1859 the Bank of the State of North Carolina was dissolved and re-chartered as The Bank of North Carolina. The Bank redeemed their stock in cash for $100 each and this left Robin's executors with the choice of how to reinvest the $4,000 from the 40 shares bequeathed to Hopewell. They could have bought stock in the new bank but, fortunately for Hopewell Church, they decided to invest it in eight bonds of the "Charlotte & South Carolina Rail Road Company." The bonds cost $500.00 each with interest payable semi-annually at the rate of seven percent per annum. The bank stock had carried a 5% dividend. The Bank closed at the end of the Civil War but the Railroad, although damaged by the war, survived and the Railroad stock kept its value.

Hopewell Presbyterian Church continued to observe the old time religion and to receive regular dividends from the bank stock and then the railroad stock. They used this income

[75] History of the Bank of North Carolina from http://www.historync.org/StateBankNC.htm , accessed Aug. 22, 2012.
[76] *Robert Davidson Folder* in Estate Papers, Mecklenburg County, State Archives of North Carolina, North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

to pay the salary of their ministers and for other expenses. However, in 1869, the church was in financial difficulty and felt they needed to purchase land and build a house in order to attract a new minister. Previously the minister had to provide his own dwelling house and that became a problem after the Civil War. The terms of Robin's will made a land purchase impossible since the church was to receive the income from the bonds but not have access to the principle, and his executors were forbidden to give the bonds to the church.

In the spring court term in 1869 the Trustees of Hopewell Presbyterian Church petitioned the court to order Robert Davidson's executors to deliver the railroad bonds to them. The original documents are much faded and torn but are legible enough to give an outline of the suit and its resolution.

- John R. Davidson and J. F. Harry, Trustees of Hopewell Church petitioned the court to cause the executors to transfer the railroad bonds to them.
- James W. Moore, James W. Osborne and D. A. Caldwell, trustees of Robert Davidson, deceased, say that the facts in the petition are true and that the bonds should be delivered to the church to be used to build a parsonage.
- The Clerk of Court, Edwin A. Osborne, investigated the matter and determined the truth of the petition. He held that using the funds for building a parsonage would be in conformity with the will. Note that this was the same Edwin A. Osborne who was a nephew of Peggy and had walked from Texas to Mecklenburg in 1859 so that she could put him through college.
- The Court held that over the years the executors had paid a total of $4,480 in annual installments to the church and there was a balance left of $271 which should be paid to the Church. The executors asked for a commission of 2½% on the $4,480 they had paid out and that after balancing this out, the executors should pay the church $27 in cash plus the railroad bonds.
- On May 10, 1869, G. W. Logan, J. P. said that since the clerk had investigated the petition and, there being no contest as to the facts, the executors were ordered to deliver the eight railroad bonds to the church along with $27 cash in hand.
- John F. Harry, A. B. Davidson, and John R. Davidson, trustees of the Church said that they had received the eight railroad bonds worth $500 each and that they had applied the funds to the construction of a parsonage for the church.

The Will of Margaret Davidson

Aunt Peggy wrote her will in February 1855, in the aftermath of her husband's death. However she did not die until January 9, 1864 and had to write two codicils to the will since several of her legatees died before she did. Her executors were her nephews James W. Osborne and John A. Young.

Many wills of the time were written while the person was in their last illness, shortly before they died. However, when a will was written long before the person's death, as Peggy's was, sometimes changing conditions required changes in the will. The testator

can tear up the old will and write a completely new one, or they can write an amendment, called a codicil which refers to the original will and states the new terms. After the testator's death the executors combine the terms of the original will and the codicils to distribute the estate.

Peggy's will disposes of her slaves to her nephew James W. Osborne, and leaves money and furniture to her nieces and nephews. The property she lived on had already been disposed of by the terms of Robin's will. She left 31 slaves to J. W. Osborne. 18 of these are on the list bequeathed to her and then to Osborne in Robin's will. 13 were not. These may have been slaves that she owned in her own right, or there may some other explanation. She also left Osborne her stock in the Bank of the State of North Carolina on the condition that he pay $1,000 to her sister Cecelia Byers. This money amount would indicate that she had 10 shares in the Bank.

She bequeathed $500 each to the following relatives:

- Niece Jane Johnston.
- Sister Panthea Lemira Houston of Alabama.
- Brother Ephraim B. Osborne (father of Edwin A. Osborne).
- Niece Harriet C. Moore of Wilmington, NC.
- Nephew John A. Young.
- Niece Adeline Hale.
- Nephew T. A. Sharpe.

She also gave specific pieces of furniture to

- Sister Cecelia Byars.
- Sister Panthea Lemira Houston of Alabama.
- James W. Osborne.
- J Edward Caldwell, son of David Alexander Caldwell.
- Salley E. Caldwell, daughter of David Alexander Caldwell.
- Niece M. A. Caldwell, wife of D. A. Caldwell.
- Niece Isabella Moore.
- The remainder of the household and table furniture to be divided between her sisters.

One Negro went to each of

- Niece M. A. Osborne.
- Robert D. Osborne.
- John J. Osborne.
- Francis A. Osborne (these last three were the children of James W. Osborne).
- Grandniece Mary E. Young.

Everything else was to be given to her nephew and executor James W. Osborne who was to pay her debts and legacies and receive the balance himself.

In a codicil dated October 22, 1859 she divided the legacy of her sister Cecelia Byers (who had died) between her two daughters, gave an additional $200 to her sister Panthia

Lemira Houston and gave a $500 legacy to her nephew Edwin A. Osborne. Edwin was the nephew who had come to live with her in early March of that year. He was raised in Texas and had walked to North Carolina on her promise to give him an education if he could make his way to Charlotte. See above for more information on this interesting man, including a portion of his autobiography.

In that codicil she also wrote that if other legatees were to pre-decease her, their legacy was to be divided between their children or, if there were no children, between their siblings.

Despite this Peggy wrote another codicil dated April 28, 1861 making a few minor changes in her bequests.

Peggy died on January 9, 1864.

Tax Lists

Throughout this period each county in North Carolina made annual tax lists in order to assess local taxes to support the county government. This was a list of the white and black "polls" or heads and the tax was called a poll tax or a head tax. A white poll is a white man age 21 to 50. A black poll is a black man or woman age 12 to 50. The entries also listed the amount of each person's land in acres plus the number of cotton gins, stud horses, town lots, plus several other pieces of information. Cotton gins were listed as to the number of "saws." A cotton gin separated the cotton fiber from the seeds by means of a series of saw blades, much like circular saw blades. Thus the number of saws in a gin was a measure of the ginning capacity of the machine.

Over the years most of these tax lists have been lost but a handful have survived, including five for the period 1797 to 1807. Even these are not complete as some pages are missing. These five tax lists have been transcribed by Ralph and Herman Ferguson and give an interesting snapshot of life in Mecklenburg during this period.[77]

Listing for Robin Davidson in Mecklenburg tax lists:

- 1798 – 500 acres, 1 white poll, 3 black polls
- 1799 – 875 acres, 1 white poll, 4 black polls
- 1806 – 1,300 acres, 1 white poll, 12 black polls, one 46-saw cotton gin.

These few tax lists give an interesting perspective on Robin's development as a planter. By 1799, at the age of 30, before he was married, he owned more land than his father who reported only 600 acres versus the 875 owned by Robin.

[77] Ferguson, *Mecklenburg Wills and Tax Lists.*

Note that the white poll numbers do not include women and children but that the black poll numbers include everyone except for children under the age of 12. This is effectively the number of hands available to work the crops and probably 2/3 of the total number of slaves on the plantation.

Censuses

The decennial US Censuses give us a record of the inhabitants of Holly Bend from 1800 to 1860. Robin is shown from 1800 to 1850 and Peggy from 1810 to 1860. The counts of Negroes are useful although they were only in a summary form until 1850. Through the years there are a number of other white persons shown in the census. These were overseers or servants, nieces or nephews, and many of them have not been identified further.

In 1800 Robin was 31 and had established his own household, separate from his father. He lived alone with 9 Negroes. He may have built the Holly Bend house by this time or it may have been under construction.

In 1810 Robin and Peggy were in residence, ages 41 and 34. They had 19 Negroes and one white female age 16-24. This probably was Jean Price, Orphan who was bound to Robin at the age of 9 in 1802 to "learn the Art & Mystery of a Spinster and Seamstress." She would have been 17 in 1810 and would not have been released from her bondage until she was 18.[78]

In 1820 Robin and Peggy were in residence, ages 51 and 44. They had 28 Negroes and one white male under the age of 10. This was probably her nephew, James W. Osborne.

In 1830 Robin and Peggy were in residence, ages 61 and 54. They had 51 Negroes and three white males living with them. One was 15-19 and two were 20-29. One was probably their nephew James W. Osborne, the others have not been identified.

In 1840 Robin and Peggy were in residence, ages 71 and 64. They had 66 Negroes and one white male, age 10-14 living with them who has not been identified. At that time Robin was the third largest slave owner in the county – Senator William Davidson owned 70 and James Torance owned 92.

In 1850 Robin and Peggy were in residence, ages 81 and 74. They had 109 Negroes and Steven Lucky, an overseer age 21, living with them. At this time Robin was the largest slave owner in the county. Senator William Davidson had lost all of his property in a court case and James Torance had died, leaving his wife, Margaret 65 slaves. She was the second largest slave owner in the county. There were 16 people in the county who owned 30 or more slaves.

[78] Ferguson, *Mecklenburg Minutes*, Vol. II, 4:373.

In 1860 Robin had died and Peggy was 84 and had 35 Negroes. Living with Peggy were Jane Price Whitley, housekeeper, age 67 and John F. McCoy, farmer, age 30. Jane Price Whitley was the granddaughter of Mary Price, Major John Davidson's sister. John McCoy was also a relative of theirs.

The Second Generation at Rural Hill:
John (Jacky) Davidson and Sarah (Sallie) Harper Brevard Davidson

Jacky Davidson was born at Rural Retreat on the 12th of November, 1779. He was the seventh of Major John and Violet's ten children, and their second son. There is no record of his education, though he was obviously literate. Major John gave and sold land to his sons, in the expectation that they would continue his tradition of farming. Major John's will is unclear on the final distribution of his property, but Jacky was the son who continued to live at Rural, farmed it after Major John's retirement, and seemed to own most of it after his father's death. On November 11, 1800, just one day short of his 21st birthday, Jacky married Sarah (Sallie) Harper Brevard, the daughter of Adam and Mary Winslow Brevard. Sallie was certainly well known to the Davidson family. Her uncle Alexander Brevard was married to Jacky's oldest sister Rebecca, and her Uncle Ephraim Brevard was a signer, and probably the primary author, of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, and has been credited as the author of the Mecklenburg Resolves. Both of these uncles and her father served during the American Revolution. Sallie's aunt Mary Brevard Davidson was the widow of Gen. William Lee Davidson.[79]

It was unusual at the time for a man to marry as young as 21. It was more customary for men of the up-and-coming planter class to establish themselves and be fully capable of supporting a wife and family before entering into marriage. Both of Jacky's brothers married at the age of 31. Robin, ten years Jacky's senior, married six weeks after Jacky's nuptials.

Sallie had just turned 20 when she and Jacky were married. She was a bit younger than most brides of the time who tended to marry between 21 and 25. The young couple seems to have taken up housekeeping at Rural Retreat, which had been vacant since Major John built his mansion house, Rural Hill, twelve years before.

Rural Retreat had first been the two room log home of Major John and Violet. Rooms had been added during the years they lived there and bore their children. All of Jacky and Sallie's ten children were also born at Rural Retreat, and perhaps some of the additions and improvements to the home were made during Jacky's tenure. They lived there until Major John "broke up housekeeping" at Rural Hill and moved in with his daughter and son-in-law, Betsy and William Lee Davidson, Jr., in 1823. At that time Jacky, Sallie, and their children moved into Rural Hill and remained there until 1837. Jacky and Sallie's son Brevard (Adam Brevard Davidson) married in April of 1836, and the young couple moved into Rural Hill with his parents. Fifteen year old Sarah was the only one of Jacky's children still at home. Augustus was at West Point, William at Davidson College, and Constantine at the Sugar Creek Academy. All the others were married and out of the home. When it became obvious that Brevard and his young wife were expecting their first child, Jacky and Sallie must have decided that living their

[79] Davidson, *Major John Davidson*, 72-80.

golden years in a house full of small children did not suit them. According to Brevard's farm journal a week after his first child arrived in February of 1837 he "raised kitchen & smokehouse at Rural Retreat", and on June 9th he wrote "Mary & A B[revard] Davidson went to housekeeping today. Father & Mother moved down to Rural Retreat on the 8th." When Mary and Brevard "went to house keeping" they did not go anywhere. The phrase means that they were now in charge of Rural Hill after his parents moved to Rural Retreat and they were no longer subservient to the wishes of his parents.[80]

Sallie died in 1864, and Jacky in 1870. They probably spent the rest of their lives at Rural Retreat, although Jacky as an elderly widower may have moved back in with Brevard. Both Jacky and Sallie now lie in the Rural Hill Burying Ground.

There are few extant records concerning Jacky, and these are mostly receipts and promissory notes of goods bought and sold, money borrowed, and similar transactions. Nearly all of them date from 1830 and later. After Brevard reached his majority in 1829, he and Jacky seemed to do most of their business together. The majority of the promissory notes are worded: on a designated date "we or either of us promise to pay" (a designated person) "for value received", and are signed by both of them. On a few of the notes the specific nature of the business is stated, but most simply say "for value received." There are some notes stating "I promise to pay" that are signed by only Jacky or only Brevard. Several records exist of their accounts with merchant Leroy Springs from 1839 – 1841. They each had a separate account in addition to their joint account during those years. In all of these business records their names are written as John Davidson and A. B. (occasionally Adam Brevard, or Brevard) Davidson. Letters and other family papers tell us they were called "Jacky" and "Brevard" by friends and family.[81]

The merchant accounts are for a miscellany of household goods; they appear to be living well, but perhaps not extravagantly. They bought hats, shoes, sugar, coffee, wine, some tools and hardware, and lots of cloth, thread, lace, trimmings, silk handkerchiefs, and shoes and as well as blankets, etc. for their slaves, and other such goods. Perhaps their wives were the primary shoppers. Some entries list items bought for a specific child, slave, or family member.

There are few records of income aside from promissory notes paid to them. Itemized receipts for the sale of cotton exist for the years 1830 and 1841. We can assume most other years were similar. In 1830 Brevard sold twelve bales of cotton averaging about 325 pounds each for a total of $366.95. He bought homespun cloth, potatoes, molasses, and a few other things from the cotton factor, paid his wagoners $31.55, and came home with $325.99. Brevard was 22 years old; this was certainly Jacky's crop that Brevard had helped with. In 1841 Jacky and Brevard together sold 64 bales of cotton, most between 315 and 350 pounds. The total weight was 21197 pounds, and it earned them $2146.17. Again they shopped, paid off a previous debt on their account, and pocketed $1856.03.

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[80] See "The Farm Journals" in the Adam Brevard Davidson section of this paper.
[81] Davidson, Chalmers Gaston (1928) Plantation Files, 1907-1994 Archives and Special Collections Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina.

The cotton crop was often sold piecemeal, part of it in the late winter, and the rest in the spring. These sales might not have been the entire harvests of 1830 and 1841.

The manual labor of raising cotton and other crops was done by slaves. According to census records Jacky owned 12 slaves in 1810, 11 in 1820, 25 in 1830, 17 in 1840, and 22 in 1850; the latter number consisted of 8 males and 14 females. So far as we know Jacky did not keep a list of his slaves' names, nor a record of their activities. Brevard had 15 slaves at Rural Hill in 1840 and 26 in 1850. Since Jacky and Brevard farmed together, the census numbers taken together reflect the combined workforce of those years. Although cotton was the cash crop, it was only a small portion of the farming necessary to support those who raised it. We can assume that Jacky, like other farmers of the time, raised a great deal of corn to feed both people and animals, and raised wheat, peas, oats, vegetables and other food crops, as well as cows, horses, mules, poultry, and numerous pigs. He lived on the river, and fish were plentiful at some times of the year.

Brevard kept an extensive farm journal for many years which records additional cotton sales, although it is not always clear if they were sales for him and his father together or for him alone. There was often more than one sale in any given year. The journal contains many details about farming, and seasonal activities, as well as lists of slaves, and descriptions of many of their responsibilities. It will be expounded upon in a later section of this study.

There is a family story concerning Jacky that, although undocumented, bears telling. Jacky is said to have been called "silver headed Jacky" due to a silver plate implanted in his skull. According to historian Chalmers Davidson, "Jacky was struck by a falling tree which broke his skull and left part of his brain sticking to the limb. His nephew, Dr. John Davidson MacLean, performed a delicate operation and evidently inserted a silver plate over the fracture…" There is no indication when this accident happened. Dr. MacLean was born in 1794; so the event probably occurred after about 1820. Another account states that Jacky acquired the silver plate as a result of a trepanning (sometimes spelled trephining) operation. This is not contradictory to the above. Trepanning, or the removal of a small section of skull, was an ancient operation done to relieve pressure on the brain resulting from disease or injury. It is possible that Jacky enlisted Brevard's assistance in business because of memory problems associated with such an accident. It was also commonplace for fathers and sons to form business co-partnerships. No document has been found describing such a partnership; one may have existed and been lost, or perhaps Jacky and Brevard had an informal verbal understanding between themselves.[82]

[82] Chalmers Gaston Davidson, *Benjamin Wilson and Elizabeth Latta Davidson of "Oak Lawn" Mecklenburg County, N. C.,* (Davidson, N. C., unpublished typescript, 1943).

Jacky and Sallie Davidson's Children

(Underlined names are those who were called by their middle names)
John Matthew Winslow Davidson – Nov 9, 1801 – Nov 16, 1879
Mary Winslow Davidson – Sept 19, 1803 – Dec 31, 1832
Violet Wilson Davidson – Jan 24, 1806 – Jan 23, 1877
Adam Brevard Davidson – Mar 13, 1808 – July 4, 1896
Robert Hamilton McWhorter Davidson – Oct 2, 1810 – Oct 25, 1841
Isabella Sophia Graham Davidson Jun 11, 1813 – Aug 3, 1888
Augustus W. Davidson – Jun 2, 1815 – Oct 25, 1837
William Speight MacLean Davidson – Nov 2, 1817 – Dec 15, 1873
Edward Constantine Davidson – Feb 17, 1820 – May 13, 1892
Sarah Rebecca Davidson – May 6, 1822 – Feb 14, 1841

The Education of Jacky's Children

Jacky educated some, and perhaps all of his children. A newspaper notice dated February 20, 1821 announced that Hopewell Academy was seeking students, Robin and Jacky Davidson were two of its four sponsors. In 1827 Jacky and his brother Benjamin Wilson were among fourteen subscribers who pooled their resources to hire Robert A. Sadler to teach their children. Classes included orthography, reading, writing, arithmetic, English grammar, geography, and surveying, and the fee was $2 per scholar. Jacky paid $7. Orthography is the study of words and their correct spelling and it is a myth that our ancestors were indifferent to spelling. A receipt from 1833 states that in January Jacky paid John Madison McKnitt Caldwell "$23.40 in full for the tuition of his children during the year of 1832." Caldwell was related to Jacky by marriage, and later became a minister at Sugar Creek Presbyterian Church. There are no records of which of Jacky's children attended any of those schools. Rev. John Williamson was minister at Hopewell from 1818 to 1842. His wife Sarah taught a common school for younger children during many of those years. Jacky's children were probably among her students. There may have also been a common school at Hopewell during the earlier years.[83]

Jacky's son John Matthew became a doctor. There is no record of his education, and he was too old to have taken advantage of the schools listed above. There was schooling for boys available in the village of Charlotte, and there may have been an earlier school at Hopewell. Many doctors at that time obtained their medical training by apprenticeship. Jacky's son Robert was probably a lawyer, and may have "read law" under the tutelage of an established lawyer. In a letter written in 1838 he mentioned his clients and the court schedule. Augustus was a cadet at West Point when he died there in 1837.

None of Jacky's daughters appear to have attended The Salem Female Boarding School, an institution popular with a number of area families. The girls may have attended the common school at Hopewell, and there were female schools in Charlotte at the time.

[83] Torrance/Banks Family Papers, UNCC.

There are records in Jacky's many receipts confirming that both William and Constantine attended Davidson College. William began his studies when the college opened in 1837. In 1843 he entered the Medical School at Charleston. In 1837 Constantine was a student at the Sugar Creek Academy and boarded with Dr. David Caldwell who lived nearby. Constantine and other boarding students wrote their names all over the walls in a bedroom of the Caldwell home. One bit of that graffiti reads: "E. Constantine Davidson, A Rascal, 1837". Dr. Caldwell's home is now an historic site, Historic Rosedale, near the middle of Charlotte, on North Tryon Street just south of Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church. The scribblings of Constantine and other scholars can be seen there today in an upstairs bedroom and hall. Constantine's Davidson College receipt is dated 1839. On August 15, 1841 his brother Brevard wrote "Brother Constantine started to Cambridge Collage, Massachusetts, started with two hundred & fifteen dollars & 50 [cents]." This may have been Harvard, or another school that no longer exists. Constantine studied law, whether in Cambridge or elsewhere in not known. He was admitted to practice in 1844.

Florida in the 1820s

Three of Jacky and Sarah Davidson's ten children moved to Florida. Their oldest child, John Matthew Winslow Davidson; third child, Violet Wilson Davidson; and fifth child Robert Hamilton McWhorter Davidson.

East Florida and West Florida were acquired by the United States from Spain in 1821. In 1822 they were united and established as the Territory of Florida. Nearly all of Florida's non-Indian residents lived near Pensacola or St. Augustine. It was decided to select a territorial capital about halfway between those centers of population, and a rise of land near Lake Tallahassee was chosen. The name was that of an Indian tribe who had left the site some six years earlier. In 1823 Gadsden County was established just west of Tallahassee and Quincy became the county seat. It was named for Col. James Gadsden who had been responsible for the Gadsden Purchase from Mexico, and had negotiated the removal of Florida's Indians to the Seminole Reservation in the south of the peninsula.

In 1825 a land office was opened in Tallahassee to attract settlers to nearly vacant north central Florida. Quarter sections (a quarter section is ¼ of a square mile or 160 acres) were placed on the market at $1.25 per acre. "Opening of the lands in central Florida to settlement and private ownership soon attracted a large and constant stream of residents – men and women of means, and representatives of old families from Virginia, Tennessee and the Carolinas. They brought with them many slaves and established large and beautiful homesteads and plantations of cotton and corn… Tallahassee [became] the political, social and educational center of Florida. It is estimated that by 1830…16,000 or two-thirds of the population of Florida, were in….that section of Florida between the Apalachicola and Suwannee rivers. Although in central Florida the Negroes outnumbered the white two to one, the personnel of the latter numbered a majority of the cultural and wealthy men of the territory [of Florida]." Florida became a state in 1845.[84]

[84] Harry Gardner Cutler, Ed., *History of Florida, Past and Present,* (New York, Lewis Publishing Co., 1923), 114.

The Florida Davidsons

This is the Florida where Jacky's children decided to settle. **John Matthew Davidson**, who was called Matthew, married Mary Jerusha Sylvester on April 4, 1826. The following October Mary's Brother Joseph Howard Sylvester married Matthew's sister **Violet Wilson Davidson**. Matthew and Mary moved to Florida in 1828, and it is likely that Joseph and Violet moved to the new territory with them. Prior to that, one or both of the men may have traveled to Florida to judge its suitability for settlement. Matthew and Mary had twelve children all of whom according to the family genealogy were born in Quincy. However their oldest child (and perhaps the second) was born before the move. A Florida historian says the family moved to Quincy in 1828; Brevard's letter cited below supports this date and a letter Matthew wrote to his wife in 1853 confirms they left North Carolina in 1828. Matthew's medical practice covered a wide territory. Letters from Florida say it was not unusual for him to travel 20 or more miles a day to visit his patients. (A letter from Matthew to Brevard in 1835, and four from Robert to Brevard in 1837-38 are in the Southern Collection.) Matthew was a farmer as well as a doctor. In a letter in 1835 he reported having harvested 60,000 pounds of cotton (about 20,000 pounds after ginning), and planning to plant 75 acres to cotton the following year. He also grew tobacco. He is said to have employed an overseer, and to have owned as many as 30 slaves at one time. He owned 18 according to the 1860 census. Matthew kept a physician's journal which is in the Florida State Archives. Matthew and his wife died in Quincy, as did several of their twelve children including two who died in infancy. Where the others died is not recorded.[85]

Matthew's brother Brevard wrote in his Rural Hill farm journal in 1838: "Brother Matthew arrived in this country Oct 24 after an absence of 9 years 11 months"; another entry states: "December 5th Started to Florida & arrived there on the 15th. Left Florida on 4th Jan 1839 & reached home on the 11th not quite 7 days on the road." Unfortunately he tells us nothing about that Christmas spent with his Florida siblings, and it's very likely Brevard's wife and children went along for the holiday visit. Matthew was probably their traveling companion. Certainly Matthew spent the six weeks between late October and early December with his North Carolina family after such a long absence. On October 30th Brevard listed furniture bought in Charlotte: a folding table for $9, a small bedstead for $7, a washstand for $3, and a clothes press for $7. These may have been taken to Florida.

Joseph and Violet Davidson Sylvester had seven children. Probably all of them were born and died in Quincy except for a son said to have died in the Civil War. Letters from Florida state that Joseph was a farmer, primarily growing tobacco. Whether he had another occupation is unknown.

Robert H. M. Davidson probably went to Florida with his siblings in 1828 or joined them shortly thereafter. He was 18 at the time and was not in the 1830 census with Jacky's family. He never married, but not from lack of effort. Several of his letters to

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[85] Davidson Papers #204, Southern Collection.

Brevard mention ladies who had caught his affection. He wanted his brother's honest opinion of the young ladies, for he was most anxious to have a wife. Robert died in Quincy in 1841 at the age of 31. Brevard wrote in his journal "DEATH 17th [Oct] Brother Robert died in Florida with congestive fever with six days sickness." On November 10th: "Father started to Florida in company with mother & Pinckney & Caroline." Pinckney and Caroline were probably slaves; a slave Pinckney was mentioned in Brevard's journal in 1842. Jacky and Sallie may have brought Robert's body home; the family genealogy says he is buried at Rural Hill, but his name does not appear on any of the stones.

Jacky's Other Children

Adam Brevard Davidson, Jacky's son who inherited Rural Hill, will be discussed in the next section.

Mary Winslow Davidson married George W. Doby on February 9, 1831. They had been married a bit less than two years when she died on December 31, 1832. No birth or death dates have been found for George Doby, nor do we know where he came from or what happened to him after Mary died. According to the family genealogy they had no children; however another Doby appears in the record indicating they may have had a son. The 1850 census lists Joseph Doby, age 19 living in Jacky's household, and states that he was a student. Nineteen would be the right age for a son of Mary born during her brief marriage. In 1850 Brevard paid William Reid for boarding Joseph Doby for two months, and the following year he paid James Ross $62.20 for boarding Doby for ten months. An account with merchant Leroy Springs states that on August 16, 1841 Brevard bought "1 cap for James Doby" for 87 ½ cents. They may have been the same person. The family genealogy states that Mary Davidson Doby was buried at Rural Hill, and that she does not have a stone marker.

Isabella Sophia Graham Davidson married James Warren Moore on February 11, 1835 at Rural Hill. He was born in York County, SC and is said to have been an elder in Unity Church in Lincoln County. They probably lived most or all of their married lives in Lincoln County and may have been buried there. Several of the letters to Brevard from his brothers in Florida inquire about "Isabella and Mr. Moore". They had one child, Sarah (Sallie) Moore. Sallie married a dentist, William Walter Pharr in 1898 and is buried in Mooresville, NC.

Augustus W. Davidson became a cadet at West Point. He died there October, 25, 1837 at the age of twenty two. His brother Robert, who was living in Florida, visited West Point the following year and wrote to their brother Brevard on August 22, 1838, "I left West Point this morning, visited the monument of our deceased brother A. This was truly painful – it is a just consolation to know that every attention was rendered him in his last hours, that he was beloved by all his acquaintances & they have as a testimony of

their great regard erected [illegible word] & I presume the most costly monument that has been erected to any of their deceased cadets."[86]

William Speight MacLean Davidson attended Davidson College, enrolling in the first class in 1837, and graduated in 1840. On December 8, 1842 he married Jane Elizabeth Torrance, daughter of James Torrance of Cedar Grove. Both families were members and strong supporters of Hopewell Presbyterian Church, and Jane's brother William Torrance was a college classmate and close companion of William Davidson. William and Jane Davidson had one son, James (Jimmy) Torrance Davidson born October, 21, 1843. In late November 1843 William enrolled in the Medical College of Charleston. Two weeks later he wrote to his father-in-law of his exciting new experiences, then almost frantically inquired, "I have written two letters to Jane and have received no word from her yet. I have anxiously expected a letter by every mail for the last week: but have been disappointed every time I go to the [post] office. What can be the cause I know not. You will please write me as soon as you can & let me know for I am very anxious to hear." Jane, with a month old infant probably had little time to write. Jane died December 3, 1844; little Jimmy was fourteen months old. William had two more wives, Rebecca Reid and Mary Johnston, but no more children. He built Ingleside, a beautiful plantation home in the 1850s or 60s. It is privately owned and still stands on Bud Henderson Road, several miles northeast of Rural Hill. William died in December of 1873, and his son Jimmy died a year later at age 30 having never married. William, Jane and Jimmy, along with William's second wife Rebecca, are buried together at Hopewell.[87]

Edward Constantine Davidson may have attended a common school at Hopewell Church and/or may have been a student of John M. M. Caldwell in 1832. He was a student at the Sugar Creek Academy in 1837. He also attended Davidson College and, as noted above, attended college in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He studied law, and was a 1st Lieutenant in the cavalry throughout the Mexican War. According to Brevard's journal Constantine left for Mexico in July of 1847, and returned home in August of 1848. After the war he is said to have given up the practice of law to concentrate on farming. On February 21, 1858 he married Jane Violet Henderson and that same year built a home called Waverly at his farm on Beatties Ford Road. He was a Major in the CSA in the Civil War. They had eight children; three of them died in early childhood, and two others never married. Constantine drowned in the Catawba River at Moore's Ferry on May 13, 1892. He was 72 years old. He and Jane are buried at Rural Hill along with seven of their children.

Jacky's youngest child was either **Sarah Rebecca Davidson**, or Sarah H. Brevard Davidson; the family genealogy lists both possibilities. She died on February 14, 1841; three months shy of her nineteenth birthday. She is said to be buried at Rural Hill, although none of the marked stones bear her name.

[86] Davidson Papers, Southern Collection.
[87] Torrance/Banks Family Papers, UNCC.

The Third Generation at Rural Hill:
Adam Brevard (Brevard) Davidson and Mary Laura Springs Davidson

Brevard was Jacky's fourth child and second son. He was born on March 13, 1808. There is no record of his schooling, but his farm journal and other documents written in his hand indicate that he was educated. He probably attended classes taught at Hopewell over the years, and he may also have studied elsewhere. The documents from the 1820s and 30s concerning the education of Jacky's children applied to the younger ones, however the older children, including Brevard, were probably similarly schooled. His journal shows that he was working alongside his father in farming and other business by his mid twenties, and that he was well lettered.

The Farm Journals

At the age of 26 Brevard began keeping a farm journal. He began the journal: "March 7th 1834. I have made the attempt two or three times to keep an account how we plant our crop, and have always failed. I shall now make one more attempt." This time he succeeded. He kept this journal until 1854. There are a few gaps in the journal; one spanned nearly two years, others days or weeks. Toward the end of this period the entries became sparser, then petered out. The purpose of the journal was to note when plowing, planting, building and other farm tasks were done, and the weather trends from year to year. Recording this information would make him a better farmer. He noted when slaves were sick (though usually not by name), and when significant events in the family and the community occurred. He recorded the births of his own children, as well as the births of slaves, horses, and cows, usually naming the mother involved.[88]

In 1856 he recorded information in a commercially printed farm journal published in 1852 in Richmond, Va. This book begins with about twenty pages of printed instructions on how to keep a farm book, charts of weights and measures, and the latest trends such as crop rotation to achieve the most bountiful crops and livestock. There is also advice on treating slaves humanely, policing their activities, and appropriate punishment when necessary. It was intended to be kept by a farm manager, or overseer, for the edification of the farm owner. However Brevard kept the journal himself. It contains blank pages to record daily activity, including columns for weather data, and pages to list slaves, farm implements, crops, etc. His daily record only covers the period from January through early April, however the entries are more detailed than in his first journal. Slaves were frequently named in this record, a definite change from his earlier volume, and they are listed by name and occupation. In the same journal he made another slave list in 1864. The volume also includes a chart for a "Daily Record of Cotton Picked". Brevard filled two pages of the chart; it covers only four weeks in September and October, about half of that year's harvest. He listed his slaves' names, the amount each person picked on each

[88] Rural Hill Journal 1834-1854, Davidson Family Papers, UNCC.

day, and the total poundage picked. From this volume we can get a clearer idea of Rural Hill's slave activity. These two journals are a rich source of information and are cited frequently in this study. The quotes in this section and the section on farming, unless otherwise noted, are from these two farm journals.[89]

Both documents are in the Davidson Family papers at UNCC. The 1834–54 journal is written in a blank copybook measuring 12½ x 8 inches and 1 inch thick. The cover boards are covered in brown marbled paper, and the spine and corners were bound in light brown leather which is now missing on the corners. All the writing is in ink that has turned brown with age. Written on the first two right hand pages are "Farmers Recollection", and "A. B. Davidsons Bought of Daniel Gould, Price $1.50" He then apparently made one of his false starts. Written at the top of the next right hand page is "February 20th 1834," and nothing more. Then he began in earnest on March 7, 1834, and numbered the page "1". All the pages are numbered; the main journal ends on page144 with his last entry of September 20, 1854. On page 145 there is one brief entry for January 1, 1867. These pages occupy about half the copybook, the remaining pages are blank.

The commercially printed 1856 farm book measures 10½ x 8½ inches and is ½ inch thick. The cover boards are covered in brown marbled paper. The spine binding is worn away and some of the exposed sewing threads are broken. It consists of 127 pages. Fourteen of the "Daily Record" pages were filled in, two of them in another handwriting. Most of the books pages are blank. Many of the unused pages were for daily records and cotton harvest records. The book also has pages for inventories of livestock, farm equipment, etc, records of slave births and deaths, doctor's visits, and financial account pages. A few of these are filled in. A photocopy of both farm books and a partial transcription of the first are in the archives at Rural Hill.

Brevard's Marriage

On April 4, 1836 Brevard married Mary Laura Springs (Nov 3, 1813 – Oct 24, 1872) of York County, South Carolina. Her father John Springs III is said to have been a good friend of Major John Davidson. Springs was a member of a large, extended, and prosperous family who owned plantations in York County near present day Fort Mill, in the Providence area of Mecklenburg County, and elsewhere. John Springs also had business interests in Charlotte, and his son Leroy became a Charlotte merchant. Descendants of the Springs family are still numerous in York County. The family's legacy includes Springs Mills and Springs Industries, Springmaid sheets and linens, and the beautiful Anne Springs Close Greenway. Katherine Wooten Springs wrote an excellent history of this important family, *The Squires of Springfield*. Many facts about the Springs family in this study are taken from that source.[90]

[89] Rural Hill Journal 1856, Box 1, folder 6, Davidson Family Papers, UNCC.
[90] Katherine Wooten Springs, *The Squires of Springfield* (Charlotte, William Loftin, 1965).

It is difficult to piece together the everyday lives of 18th and 19th century plantation women, except when letters and diaries survive. Women rarely appear in public records. They typically filled their lives raising children and tending to the domestic needs of their families and their slaves. Most had active social lives through church and many visits to family and friends. Weddings and gala occasions often meant visits of several days or even a week. Such events will be noted here when they can be documented.

Mary was sent to the Salem Female Academy in 1828, and in the fall of 1830 she began a year at Mrs. Sarazin's school in Philadelphia. Her uncle Eli accompanied her on the journey there. Soon after her arrival she wrote a chatty letter to her parents describing the experience. She traveled by stagecoach to Salem where she met several former teachers who "seemed delighted and pleased with the idea of my coming to school again. When they found I was for Philadelphia, they laughed, saying they supposed I was going to get the polish." Another stop on their journey was for a tour of Washington which included the President's residence, but not the interior, and the Capital Building containing many works of art. The stage took them as far as Baltimore; from there they went by steamboat and barge across the Chesapeake Bay, through the Delaware and Chesapeake Canal, and up the Delaware River to the port of Philadelphia. When she reached the school her friends Camilla Torrance and Mary Ann Irwin had already arrived. The girls were natural companions, being so far from home together. Camilla was raised on a large plantation near Hopewell; Mary Ann's father was a prominent Charlotte merchant. Though they had not been raised in close proximity to one another, all their fathers were important in the community, and they obviously were acquainted. Quite a cosmopolitan adventure for a young lady, and a great contrast to her adult life as a plantation mistress and the mother of sixteen children.[91]

On their wedding day Brevard was 28 and Mary was 22. By then her father was a widower, her mother having died two years earlier in 1834. According to *The Squires of Springfield* the wedding was an elaborate affair held by candlelight at her father's home called Springfield. Brevard described the marriage in his journal: "April 20 I was married on this day about 50 persons at the wedding and about 75 at the infair." It was commonplace at the time to hold weddings in the bride's home, rather than a church. An infair is the 19th century version of a wedding reception. It was typically held the day after the wedding at the home of the groom's family.

The Dowry

The newlyweds, who moved into Rural Hill with Brevard's parents, had a fine start in life. John Springs gave his daughter an extensive dowry including the Dickson Plantation in Lincoln County and nineteen slaves. Both the Plantation and the slaves are mentioned frequently throughout Brevard's farm journal. The location of the Dickson Plantation (also spelled Dixon) has not been researched. It was probably in the eastern half of Lincoln County, perhaps in the part that became Gaston County in 1846. Below is a transcription of John Springs' letter to his son-in-law concerning the dowry, and a list of

[91] Davidson Papers #204, Southern Collection.

the property he gave them. Both of these documents are in the Davidson Papers, #204, UNC Chapel Hill.

Springfield York, D[istrict]. S. C. 8 Decr 1836

Dr Sir

I have been expecting you and Mary down, but perhaps it is not material, as I have sent up Marys Negroes &c to your house, and you can select out such as you wish to keep at home and place the others on the plantation

I think Ann the best cook, but she has a large Family I dont know how you would arrange with them. Peggy has Cooked longer for me than any Negro I own, or at least Mary^{s} Mother kept her at it longer, but I never admired her for a Cook and she is getting old and blind. Julia says she has cooked a good deal, but she is likely to have a larger encumbrance of Children. Fanny has no encumbrance of Children and probably wont have, but she has never been put to cooking, and is equal almost to a Man on a Plantation I have an expectation of getting Ann^{s} Husband, if so I will take back Wilbert in his place. I will send you up Bill one of my Black smiths, Christmas Holidays, you can hire him out or work him at home. I have had three or four applications could get $250 next year for him without any trouble, but I think I would try it at home. a constant shop always can find a good deal of work any where, and Bill is getting old you ought to learn a young one before he wears out, unless you have a choice boy of your own. you could put Henry, Alek, or Wilbert, at any rate I would learn one of my own and not for another. These however were the reasons I wanted to have seen you before I sent up the Negroes to have advised with you. I send you 3 heifers of my improved stock and a pair of little steers, which all you had better keep at Home. I bought 3 fine Young Cows from Mr Duffy that will all have calves between this and Spring and two yearlings which will be enough to commence with there as forage will be scarce. I send 250^{lb} Bacon to feed the Negroes on the Plantation. you had better take it in charge and not let them cut on it to waste

I have taken a little cold and feel rather unwell but if nothing happens I will meet you at the Plantation on Monday, till which time you can keep the Negroes at home. send Wheeler back on sunday from your House with the little Bay Colt. the pair of Dun Horses the two Fillies, Waggon gear & harness &c I allow you to keep. You can probably go with four Horses to the Plantation, if not you can put one in the place of the Bay Colt as I want Wheeler to return on Sunday

I am inclined to think I would try Alek with Bill if so it would be convenient if Mary would take his Mother for a Cook. I send 3½ bushels salt When the Waggon came up I found one of the Dun match Horses snagged in the shoulder and as sendded [sent?] he was not fit to go. you must keep the bay Colt till he gets well, and then we can change. send the bay filley by Wheeler

Respectfully yours

John Springs

The Dowry's Inventory

Inventory and valuation of the Property given off to Mary Davidson and charged to her on my Book December 1836

1828 to 1831	To your expenses at Salem & Philadelphia Inventory &c &c	1742	
1836	1 side saddle	20	
August	1 cutting box & knives $9 pr wedges 2 Mattocks $4 Grindstone $5	18	
Novr 8	1 fine Mahogany bedstead 40. Bureau & dressing glass 45 set Tables 90	175	
	2 Beds 3 ^{pr} sheets 2 ^{pr} Blankets. quilt, coverlid 3 Counterpains	100	
	Table cloths Towels &c &c	10	
	2 ^{pr} Candle sticks snuffers & tray	4	
	Silver soup spoon 1 set Table & Tea spoons salt spoons & sugar Tongs	41	
	1 full set knives & forks compleat	15	
	Bill of Crocking ware bought by Leroy	34	
	1 Doz Chairs lost in the steam Boat	15	
			2174
Decr 9			
	3 Cows two yearlings 60. 1 Sow & 4 Shoats from Duffy 15	75	
	3 Heifers & 2 Steers from home 60. Stack fodder from Duffy 12	72	
	3½ Bushels salt 5 Meal & corn	8	
	250 ^{lb} bacon at 15	38	
	New Waggon gear & Harness for five Horses Cover &c	250	
	1 ^{pr} Dunn Horses 4 y old 250 Spotted filly 4 y old 125 Sorrel filly 3 y old 100	485	
			928
	Dixon Plantation in Lincoln containing 959½ Acres 11 sold to West 970½		5000
	Bill Black Smith 51 years old	1000	
	Ann 42 years old 300. Fanny 21. 450. Wilbert 15. 500	1250	
	Rhody 12. 350. Hannah 10. 300 Nancy 7. 250	900	
	Humphrey 5. 250. Celia 3. 200	450	
	Tom 30. 600. Julia & Child 500. Austin 7. 300	1400	
	George 5. 250. Lemuel 2. 200	450	
	Burrow 54. 400. Sinai 14. 400	800	
	Peggy 50. 200. Henry 18. 500. Alek 15. 500	1200	
		7450	
Decr 14			
	193 Bushels Corn 145. Cash to furnish Plantation 300	445	
	1375^{lb} Bacon at 13	178	
			623
			$16175

Drawn off and valued by me this 17 August 1837

John Springs

The listing of slaves implies several family groups: Ann and seven children, Tom and Julia and three children, and Peggy and two children. Brevard wrote on December 12, 1836, "Moved Mary's Negroes down to the Dixon place 17 in number – Burrow, Ann & seven children – Tom Julia & three children Peggy & two children kept Sina at home." Although Burrow and Ann are mentioned together they were not married, as Springs' letter said he would try to acquire Ann's husband. Bill, the blacksmith, may have been hired out or have died shortly after reaching Rural Hill since he is not mentioned again. Sinai (more often spelled Sina) is mentioned frequently. The "& child" following Julia's name probably meant "& children" referring to the three listed. Brevard's journal records the birth of four more sons to Julia, then in 1847 "Julia's first daughter & eights child ..5th born since I owned her." This confirms that Julia had only three children when he acquired her.

The Farm Journal: 1834 – 1854

As noted earlier Brevard and Jacky farmed and did business together for many years. There seemed to be a clear understanding between them of which property belonged to each man, and when crops were sold, each person's portion was often noted. Cotton was the cash crop, and its importance is apparent in the journal. (A later section of this study will cover details of farming practices.) Nearly every year he noted the dates of the first cotton bloom of the season, when the first cotton boll opened, when the harvest began, and when it was completed. He wrote of family and community events that tell us much about Brevard's daily life.

Brevard began keeping his journal in 1834, and nearly all of the entries in the first several years concerned farming. The exceptions were the announcement of his marriage, sawing lumber for Davidson College, and his parents' move back to Rural Retreat. On February 3, 1837 he wrote "Mary's & A. B. Davidson's first child was born." This was Mary Laura Davidson, the first of their sixteen children. Then on September 25th "Our little daughter Mary Springs is very sick with the huping couf has been dangerously ill for about five weeks we think is a little better." Although Brevard called his daughter "Mary Springs" in this entry, there is no other indication that "Springs" was part of her name. Mary recovered, yet there was a death to report in November: "My brother Augustus W. Davidson died at West Point Oct 25th 1837 aged 22 years & 4 months."

In August of 1838 he wrote "Birth Monday 6th Our son John Spring was born." On July 20, 1840: "Our third child second son born, ½ after two oclock 1 year, 11 months & 14 days after the birth of John Springs, our 1st son." This was William Lee Davidson. Subsequent children were generally noted this way by birth order and gender; only occasionally was the child named. The time of William's birth and the age span between him and John Springs is an unusual feature of his records.

Dickson Plantation

The Dickson farm he received from his father-in-law is frequently mentioned in the journal with references to farming, Brevard's many visits there, and other activities on the place. In August of 1839 he wrote "Raised my Barn at my Dickson plantation," and the first entry of 1840 states: "Set up a shop at My Dickson Place the firm of Davidson and Springs." They kept a Day Book which is in the Davidson Family papers at UNCC. It begins on February 4, 1840, and is a financial record of goods bought and sold as well as work done on the plantation. Some of the work was done for, and charged to, others. The business was a partnership, but the farm clearly belonged to Brevard. It was given to him as dowry, and he always called it "my plantation." In September of that year he "Finished the brick house at the Dickson plantation, to day covering, ten thousand five hundred shingles." The plantation produced hogs and other goods in significant quantities, including enough cotton to justify building a gin in September of 1841. "Osborn Flanigain commenced working at my gin at the dickson plantation is to put up the house, running gear, & screw press for $115.00." In March of 1842 "Mr. Hutcheson has about 20 Acres corn planted." Cyrus Hutcheson is mention many times in conjunction with the Dickson plantation and was probably its overseer. Perhaps he inhabited the brick house.

John Springs

Brevard's family made a number of visits to Springfield, the South Carolina home of Mary's father. On April 11, 1840 "My self & family went down to Mr. John Springs on a visit & returned on Tuesday 14th ." In June of 1842 Brevard went to Springfield to retrieve Mary and the children who had been there three weeks. John Springs, who had been widowed shortly before his daughter's marriage, had a short late-life marriage to Elizabeth Hill who was also widowed. Springs died in 1853 at the age of 71. Brevard wrote on November 1st "Mr. John Springs died in Augusta, Georgia October 21st 1853 on Friday." Springs had been in Augusta with his wife and other family members to attend the Georgia State Fair. He had been a constant and important figure in Brevard's family.[92]

Weather Worries: A High Freshet, Deep Snow

Weather was always a concern to Brevard, as it is to any farmer. He wrote incessantly that it was too wet or too dry, and the crops were being harmed. He also noted weather that was unseasonably hot or cold. One notable occurrence was a freshet on May 28, 1840. A freshet is a large rise and overflowing of a river caused by unusual rainfall or extensive snow melt. Crops along the river bank can be severely damaged, and travel across the much-forded Catawba was often curtailed. "A very high freshet in the river said to be the highest in fifty years. I saw one in 1824 about 11 inches lower, making this one the highest by 6 inches I ever saw, about 32 ft past common water in fact water

[92] Springs, *The Squires of Springfield.*

courses all very high & a great deal of rain, more injury done on the river than ever was done." This is a long journal entry for Brevard. His entries on May 25th "Very wet weather", and May 26th "Stopped by rain" are more typical. The rains continued; on June 6th he wrote, "Have done no ploughing for neare three weeks". In mid July he wrote again that plowing had been hampered for weeks by rain. He cut his oats, but could not get them tied up for six days. Crops were damaged, and many acres were lost. In August an exasperated Brevard wrote, "Finished working our crop or rather quit it." But of course he didn't quit. By fall he was farming as usual. Crops may have been smaller that year, but they appear to have been satisfactory.

Brevard often reported river flooding as a number of feet "past common water", meaning the distance beyond the normal riverbank. The inches referred to here are probably a portion of the 32 feet past common water, rather than a measurement of the water's depth. A contrast to this occurred in the fall of 1839: "Have about 17000 lb cotton out with out any rain, very dry weather water courses said to be lower than they have ever been by some of our oldest men, our mill is nearly stopped, in fact the crick is nearly stopped running… McDowels crick is stopped running from our Bridge up. Catawba river never known to be as low."

The first few months of 1856 were particularly cold and snowy. On January 4th he wrote, "Commenced snowing about 11 Oc'lock at night". It continued until one the following afternoon; eight inches accumulated. It snowed off and one for the rest of the month. He wrote several times that there had been little snow melt, that it remained between 8 and 12 inches deep in most places. The weather remained cold, once reaching 2 degrees below zero. During most of this time the men were chopping and splitting firewood, probably in the barn, and the women were inside spinning. Spinning was rarely mentioned during the previous years; we can assume there was little else for them to do with so much snow on the ground. On January 26 the women were still spinning and he wrote, "not a furough of ploughing since the new year set in, & no cotton picked out of the field I have about 6000 lb in the field." Finally about mid February the snow had melted enough to complete his harvest and begin plowing his land. Ordinary late fall tasks resumed: killing hogs, and ginning and packing cotton. Plowing continues apace through March. The journal ends in early April; probably the new cotton crop was planted mid month. This was indeed an unusual snow. Back in 1835 he noted 9 or 10 inches of snow, "the deepest I ever saw, and the deepest since the death of Washington"

Church

Like the rest of his clan Brevard and his family were Presbyterians and Hopewell was their church. Presbyterians at the time celebrated the sacrament of communion at least once a year, sometimes more often. In order to participate in the service each church member was required to appear before the elders, demonstrate an understanding of Presbyterian theology and affirm a sincere belief in Presbyterian teachings. Those who met the criteria were given tokens which they presented on communion Sunday in order to receive the sacrament. Hopewell's practice was to hold these services in the spring,

usually in May, sometimes in early June. Nearly every year Brevard's journal noted "Hopewell Sacrament" in May or June. In 1841 he wrote "Our Hopewell sacrament was on the 23 of May. Mary & myself connected our selves with the church & had our children baptised – Mary, John, and William." It was not unusual for sincerely religious people to regularly engage in worship services, yet not become church members. Apparently Brevard and Mary became church members on that day. According to Chalmers Davidson, Brevard was an elder at Hopewell from 1846 to 1875.[93] [94]

Births of Children

Brevard recorded many births and deaths of his slaves and family members. He also noted births, and sometimes conceptions of horses and cows. On May 26, 1841 "My little mare Ariel took the horse" and on August 1st "Spot cow took the bull". Various livestock births include "Two calves Frosty's & Bet's", "My little mare Ariel colted yesterday, the 1st day of April, "Sinet colted at the plantation the last day of March". Many others are recorded; most of them name the mother who gave birth. Slave births also name the mothers and sometimes include the child's name. They are noted in the section on Brevard's slaves.

The first three of Brevard's own children have already been mentioned. Journal entries relating the births of his other children are as follows: "Our third son was born 15 minutes after three p.m." This was Robert Augustus who was born on March 13, 1842. On December 10, 1843, "Our fourth son was born to day. Austin Richard." On August 16, 1845, "Our sixth child & second daughter born"; this was Sarah (Sallie) Harper. On November 17, 1847 "Our third daughter & seventh child Jane [later called Jenny] born." The birth of twins came on June 17, 1849, "Mary gave birth to two daughters this morning about 6 O,clock (9 children)"; and "Sept 29th to day Isabella Sophia & Amanda Margaret Baptised by the Rev. H. B. Cunningham, Pastor our church."

Next comes a surprise. In recording the birth of Adam Brevard, Jr. he wrote on March 20, 1852, "Our 5th son & 11th child born". Eleventh child? When the twins were born he wrote "9 children". There is a break in the journal from November 3, 1849 to September 18, 1851. Was a child born during this interval? The next birth entry, "12th child & 7 daughter [Blandina] was born October 15th 1853", confirms that there was indeed another child, a daughter, born between the twins and Adam Brevard, Jr. She must have died at or soon after birth; there is no other record of her existence.

The primary farm journal ends in September of 1854. The 1856 commercially printed farm journal only covered part of that year; consequently the births of the last four children are not recorded in his hand. According to the family genealogy their sixteenth child was born in June of 1861. Mary bore her last child at the age of forty seven.

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[93] Spence, *Rocky River Church.*
[94] Powell, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography,* S. V. Davidson, Brevard.

Deaths, Marriages, and Notable Events

Deaths of a number of family members, friends, and slaves were noted. Previously mentioned were the deaths of two of Brevard's brothers, and Mary's father John Springs. Among others were the death of Mary's Aunt Sophia in 1839, and on February 14, 1841, "Sister Sarah died this morning at half past one Oclock". Sarah was Brevard's youngest sister and was nineteen years old. On February 3, 1842 "Aunt Sarah Caldwell died". Sarah Caldwell, daughter of Major John, had been married to Rev. Alexander Caldwell, the minister who was dismissed from Rocky River Presbyterian church in 1797 upon becoming deranged. At some time after that Sarah moved with her three children back to Rural Hill where she lived out her life. Her children lived at Rural Hill, at Holly Bend with their Uncle Robin and Aunt Peggy, or at Beaver Dam with their Uncle William Lee Davidson and Aunt Betsy. They probably spent time in each of those three households.

A slave Peter died on November 8, 1851, and on May 8, 1853, a Negro boy Charles died. There are a few mentions of infant slave deaths; other slave deaths which must have occurred went unreported.

Brevard's journal tended to be businesslike. Most births, deaths, and happy events were noted with scarcely a hint of emotion. The tribute below is an exception, perhaps the most heartfelt words in the entire journal.

"The Rev John Williamson, pastor of our church died the 16th of September 1842 about 7 Oclock in the evening, a man of fine judgment, good common sense, and beloved by all of the congregation, & no doubt will be missed very much in the neighborhood & as a good neighbor as well as the pastor of Hopewell congregation." Williamson had been Hopewell's minister since 1818; Rev Cunningham became the next minister at Hopewell.

Weddings and other happy occasions were mentioned. On April 6, 1842 Brevard "Went to James Osborn wedding in Charlotte to Mrs. Moores & returned to day." James Osborne was a nephew of Brevard's Aunt Peggy Davidson and had been raised by her and Robin at Holly Bend. James' bride was Mary Ann Irwin who had been a classmate of Brevard's wife Mary in Philadelphia. Surely Mary accompanied Brevard to this affair. Mrs. Moore apparently hosted the wedding. She has not been identified.

The following December 8th he wrote "Brother W. S. M. Davidson & Jane Torrance were married to day", and on the 9th "Infair at Fathers to day about 100 persons took dinner & a small dancing party at my house at night." Jane Torrance's sister Camilla was also a classmate of Mary Ann Irwin and Mary Springs. Camilla probably was among the guests at her sister's wedding, but perhaps she missed Mary Ann Irwin's nuptials. The following April Camilla wrote her father: "Mary Ann and Mr. Osborne were down this week…I was very much pleased to see Mary Ann she is very lively and looks quite as well as ever, the Same old Mary Ann and has changed as little as anyone in my knowledge." She had probably seen little of Mary Ann since their school days.[95]

[95] Torrance/Banks Family Papers, UNCC.

In 1840: "July 3 & 4 Attending the great celebration at sals-bury, said to be about ten thousand people." There is an intriguing entry of May 20, 1844, "I attended a meeting in Charlotte, monumental meeting." At the previous session of the legislature the Mecklenburg Monumental Association was incorporated for the purpose of erecting a statue commemorating the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. A concert was held on March 25th to raise money for the purpose. The amount of money raised, and whether a statue was built are unknown. The meeting Brevard attended on May 20th was probably a Monumental Association meeting. In a letter of 1875 to historian L. C. Draper, and in a Mecklenburg Superior Court affidavit of 1896, Brevard stated that the declaration and its date of May 20, 1775 had been discussed frequently in his home and by his grandfather Major John. Brevard was a believer in the declaration, and would have been interested in such a meeting if that was indeed the topic.[96]

Education of Children

Certainly Brevard educated all of his children. His journal mentions schooling of the oldest three who were of school age during the years it was kept, and the 1850 census notes that seven of his nine children had "attended school within the year." Mary Laura at thirteen was the oldest scholar, and four-year-old Jenny the youngest; the one-year-old twins were the only ones not in school. In November of 1846 Brevard wrote "Mary, John, & William went over the river to Mr. Moors to go to school thursday the 12th." Mary was nine; her brothers were eight and six. Mr. Moore was probably Brevard's brother-in-law, married to his sister Isabella. They lived in Lincoln County where James Moore was an elder in Unity Church. The family papers contain two brief progress reports for John and William from Unity Academy. The following November he "Brought the children home from school Mary, John, & William have been there four months." This was obviously a subsequent session, perhaps at the same school or another one. On April 6, 1848 Brevard "Took Mary, John, and William to B. W. Alexanders to board to go to Rev. H. B. Cunningham school & Inst." This school was held at Hopewell, close enough for the children to come home on weekends.

In July of 1848 "Mr. John Springs took my daughter off to Salem 20th of this month." The Salem Female Academy, operated by the Moravian Church, was a very popular institution for daughters of area planters. Brevard's wife had studied there when she was a girl. Salem records show that Mary entered Salem on July 24, 1848, and left the school on May 29, 1852. She was there from age eleven to fifteen. "John, William, Robert, Richard commenced going to school to W A Patton March 29th 1853." This is his only mention of school for Robert and Richard who were eleven and twelve that year. In January, 1856 he took John and William to the Ebenezer Academy in Charlotte; they were seventeen and fifteen. Their tuition and board cost $115.

Only a few of the surviving receipts specify school expenses. Most are written for "value received"; some of those may have been for educational expenses. On Sept. 16, 1862 Brevard sent his daughter Sallie to Edgeworth Female Seminary in Greensboro, NC. He

[96] *The Charlotte Journal*, Charlotte, NC, April 12, 1844, May 3, 1844.

paid $150 for her tuition. Another receipt from Edgeworth for $100 is dated October 1 of the same year. This might have been an additional expense for Sallie, but it was more likely for her sister Jenny. Sallie was 17 that year; Jenny was 15. The same year in November he paid Salem Academy $200 for the education of his twin daughters Amanda and Isabella, who were 13 years old.

Chalmers Davidson states that both Robert and Baxter (Edward Lee Baxter Davidson) attended Davidson College, and when Baxter died he was the largest donor in the college's history. A journal kept by Brevard's daughter Sallie confirmed that her brother Baxter was at Davidson College in 1877.[97]

Brevard paid many expenses to the guardians of his nephews, sons of his uncle Benjamin Wilson Davidson who had died in 1829. Their mother died in 1838. Some of these payments may have been for education. Rufus Reid, the boys' step-father, and Rev. John Williamson, and perhaps others, were guardians of the six boys. Guardianship was strictly financial management; the boys lived with various relatives until their maturity.

Railroads and Other Business Associations

Both the journals and extant receipts show that Brevard had many interests besides farming. He was one of many local men who bought stock in the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad to support its construction, and in 1847 he became a member of its board of directors. The railroad line, which ran from Charlotte to Columbia, opened in October of 1852 and connected with the South Carolina Railroad to Charleston; for the first time piedmont farmers had reliable farm-to-market transportation. The Catawba River was only partially navigable, and then only when conditions were right. Before 1852 Brevard and his neighbors had to pay men to drive many wagon loads of cotton to Cheraw, SC at the fall line of the Pee Dee River, or to the port in Charleston. Brevard often went to meetings of the railroad company in Columbia. In March of 1848 he wrote, "Returned from Columbia from a meeting of the board of directors of the Charlotte & S. Carolina R. Road, also took a ride on the cars [railroad cars] to Charleston on 16th & returned to Columbia on 17th & home on the 20th Inst….very cold hard freeze. I saw Ice & Ice sickles plenty between Branchville & Charleston, as large as walking canes." This jaunt was surely planned to whet the appetite of investors. This was probably a first train ride for most of them; roaring across the countryside being pulled by a smoky noisy "Iron Horse" was certainly a heady experience. In May of 1852 Brevard attended another meeting of the railroad's board of directors at Ebenezer Depot. This must have been a newly built stop on the route. The railroad opened the following October. Brevard remained on the board of directors after the railroad opened, and mentioned attending meetings in 1856. Family historian Chalmers Davidson said Brevard served on the board until his death.[98]

[97] Davidson, *Plantation World.*
[98] Powell, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography,* S. V. Davidson, Chalmers.

The journal contains several mentions of building public roads, working along with others: neighbors, slaves, and hired white laborers. He also worked with others building bridges. It's unclear if all the bridges were on public roads or if some were on his property.

According to family historian Chalmers Davidson, Brevard was a member of the Mecklenburg Agricultural Society, and became its president about 1845. He was an advocate of the latest improvements in farming methods including crop rotation, deep plowing, and improving livestock by selective breeding. The journal records his attendance at many Agricultural Society meetings.

Overseers, Hired Men, and Tenant Farmers

As will be seen in the section on farming, an enormous amount of work took place at Rural Hill over the years: plowing, planting, cultivating, harvesting, as well as building cotton gins, mills, farm roads, fences, etc. Brevard's slave population was fairly small for the tasks, and he frequently hired others, both white and black, to assist with the meatier projects. On December 29, 1835 he hired a slave "Aaron belonging to the estate of B. W. Davidson decesd. @ $98.00 this is three years we have hired him does very well." Annual contracts for hiring slaves were usually made at the end of December and in early January.

Brevard did employ overseers from time to time. On January 4, 1847 he wrote, "getting boys to repairing the dwelling house at the mill for James Johnson as overseer." And on January 1, 1849: "Jacob Riley set to work with me on Monday the 8th Inst. @ $10 per month." Riley may have been an overseer or more likely a tenant farmer; both kinds of contracts were typically made in January. Cyrus Hutcheson, as mentioned before, was almost certainly the overseer of the Dickson Plantation. Having an overseer on his Lincoln County plantation, some distance from Rural Hill, makes perfect business sense. Sometimes a specific portion of the farm's production was reserved for Hutcheson, particularly several of the hogs that were slaughtered each fall.

In September of 1842 while building a mill, Brevard hired John D. Prim for 3 ¾ days for 75 cents per day; Prim was one of a number of men hired for the project. In May of the following year Brevard planted seven or eight acres of corn "by Prim's little house." Prim appears to have lived on the property for a number of years and was probably a tenant farmer. The 1850 census includes Eliza Prem, age 20, as a member of Brevard's household. The only John Prim in that census was an eleven year old living in the home of the Duckworth family. They may have been orphans of John D. Prim, but there is not enough evidence to be certain. Ibzan Tanner also appears to be a tenant farmer. In November of 1837 Brevard received "of Ibzan about 70 bsh [bushels] of corn for wrent of upper plantation." Prim and Tanner, and occasionally others, received a portion of the hogs slaughtered, and had their cotton ginned by Brevard.

Brevard's Land

It is unclear how much land Major John Davidson owned, and how he divided it among his three sons. Deeds often were not registered, and inherited lands, unless contested, rarely were. Jacky's portion of the inheritance eventually came to Brevard. During the years they both actively farmed it, the two men had a clear understanding of how it was divided between them, but they left no documents to reveal that division. Brevard had names for the various fields: the swamp, the bottoms, the meadows, the upland field, the orchard, etc, and when a crop was sold he often stated if it was his or his father's crop. Over the years he added a few adjacent parcels to Rural Hill. In October of 1841 he bought the Barry Plantation from the estate of Richard Barry for $1,031. He doesn't mention its acreage. Miss Jane Barry continued to live on land adjacent to Brevard; he wrote several times of building and repairing a fence ending at her line. If she was Richard Barry's daughter, she probably inherited part of his land, and the rest was sold by the estate. Andrew Barry also continued to live in the area, so the above assumption is not automatic. In 1844 Brevard bought 111 acres from Rocinda Wilson for $388.50. It lay on McDowell Creek, the eastern border of Rural Hill, adjacent to Jane Barry, and probably also adjacent to Rural hill. In October of 1849 Brevard bought 200 acres from Joseph M. Davidson for $3200. Joseph's father, Benjamin Wilson Davidson, was a son of Major John. Joseph had inherited land upon his father's death which had originally belonged to Major John.

In the 1850 census Brevard reported the value of his property as $19,000. This is not a valuation for tax purposes, but a self reported estimate. The census did not ask for a farm's acreage. In Brevard's farm journal of 1856 he listed his Rural Hill farm as consisting of 1,982 ½ acres valued at $8 per acre for a total value of $15,860. Jacky was still alive, but at 77 was probably not actively farming. Some of the acreage of Rural Hill may still have been considered Jacky's land.

Building a Mill

Mills had existed at Rural Hill since its earliest days. Brevard's first references to milling were in 1836. In January he began sawing huge quantities of lumber for Davidson College, and later that year he sold 1300 pounds of flour in Charlotte. In 1842 he began building a new mill, which must have been a grand mill indeed. On August 19 he "commenced digging our mill pit with 6 hands." Over the next week: "Three days at the pit six hands $3.00…have had from 6 to ten hands this week 6 days with two mules. $14.00… two days with 8 hands & two mules at our mill pit." It is unclear if he was hiring slaves, paying his own people, or simply valuing the work. On the 3rd of September he began quarrying stone: "John Hiss 6 days spliting & blasting rock for our mill." The blasting was done with black powder; dynamite was not invented until 1867. Work continued at the quarry until late November. Altogether 288 wagon loads of rock were quarried and hauled to the mill site. Again he noted the number of workers who were slaves, the few white hired laborers, and the cost or value of their services. The rock came from the Cashen Quarry, which must have been the closest place where the

necessary quality and quantity of stone could be found. (There is a modern-day Cashion Road about 2 miles north of Rural Hill, running from Beatties Ford Road toward the river.)

On September 18th Harry Worke commenced building the mill wall. Mr. Worke, his brothers, and several hands continued building until November 24th: "Harry finished mill wall today…37 days at it." During that month or so there were often two or three hands "waiting on Harry", while others continued working at the quarry. There was apparently little or no work done on the mill through the winter; the days were filled with harvesting cotton and other crops, killing hogs, sowing wheat, and other seasonal tasks. On March 23, 1843 "Isaac Pain, his Brother, & Brother [in-law?] came here to build the frame of the mill house." On April 3rd "Martin Sigman & his workeman came here to day to commence mill." Five days later: "Raised our plank hill at the mill." In May they "Raised the husk frame of our mill Ten hands – in 4 hours;" and "Raised our mill house the fraim."

Early in August: "Commenced digging our mill race. Dug 1 day & half with 11 hands, men. Dug 2 days with 17 men, boys & women.". Over the next several weeks they dug the heel race with "12 hands, two hired ones", and the head race with 16 hands. On September 7th he wrote "Still at our mill"; the race was not yet complete. Then a bit of frustration: "Started our new mill the corn stones, not a good head grinds about 3 bushels in 40 minutes." Stones used to grind corn or wheat were grooved differently; two grinding mills could be run simultaneously, or a mill's stones could be switched to suit the task. October 3rd: "Started our wheet mill." And finally on November 7, 1843, "Finished our mill dam & races cost of our own labour about $320." There was one more improvement to be made. On September 7, 1844 Brevard "Finished burning brick four days and knights, burnt about 43 or 4 loads of wood. Early in October: "Halling Brick & sand for mill house chimney built by Edwin Lundergain $12.00."

Mills of course needed upkeep. On October 16, 1852 Brevard wrote, "Finished my mill race after a siege of six weeks, with 17 hands & three hired ones, blasting rock. I think it cost six hundred dollars. 18th Started the mill today, after being stopped near two months."

Slaves were the millers at Rural Hill. Unfortunately the farm journal of 1834 – 1854 gives us little indication of which slaves were doing which jobs, and no mention of which man (or men) was milling. In Brevard's journal of 1856 he lists the occupations of his slaves, and Thomas was the miller. Several times in that brief journal he stated that Tom was at the mill, once assisted by George. In all of these instances the mill was "out of fix" and the men were working on the problem.

Slaves at Rural Hill

According to the 1830 census there were 25 slaves at Rural Hill, all belonging to Jacky. This was a smaller work force that one might imagine considering their ages. Nine of

them were under 10, and another ten were between 10 and 23. There were three males and one female between 24 and 35, and one each over 36. When Brevard began his journal in 1834 he had not yet married, was still a member of his father's household, and the two of them were the farmers of Rural Hill. During the journal's first three months, March through May, they planted 125 acres in corn, 70 acres to cotton, and set out 900 tobacco plants. The only specific mention of slave labor was planting 14 acres of corn with 5 hands on March 22, and 18 acres with five hands several days later. Prior to planting a great deal of work was done to prepare the soil, afterwards nearly constant plowing, hoeing and harrowing was required until the plants were well established. Then followed the harvest, hog killing, ginning, baling, etc. until it was time to begin anew in the spring. In addition there were other farm tasks: cutting trees, hauling and splitting wood, raking and hauling manure, building and repairing fences, etc. An enormous amount of work for a force of twenty-five, about half of them children.

Information about Brevard's slaves comes from several sources: Census records; the inventory of the slaves given to him in 1836 by his father-in-law which gives their names, ages, and family groups; his 1856 list which gives their names, ages, and occupations; and the farm journals which occasionally mentions their names, records most births, and occasionally implies whether they lived at Dickson or Rural Hill. The fact that he owned plantations in Mecklenburg and Lincoln Counties confuses the issue. Censuses record where people lived but do not reflect ownership. The records that have been consulted are for Mecklenburg only, and the 1856 list clearly is for Rural Hill. It is apparent from the journals that some of his people moved back and forth between the two properties. One can infer from the sizes of the crops planted at Rural Hill and at Dickson nearly as many people were at Dickson as at Rural Hill. Since the Barry plantation, bought in 1841, was contiguous to Rural Hill, both properties were probably worked by the same labor force.

The 19 slaves he received in December of 1836 were of course Mary's dowry, but by the laws of that time a married woman's property belonged to her husband unless a written agreement specifically stated otherwise. Shortly after taking possession Brevard "Moved Marys Negroes down to the Dixon Place 18 in number Burrow, Ann & 7 children Tom, Julia & 3 children Peggy & two children kept Sina at home." The numbers don't exactly add up. The blacksmith Bill, who was to be sent up during the Christmas Holidays, may still have been at Springfield, or already at Dickson. He is never mentioned again in any of Brevard's writings, and may have soon died or been hired out.

According to the 1840 census Brevard had 15 slaves at Rural Hill, 9 males and 4 females (Jacky had 17). The age and gender categories indicate that some of those sent to Dickson had probably come back to Rural Hill. The 1850 census states Brevard had 26 slaves at Rural Hill, 19 males and 7 females. His journal records 19 slave births during the intervening decade. 8 of them probably occurred at the Dickson plantation, of the remaining 11, 6 were male, four were female, and one is unknown. Clearly people were moving back and forth between to two farms. Some births were not recorded, for instance he listed Sina's first and third children, but not her second. Very few slave deaths were noted, although many names disappeared from the record.

The slaves lived in cabins probably close together in family groups. On April 18, 1840 Brevard "Raised a double negro house yesterday 15 by 30 feet." Not much room for two families, or perhaps one extended family. He may have permitted his slaves to keep gardens and chicken coops at their cabins and to eat or sell their bounty. This was fairly customary on plantations during this time. Slaves usually prepared and ate breakfast and supper in their cabins. The main meal of the day was a midday dinner. It was prepared communally and carried to the fields, or eaten wherever slaves were working.

On February 14, 1844 Brevard wrote, "Father and myself divided our hands this week." The slaves they both owned had already been working the farm together; they apparently wanted to declare clear ownership of each person. Unfortunately Brevard gave us no details of how many people were involved or how they were divided. In the 1850 census Brevard owned 26 people; Jacky had 22. Brevard owned a few less than most others in the county of similar economic status, and we don't know how many people were at his Dickson plantation. However it is a sharp contrast to his Uncle Robin. Robin reported a little less real estate wealth than Brevard, yet he owned 109 slaves.

1856 Slave Inventory

Brevard's 1856 commercial farm journal has a page for listing slaves along with their ages, occupations, and values. He listed thirty people; first males then females by age, not by family groups. Names in bold were also in the 1836 inventory.

Name	Age	Occupation	Value	Name	Age	Occupation	Value
Thomas	50	Miller	500	Bill	7	Farm	300
Adam	42	Wagoner	900	Rufus	3	Farm	300
Logan	30	Farm	1000	Jim	1	Farm	200
Alexander	34	Blk Smith	1200	**Ann**	61	H. Hand	300
Phil	27	Wagoner	1000	**Julia**	49	Weaver	400
Hampton	24	Blk Smith	1200	**Sina**	33	H. Hand	500
Umphrey	24	Farm	1000	Sarah	30	Cook	800
George	24	Farm	1000	**Hannah**	29	Farm	800
Alfred	20	Farm	900	**Nancy**	26	Farm	800
Jerry	14	Farm	600	**Celia**	22	Farm	800
Joe	11	Farm	550	Poly	17	Farm	800
Harrison	11	Farm	550	Jincy	15	House Maid	700
Moses	8	Farm	400	Susan	12	House Maid	700
David	9	Farm	400	Amy	6	Child	300
John	6	Farm	350	Dilsie	3	Child	200

In the same book he made a "New list of ages for 1864." It includes 35 people:

Name	Age	Name	Age	Name	Age	Name	Age
Alexander	42	Davie	17	Tom	8	Iby	--
Phil	35	Jack	14	Sina	41	Adam	--
Hampton	34	Bill	15	Sarah	40	Adeline	--
Umphrey	34	Rufus	11	Hannah	35	Evaline	--
Alphred	28	Jim	9	Celia	30	Liza	8
Jerry	22	Jef	--	Susan	20	Bob	6
Joe	19	Monrow	--	Ginci	17	Moly	4
Harrison	19	Dick	--	Amy	14	Alice	2
Mose	16	Green	8	Dilsi	11		

Sales receipts confirm that Brevard bought Phil, Hampton, and Sarah. (Evalina and Dick were also purchased, and probably lived at Dickson.) The births of Jerry, Joe, Harrison, David, Rufus, Amy and Dilsie are recorded in the earlier journal; Moses, Bill, and Jim may have been births where the child was not named. It is not know how Brevard acquired Adam, Logan, Alfred, John, Polly, Jincy, and Susan. They may have once belonged to Jacky, or their purchase or birth may not have been recorded.

From the various resources we can get glimpses into the lives of the people that Brevard owned. The five slaves known to have been bought were Evalina, Phil, Hampton, Dick and Sarah. Evalina came from the estate sale of Joseph McConaughey on October 29, 1839, when Brevard paid $802 for "a negro girl Evalina about 15 years of Age." She appears to have lived at Dickson, and the journal references to her are few. In 1849 Brevard wrote sideways in the margin, "Evalinas 4 daughter & 4th child born at plantation [Dickson] Feb". Later he wrote "Evelina's 7th child & 6th daughter born April 1853." On March 16, 1856 Evalina gave birth to twins, Tom and Lizzie, at Dickson. Evaline is on the 1864 list with no age; Liza and Tom are both 8. This must be the same family.

Phil and Hampton were purchased on the same day. On January 24, 1842: "Charlotte Court, I attended four days bought two negrow boys, one at Maj Smiths sale for $606.00 Phil 16 or 17 years old, & one at William Davidson's trust sale for $550. Hampton 13 years old." William Davidson, very distantly related to Brevard, was a former state senator whose many investments had gone sour. He was mortgaging his property to settle debts, and never recovered most of it. His daughter had kept a journal in 1837 in which she wrote, "After tea attended the instruction of our young servants…I commenced learning them to read…[They are] progressing as fast as I can reasonably expect…" She enumerated the progress of some of her young charges; eight year old Hampton was spelling "in three letters.".) Brevard must have thought highly of these young men. In 1856 Phil was a wagoner valued at $1000, and Hampton a Blacksmith valued at $1200.[99]

A receipt of January 1, 1847 states that Brevard bought "Dick, about 27 years" from the estate of A. F. Derr for $725. There is no mention of Dick in the journal. On February

[99] The Private Journal of Sarah F. Davidson, Davidson Family Papers, UNCC.

17, 1854 he paid $800 to R. B. Harry "for a negro girl named Sarah aged about 30 years old which girl I do warrant sound in body & mind with the exception of one Finger…" In 1856 Sarah is listed as a cook at Rural Hill.

Since Brevard's journal recorded many (but not all) Negro births, and named the mothers and often the children, some of those families can be followed. Tom, Julia, and their three children (Austin, George, and Lemuel) were part of the 1836 dowry. Over the years Julia gave birth to six more children, Jack, Jerry, Joe, another son and two daughters who are not named. All of them appear to have been born at Rural Hill. Tom and Julia along with their sons George, Jerry, and Joe were at Rural Hill in 1856. Tom, 50, was a miller, and Julia, 49, was a weaver. The three sons were all farmers, and valued at considerably more than their aging parents.

Sina, also part of the dowry, was 14 in 1836. In 1856 she was a house hand, meaning she worked inside the plantation home, a job for a favored servant. Sina had ten children; those named are Hannah, Harrison, Dave, Dilsie, and Andy. A son who was not named died at the age of one. An unnamed son was born in 1848, and two births were not recorded. Since most births were noted as "2nd son, 3rd child" etc, we know they were both boys and approximately when they were born. It is unlikely that the small children would have lived separately from their mothers; therefore John and Bill were probably Sina's sons. Hannah and Andy who would have been 13 and 2 are not on the 1856 list, and had probably died. In March of 1856 Sina gave birth to Steven who died the following October.

In 1836 Ann was 42 and Burrow was 54. Although they are mentioned together in Brevard's journal entry in December that year, they were not married. John Springs' letter says he hoped to acquire Ann's husband who could be traded for Wilbert. No husband is ever mentioned, and Wilbert remained Brevard's property. Ann had 7 children when she came to Rural Hill: Fanny, 21; Wilbert, 15; Rhody, 12; Hannah, 10; Nancy, 7; Humphrey, 5; and Celia, 3. Wilbert is not on the 1856 list, but that year Brevard bought Wilbert a coat for $3.50, so he was probably at Dickson. Burrow is not mentioned after 1836. Fanny and Rhody must have lived at the Dickson place. Fanny had five or six children, three were daughters. Two of them were born at Dickson, and the births of the others were recorded a week or so after the fact, indicating Brevard may not have been immediately aware of them. Rhody had three or four children, at least two were boys. Both Fanny and Rhody are mentioned several times as being at Dickson, neither lived at Rural Hill in 1856. The fact that Brevard didn't note their children's names, and was unclear about their exact number indicates he was not as familiar with them as the people who lived "at home".

Ann's children, Hannah, Nancy, Humphrey, and Celia, were all at Rural Hill. Hannah had five children; Amy, Henry, Ann, and two other boys. In 1856 Moses was 8 and may have been Hannah's son. Henry disappeared from the record; Hannah's daughter Ann was born in 1857. Hannah's sister Nancy was the mother of Rufus who was 3 in 1856. Both Hannah and Nancy had a son in 1854; Jim was probably one of them. In March of

1856 Nancy gave birth to Lidia. Nancy died in August of that year, and Lidia died about six weeks later.

There may have been two slaves named Polly; none are in the dowry. On April 27, 1841 "Polys child born on the 22nd of this month." She was probably at Dickson since it was recorded a week after the fact, and the name and gender of the child are not given. The Polly on the 1856 list was born about 1838, so she could not have been the woman giving birth three years later. Polly who was 17 in 1856 gave birth to Green in June of that year.

Brevard never noted the fathers of his slave children. Surely some of the male slaves he owned were married to the young women bearing children. Slave marriages were not legally binding, but they were generally recognized and honored by the slave owners. Partly for religious reasons, and partly because family life kept slaves contented and productive, discouraged running away, and produced a future generation of laborers.

Very few slave deaths were recorded. Sina's son, and Nancy and her daughter have already been mentioned. On May 8, 1853 "Negrow boy Charles died." There is no other mention of Charles in any of Brevard's records. In November 1851 "Peter died to day the 8th." Peter had been brought to Rural Hill from Dickson several times. He was one of the men who helped build the mill. Many slaves disappeared from the record; most likely they died. There are no receipts or any mention of Brevard ever selling a slave.

We have no concrete evidence of how Brevard treated his slaves. He never mentioned punishing a slave or being dissatisfied with anyone's work or behavior. There are several mentions of other men's slaves running away, but none of Brevard's. He seems to have kept families together, valued his slaves' work, and may have felt compassion for them. The journal is businesslike; rarely are Brevard's emotions seen even when recording death or illness within his own family. He had a large farm with many acres under cultivation. In describing the multitudinous farm chores, he obviously expected diligent work from his people, and the same of himself. Hard work was a fact of life.

Brevard and Mary's Death

There are few records other than receipts in Brevard's hand in his later years. A thorough study of the receipts, public records, and family stories was not made for the later half of the 19th century, as that time period is beyond the scope of this work. Bearing and raising children had absorbed much of Mary's life. Over the first 25 years of her marriage she had 16 children, the last one born when she was 47 years old. At that time, only one of the others had married, and two had died. She had twelve others still at home. Mary Laura Springs Davidson died on October 24, 1872, at the age of 58.

In 1876, at the age of 68, Brevard married Cornelia Elmore (January 1, 1835 – March 14, 1921). Cornelia was 41 and apparently had never been married before. Brevard died on July 4, 1896, at the age of 88. He and Cornelia had no children. Brevard and Mary are buried in the Rural Hill Burying Ground. Cornelia is buried in Columbia, SC.

Brevard and Mary Davidson's Children

The education of Brevard's children is covered in a previous section.

Mary Laura Davidson February 3, 1837 – May 8, 1902. Brevard called her Mary as a small child, but later she was called Laura. She had attended Salem Academy, as previously noted, and on September 15, 1854 Brevard wrote, "Returned from the north with my Daughter Laura. I was absent from home 5 weeks." Laura was 17. Was this a journey to broaden her horizons, or was he retrieving her from a northern boarding school like the one her mother had attended many years before?

On August 10, 1858 she married Rev. Alexander McLean Sinclair. In his 1864 list of slaves, recorded in the 1856 journal, Brevard noted that he had given Harrison and Susan to M. Laura Sinclair. She died at the age of 65 and is buried in Charlotte.

John Springs Davidson August 6, 1838 – August 7, 1899. John Springs served in the Confederate Army and on May 31, 1864 he married Margaret (Minnie) Caldwell, daughter of Harriet and Dr. David T. Caldwell of Rosedale plantation. They had six children one of whom died in infancy. Their son Baxter Craighead (Craig) Davidson spent much of his childhood in Charlotte at Rosedale, the home of his Uncle Baxter and Aunt Alice Caldwell, siblings of his mother Minnie. Neither Uncle Bax nor Aunt Alice ever married. When Uncle Bax died he left Rosedale to his nephew Craig who became the father of Rosedale's last two residents, Mary Louise Davidson and Alice Davidson Abel. Neither of them had children. Rosedale is now an historic site near downtown Charlotte.[100]

John Springs, Minnie and their children were living in the Rural Hill mansion house when it burned in 1886, and the family moved into Rural Retreat. Then Rural Retreat burned in 1898. Minnie had died in 1896; we can only speculate about which of the children were still in the home. Mary Laura was 19 and probably not yet married; Baxter was still single, but probably at Rosedale; Harriet was 27, and Jo Graham and Thomas were in their early thirties, but unmarried. John Springs and his children still at home moved into an old house on the property that had once been a kitchen. That house still stands and has been expanded and much improved over the years. Some of these improvements may have been made before Rural Retreat burned. John Springs died in 1899, the year after the fire. He and Minnie are both in the Rural Hill Burying Ground.

William Lee Davidson July 20, 1840 – July 27, 1857. He died at 17, and is buried at Rural Hill

Robert Augustus Davidson March 13, 1842 – March 31, 1865. Robert served in the Confederacy during the war, and became a prisoner of war in September of 1863 at Jack's Shops, Va. He was taken to Point Lookout, Md., then transferred to Elmira, NY. Like all prisons, Elmira was drastically short of food, medicine, blankets, guards etc, and severely overcrowded with men and their yet to be buried comrades. Near the war's end

[100] Caldwell-Davidson Papers, Historic Rosedale Plantation, Charlotte, NC.

Robert was released in very poor health. He reached home, but died shortly thereafter. His sister Sallie wrote of his memory in her journal on March 1, 1868: "I've felt particularly sad at the approach of it [March] as it brings to my mind very forcibly the sad recollection of the death-bed scene of my darling brother Robert who died the 31st this mo. three years ago." Robert was 23. He was unmarried and is buried at Rural Hill.[101]

Richard Austin Davidson December 10, 1843 – April 1, 1892. Richard also served in the civil war. He never married, and died at the age of 48. He is buried at Rural Hill.

Sarah (Sallie) Harper Davidson August 16, 1845 – March 26, 1935. Sallie never married but lived quite an adventurous life. She kept a short travel journal (privately owned) in which she told of a wonderful sojourn in Philadelphia in 1868, and a "Centennial Trip" in 1877 to many eastern US cities. She wrote that she longed to travel to Europe, and later did go to Europe as well as Japan, South America, Egypt, South Africa and other exotic places. Her traveling companion on many of these ventures was her younger sister Blandina. Sallie was a wealthy eccentric, dressing as she pleased regardless of style, and frequently entertaining in her Charlotte home. Family stories told of Sallie bear repeating. They were passed down in the family and were related by family genealogist Doug Marion. Once while in New York she went to Tiffany's to buy a piece of jewelry. She made her selection and paid with a check. The clerk was skeptical of this woman's unfashionably drab attire; long black dresses were her usual garb and she was sometimes mistaken for a beggar. The clerk gave the check to the store manager who telephoned Sallie's banker in Charlotte. He was told "You can sell her the whole store if you want. She has lots of money." On another occasion when planning a trip to Europe she was asked if she was buying a new wardrobe for her trip. She replied, "Why should I, no one over there knows me." Her friend than said, "Oh, you're going to buy new clothes when you get back." Sallie answered, "Of course not; everyone here knows me." Sallie died in Charlotte at the age of 89 and is buried at Rural Hill.

Jane (Jenny) Baxter Davidson November 17, 1847 – December 28, 1879. Jenny married Dr. James Meek Miller in 1879. She died six years later and is buried in Charlotte.

Amanda Margaret (Maude) Davidson June 17, 1849 – November 25, 1939
Isabella Sophia Davidson June 17, 1849 – May 4, 1933
These twins were educated together at the Salem Academy. Amanda married Andrew Jackson Beall in 1875. She died at the age of 90 and is buried in Charlotte. Isabella married Charles Gaines Montgomery in 1871. She died at the age of 84 and is buried in Concord, NC.

Unnamed Daughter The break in Brevard's journal and his listing of the birth order and gender of his other children confirm that a daughter was born between June of 1850 and June of 1851, and had died by mid September 1851.

[101] Sarah Harper Davidson Journal, 1868 – 1877, Private Collection.

Adam Brevard Davidson, Jr. March 20, 1852 – October 11, 1869. He was 17 when he died and he is buried at Rural Hill.

Blandina (Blandie) Rebecker Davidson October 15, 1853 – April 26, 1937. Blandie never married. As an adult she shared a home in Charlotte with her sister Sallie. Blandie and Sallie were frequent traveling companions. Blandie died in Charlotte at the age of 84 and is buried at Rural Hill next to her sister Sallie.

Leroy Springs Davidson August 19, 1855 – September 15, 1915. Leroy never married. He died in charlotte at the age of 60 and is buried at Rural Hill.

Julia Stockton Davidson May 6, 1857 – January 17, 1930. Julia married Rev. Thomas H. Stroehecker in 1883. She died at 73 in Washington, DC and is buried in Charlotte.

Edward Lee Baxter Davidson November 7, 1858 – October 10, 1944. As an adult Baxter lived in Charlotte, and was devoted to civic duty in many forms. He contributed a great deal of money and energy toward historical research and the erection of historical markers documenting the Davidson family history, especially that of his great grandfather Major John. Among his passions was building low stone walls to set off important places. His legacy survives in the restoration of the Rural Hill Burying Ground, and in building the stone wall surrounding it in 1923. The interior brick wall had been built much earlier. Baxter also built the wall on both sides of Beatties Ford Road in front of Hopewell Church, and probably many others. Baxter was a bachelor until he married the widow Sarah May Williams Vosburgh (1883 – 1973) in 1935. Baxter was 76 on his wedding day, his bride was 52. According to a Charlotte newspaper Baxter had been severely injured in an automobile accident near Lincolnton; he was traveling to Charlotte from Asheville where he had just celebrated his birthday. The car was driven by Mrs. Sarah Vosburgh, a trained nurse of Charlotte. She sustained a broken collarbone. The article is undated; the accident probably happened a year or two before they married. Baxter died at 85 and Sarah at 90. Their graves are the nearest to the entrance of Rural Hill's Burying Ground, just inside Baxter's beautiful wall. Buried with them is David W. Vosburgh, probably Sarah's son from her first marriage.

Fannie Baxter Davidson June 3, 1861 – July 24, 1863. Fannie died at the age of two and is buried at Rural Hill.

Rural Hill, the Last Two Generations

When John Springs Davidson (son of Brevard) died in 1899, his second son, Jo Graham Davidson inherited the property. Both the Rural Hill mansion house and the Rural Retreat cabin had burned, and he and his wife Annie May Alexander Davidson raised their family in the improved kitchen building (see John Springs Davidson above). Rooms had been added to the original log structure, it was covered with board siding, and improvements had been made to suit the times. Jo Graham and Annie May were married on November 23, 1904. Their five children were a son who was born and died on January 1, 1906; John Springs Davidson born December 26, 1906; Elizabeth born January 9, 1911; Jo Graham, Jr. born November 21, 1914; and May born May 5, 1919.

Jo Graham, Jr. died in World War II. He had trained as a pilot, graduating from the Army Air Corps Flying School in Texas on April 30, 1942. He was flying a plane to combat in North Africa when his plane crashed over the coast of South America on February 27, 1943. Neither Jo Graham, Jr. nor any of his siblings married. The three surviving children sold a large portion of the remaining Rural Hill property to Mecklenburg County in 1992. John Springs died in 1998, Elizabeth died in 2004, and May died in 2011. Both Jo Graham and Annie May Alexander Davidson with all of their five children lie in the Rural Hill Burying Ground.

Farming at Rural Hill

Most of the information about specific farming practices at Rural Hill comes from Brevard's farm journals kept from 1834 –1856. This was a time when there was great interest in improving crop management by new scientific methods. Brevard's records and his membership in the county Agricultural Society show that he was following these new ways. A typical running excerpt from 1838 shows the variety and amount of work accomplished: "July 6th Finished ploughing our corn over 3 time & about 12 acres 4 times. Have layed by 18 acres. 7th Planted potatoes slips 10th Commenced cutting oats First cotton blosom seen on the 10th. 26 Finished ploughing our corn, gave it four ploughings 28 Quit ploughing our cotton on account of the dry weather, have ploughed it four times all except about thirty acres. Aug 3 Finished laying by our crop two & three good hoeings Finished thrashing our wheat. BIRTH. Monday 6th Our son John Spring was born 9th Cleaned & put up our wheet 165 bu 11th Sowed our turnips 13th Finished halling our oats had eleven wagon loads". In June of 1840 Brevard cut 40 acres of wheat with four hands in two days, which means that each person cut about five acres a day with a scythe by hand – overwhelming to the modern non-farmer. Certainly Brevard rolled up his sleeves and worked alongside his slaves on many of the farms chores. This study can only give a taste of the many tasks and amount of labor involved in operating a large complex farm. Anyone interested in a comprehensive understanding of 19th century farming should read Brevard's entire journals. Copies can be read in Rural Hill's archives.[102]

Farming in Major John's time was simpler and produced smaller crops. There was a gradual evolution of farming methods from the 1750s to the 1850s. Cotton was the cash crop and was first planted at Rural Hill about 1800.

The Nature of Cotton

During the first quarter of the 19th century cotton became very profitable throughout the American South. By 1821 cotton had become America's leading export, and shortly before the Civil War it comprised 60% of all American exports. Cotton was grown in the South, primarily with slave labor, but most of it was exported through shipping companies in the Northeast and most domestic manufacture of cotton cloth took place in New England. Consequently many in the North, while opposing the expansion of slavery, did not initially favor abolition. In the 1850s as the abolitionist movement grew strong, the north decreased its cotton commerce; then came the Civil War and everything changed.

North Carolina was not as well suited for cotton as the deep south. The red clay soil of the piedmont was hospitable to the crop, but not as productive as the loamy soil farther

[102] Almost all of the information in this section, except where otherwise indicated, comes from Brevard's farm journal: Rural Hill Journal 1834-1854, UNCC.

south and west. North Carolina rivers were mostly non-navigable and a lack of good deep-water seaports hindered transportation to market. However a number of Mecklenburg farmers prospered well on their cotton plantations.

Depending on soil and weather, an acre could produce 150 – 400 pounds of ginned cotton. About 2/3 of the weight of raw cotton is seeds. This means an acre might produce 1,000 pounds of bolls to be picked. This difference in the weight of raw cotton and ginned cotton is clearly reflected in Brevard's journals. He often estimated the number of pounds of cotton in various fields, and recorded the number of pounds that had been picked. Those were raw cotton weights that included seeds. Bales of cotton that were packed for market had been ginned, and consequently their weights were much less.

Most of a plantation's acreage was not used to grow cotton, but to support the labor of those who did. The slaves who worked the crop had to be fed, and the creatures they ate and the working animals also had to be fed. Farmers raised hogs, cows, horses, mules, sheep, and poultry; and grew oats, peas, and other food crops, as well as enormous quantities of wheat, corn, and animal fodder. Pork was the primary meat eaten by both black and white families. Corn was grown to feed the people as well as the hogs; it was generally a farm's largest crop.

Growing cotton was very labor intensive. As soon as the land could be worked in the spring, it was cleared of the previous year's stubble and plowing began. When frost danger had passed, about mid-April, planting commenced. The young plants had to be continuously hoed, or chopped, to prevent weeds from overpowering the crop. Before planting, the plowed fields were formed into hilled rows where the seeds were sown, with furrows between the rows to facilitate hoeing and keep water near the plants' roots. Around mid July when the crop was well established and weeds no longer a threat, the crop was laid by. The process of laying by was the last hoeing; during the "lay by season" the cotton fields were idle as the crop needed no further work until harvest time. This was a convenient schedule as many of other crops were gathered in the late summer and early fall. Recently a farm curator at Historic Brattonsville commented that hilling and furrowing was really hard work, and seemed unnecessary for his small demonstration cotton patch, so he left out those steps. He soon learned that his field would not drain after a rain, and hoeing the weeds without damaging the cotton became nearly impossible. The next year he mended his ways and had a fine healthy crop.

Each cotton plant produces up to twenty branches, and each branch produces multiple buds. Blooming is progressive, starting with the top-most branches and working gradually down to the lower ones. The blossoms are first white then change to deep pink and then to the fruit which is a leathery 5-bract boll, pointed at the top. When ripe, the bolls burst open revealing masses of fibers and seeds. By then the bracts have turned woody, their tips as sharp as needles. The plants grew from two to five feet tall. Bolls bloomed and ripened gradually over several months from September until the first killing frost. A single plant could have both white and pink blossoms and closed and open bolls all at the same time. Each field was picked many times as ripening progressed. The varying heights of the plants, the sharp bracts, and the long gathering season, made the

harvest unpleasant, backbreaking work. By contrast, modern cotton has been hybridized to be low growing, and ripen all at once so it can be harvested by machines.

Brevard described all of the processes of preparing the fields, planting, cultivating, and harvesting. Nearly every year he noted the first cotton blossom of the season, the first opened boll, when harvesting began, and when it was completed. Heavy frost kills the cotton plant; no more flowers will be produced, and blossoms and immature bolls will be lost. However fully opened bolls are not damaged and can be harvested into winter. Brevard often completed his harvest in January and February. The idea was to gather all of the cotton and have the fields cleared and prepared in time for spring planting.

Cotton Gins and Presses

Next the cotton was ginned; the word gin is derived from engine. In 1793 Eli Whitney invented an improved cotton gin. Earlier gins had removed seeds by passing the cotton through a pair of rollers; as the fibers passed through, the seeds fell behind. The roller gin worked well on some species of cotton, but was useless for upland cotton, the variety that grows in the American South. Upland cotton has soft sticky seeds, closely attached to the fibers and the seeds were crushed by the rollers, gumming up both the fibers and the gin. In Whitney's gin, cotton was placed in a slotted hopper next to a roller set with rows of curved wires. When the roller was turned the wires passed through the slots and grabbed the fibers, leaving he seeds behind. Whitney's idea was to remove the fiber from the seeds, rather than the seeds from the fiber, a simple but non-intuitive variation that made it possible, and profitable, to raise upland cotton and revolutionized the southern economy. Although Whitney obtained a patent, the cotton gins were easily copied and sprouted across the land like mushrooms. Saw blades quickly replaced the wires on the rollers; dull circular saw blades were plentiful or could be easily made and were much more efficient. Brevard had a gin, or perhaps several gins at Rural Hill and at least one at the Dickson Plantation.

The ginned cotton was placed into a press that compressed its volume. Then it was tied into bags, or bales, to be taken to market. Brevard also had one or more cotton presses. A press consists of a box, about three to four feet on each side and about ten feet high, open at the top with removable sides. Bagging cloth is draped inside the box, and the box is filled with ginned cotton. A heavy wooden screw presses a platform down to compress the cotton. Then the screw is backed out and more cotton is added and pressed. This continues until the box is nearly full. The bagging cloth is sewn tightly across the top of the resulting bale, the sides of the box are removed, and the bale is secured with ropes. Both gins and presses could be operated by water power or turned by mules. Brevard occasionally ginned and pressed cotton for others, receiving a percentage, or toll, of the cotton in payment.

Cotton and Corn: Field Preparation

The preparation of the fields was a lengthy process. Cotton and corn were the most important crops, and were the first to be tended to at the beginning of a new year. As soon as it could be worked the land was broken up by a rough plowing, then deep plowing was done. Each field was plowed several times to make it ready for planting. When plowed sufficiently rows of hills and furrows were formed. Brevard always hilled and furrowed his fields for corn and cotton, and may have for other crops as well. He often mentioned bedding or beading (distinctively different words in his handwriting), and sometimes ridging his land. These seem to be interchangeable terms for hilling and furrowing. One can visualize a row of hills as being a "bead" between two furrows; planting in a bed is familiar wording. When planting, one person distributes the seeds in the prepared hills; another person comes behind to cover them with soil. Brevard sometimes mentioned making a drill or planting in the drill. A drill was a shallow furrow in which seed was sown. Corn was planted from late March through April; cotton was planted during the last half of April. After the planting was completed, plowing, harrowing, and hoeing were done for weed control. Plows turn over the soil and turn under the weeds. A harrow has spikes or discs which root out the weeds, and break up the soil without turning it. Hoeing was done by hand when a more delicate touch was needed to avoid harming the crop. Newly planted corn fields were often molded or moulded. This meant breaking up and crumbling soil that had become compacted around the plants. This may have been done with tools or by hand.

Throughout the summer, fields were plowed, harrowed, or hoed multiple times. Cotton, and sometimes corn, was thinned, and various fields of either crop were replanted if damaged by a drought, hail or a freshet. When the crops were well established they were laid by, and attention could be turned elsewhere until harvest time. Both cotton and corn were laid by in July. Brevard does not mention laying by other crops.

Cotton at Rural Hill

Most years Brevard made a note of the season's first cotton bloom and the first opened boll. Blossoming began in July, some years early in the month, others later. Bolls began to open in early September. By mid to late September the harvest began, and continued through the fall and sometimes well into mid-winter. Brevard generally planted between 70 and 100 acres of cotton at Rural Hill. Some years he planted less. On April 28, 1845 he "Finished planting cotton about 30 acres about half as much as I had last year." He seems to have planted nearly as much at his Dickson plantation, sometime even more. His records for Dickson are not nearly as complete as those for Rural Hill.

He recorded the amounts of cotton harvested, the amount ginned, the number of bales made and sold, and the price it brought, but not all of those each year. In 1839 he harvested 40,000 pounds of cotton and made 41 bales. This amount of cotton would have weighed about 13,200 pounds after ginning, about 320 pounds per bale. Late in November he sold 9 of those bales, in February he sold another 28 bales for $877.80. In

1841 he planted 100 acres of cotton. By December he had harvested 37,000 pounds, and had about 15,000 still in the field. In February he "Finished ginning our cotton & packing 45 bags in number, I think will average about 345 lb [per bag]." 45 bags at 345 pounds each is 15,525 pounds, a bit less than the expected one-third of the crop's weight before ginning. He sometimes held back some cotton to be spun at home.

The curious division of crops between Brevard and his father in shown by several cotton sales. On May 7, 1841 Brevard "Returned from Cheraw,… sold 75 bags of cotton @ 10 1/8 cts [per] pound, 64 J & A.B.D & 11 A.B.D the amount of 64 [$]2146.19. Amount A.B.D 11 [$]377.96 [Total amount] $2524.15." In April of 1845 he took 176 bales to Cheraw, 43 bales they owned together, 104 of his alone, and 30 of his father's. He sold 175 bales for $3,205.74. One of his father's bales was not sold.

The "Daily Record of Cotton Picked" in Brevard's 1856 journal provides a detailed snapshot of a cotton harvest. On the chart the names of workers are listed down the left hand side of each page, and days of the week across the top. The chart covers 22 days (Sundays excluded) from September 16 – October 10 which was the first half of that year's harvest. It is filled in with the number of pounds picked by each person on each day. Seventeen names are listed, 13 males and four females; all of them did not work every day. Of the males, Adam (age 42) and Phil (27) were both wagoners, and worked about half the days. Alec (34) and Hampton (24) were blacksmiths; Alec worked only 3 days, Hampton 14. These men probably had responsibilities other than picking cotton. The other males worked most days except Jerry (14) who picked only one day. He may have been ill. Two other males were in their teens. Moses and David were 8 and 9.[103]

The four women were Julia (49) who was a weaver, and Hannah (29), Celia (22), and Polly (17). Julia worked only 3 days; Polly worked 7. Hannah and Celia were among the most productive workers; in fact Celia picked the most cotton of all, and Hannah's total was surpassed only by Celia and two of the men. As one would expect little Moses and David picked the least of those who worked regularly.

There were a couple of light days; it may have rained part of the day, or they may have been picking a field for the second time. Altogether 17,650 pounds of cotton were picked. This was seeded cotton and yielded about 6,000 pounds after ginning. Four weeks represents only about half a year's cotton harvest. These numbers are on a par with Brevard's typical crops.

Corn at Rural Hill

Most of the corn planted on 18th and 19th century farms was Indian corn, or field corn. It has dense mealy kernels, and keeps well when dried. It was used to feed livestock and ground into meal and flour for human food. The corn we eat from the cob today is sweet corn. It has a high water content and cannot be successfully dried. Sweet corn was grown during this period, but not in large quantities. Brevard wrote that his wife Mary

[103] Rural Hill Journal 1856, Box 1, folder 6, Davidson Family Papers, UNCC.

planted five or six rows of corn in the garden. This was probably sweet corn destined for the table.

More acres were planted to corn than cotton on most farms. Brevard planted 100 acres of corn in 1836, and 225 in 1837, however most years he simply tells of individual fields of 20 to 50 acres, and does not give the total acreage. The corn harvest began in late September, about the same time the cotton was ready, but it was finished more quickly. He did not weigh his corn, but recorded his bounty as the number of loads (wagon loads) he gathered, pulled, or hauled from the fields. Nor do we have any indication of how much was ground into meal or used to feed his animals. He sometimes stated how many loads were stacked in the crib; we have no idea of the size of his cribs, or how many he had. From a sampling of his entries we can see that his corn crop was large. In 1838: on October 18th 10 loads equaling 500 bushels were cleaned (husks removed) and cribbed; another 8 loads – 400 bushels – were done on November 1st. In 1839 he hauled 61 loads from the river and began husking 80 loads. In 1840, 24 loads equaled 1200 bushels, and in 1841 he had 26 loads in the husk. By doing the math we can determine that a wagon load contained fifty bushels of corn in the husk. He does not imply that any of these numbers are his entire harvest.

Hogs

In February and March breeding pigs were spayed, marked, or cut and then allowed to forage in the woods until fall. The word spay means "to cut" in this context; they were not neutering hogs as they wanted them to breed. Brevard used a distinctive ear notch so he could identify his livestock when they were gathered for fattening, and protect them from being stolen. Sometimes these unique notch patterns were registered in the county court. Another cutting procedure that Brevard performed was to remove a gristly appendage at the end of the snout so hogs could graze freely without rooting out the plants. On March 15, 1839 he "Spayed and marked 14 pigs at the mill & 5 large ones, making 19 & 4 others". On March 11, 1848, "Spayed & marked 15 pigs for myself Spayed and marked 19 for father I have 7 more to mark for myself 22 in number". The marked pigs were turned loose in the woods. Brevard referred to his young animals as pigs, the mature ones were hogs. In September and October they were rounded up and put in fattening pens. There were several on the property, and at least one at his Dickson plantation. On September 27, 1841 "Put up our fattening hogs 40 in my pen, 14 at the mill, at Fathers 14, in the woods 4 making in all 72." From late November through mid January he killed 73 hogs. Had he miscounted, or had one more been found in the woods? Their average weight was 191 pounds, totaling 13,906 pounds of meat and producing 1,000 pounds of lard. After curing all of the meat he kept 56 of the 73 hogs for himself. Of the rest his father got 10, Prim and Tanner who lived on the property got one each, and 5 were sent to Charlotte probably to be sold. He also sold pork in Columbia, SC from time to time.

This was an unusually large slaughter. In 1835 he slaughtered 11 hogs; the number increased for several years and reached 50 in 1839. After that, with the exception of

1841 noted above, between 40 and 50 hogs were killed each year, weighing between 8200 and 10970 total pounds. At least these seem to be the numbers. The arithmetic is confusing as he killed and weighed hogs over several weeks. His figures were usually cumulative, adding subsequent kills, and subtracting out those destined for his father and others. Hogs at Dickson were sometimes included, other years it is unclear if they were. Occasionally some of the meat was sold, but most of it was kept at home to feed his black and white families. This amount of meat is not excessive when you consider it was intended to last an entire year. 9000 pounds of pork eaten by 40 people for 52 weeks is 4.3 pounds per person per week, even less when bones, fat, and rind are factored out.

In Brevard's 1856 commercially produced farm journal, he inventoried and valued his hogs. He had one boar worth $3; 6 sows worth $24, 37 pigs worth $37, 20 shoats worth $60.50, 57 pork hogs worth $798, and 44 mill hogs worth $296. Shoats are pigs that have just been weaned. The meaning of mill hogs is unclear.

Farming Methods and Other Crops

Brevard was a member of the county's agricultural society, and was following current recommendations for farm management. He rotated his crops. He often mentioned planting fields that had lain fallow, and establishing new fields, probably where there had previously been woodlands. He reported chopping enormous amounts of wood, for firewood, for fences, and to be milled for building. As some of these woodlands were depleted they were turned into crop fields. Building and repairing fences was a frequent activity. Fences were most often built in winter when other chores were lighter, but could also be built whenever needed. The journal tells us where the fences were, but not by landmarks recognizable today. He was defining his borders with neighboring farms and delineating various fields but the fences main purpose was to keep cows, horses, pigs and wild creatures away from the crops. He mentioned pastures, and certainly kept some livestock in enclosed areas. In April of 1837 he "Finished building 475 panels of fence at the river from the gate to Barrys Bottom." He does not tell us the size of the panels, but they were probably as large as could be managed by two men. If each panel was 8 feet long, 475 panels would be 1260 yards, a bit less than three quarters of a mile. In March of 1842 he "Repaired and reset the fence on the North side of the Benjamin Wilson plantation 254 panels" and "Made the fence along the big road from the upper corner down 270 panels". These are just a few of numerous examples.

When planting a crop he often named the field he was working: the swamp at the river, the swamp up the creek, upper and lower meadows, chestnut field, orchard field, field at the barn door, bottoms, Black Jack field, the fields by Mr. Prim's house, the field by the Negro houses; the list goes on. Some names, like chestnut field sound cozy, yet he spread it with 189 loads of manure, and it took two days to plant. The meadows, as the name implies, were used for hay and grasses.

After corn and cotton, wheat was the next most important crop. The few times Brevard listed the yearly total acreage sown to wheat, it was between 25 and 60 acres. Yearly

yields of harvested, thrashed, and cleaned wheat range between 130 and 340 bushels. As with other crops, he most often listed the acreage and yield of individual fields, and rarely the entire year's crop. Wheat was ground at his mill. A fair amount of flour was sold in Charlotte including 1300 pounds he sold for $4.50 per hundred pounds. Wheat was sown between October and January, and cut in June.

Oats were sown every year, usually in March, and cut in July. Brevard planted about 40 acres in 1837, 60 in 1839, and 70 in 1844. He planted common oats and ruffled oats which were mostly used to feed his horses. Also in March he sometimes sowed rye, barley, and clover. Peas seemed to be a fairly large crop; he gathered 26 loads in 1839. These were undoubtedly field peas to be eaten fresh, or dried and used throughout the year. Sweet peas, or English peas, were a kitchen garden crop, and eaten only when in season. In April and May he planted Irish potatoes, usually several acres, and harvested about 100 – 125 bushels per acre. He also planted sweet potatoes; in 1835 he sold 55 bushels of sweet potatoes for 50 cents each. Most years he planted turnips, and several times he set out tobacco plants, unusual in piedmont North Carolina. Other crops were watermelon, pumpkins, hay, and various grasses.

A large amount of fodder was pulled. Some fodder may have been grown strictly for animal feed, although he doesn't mention planting fodder; most of it was probably corn stalks, pea vines, or other vegetation left after harvest.

In 1838 Brevard wrote that he had "Finished paling in our garden, have been about two weeks at it done by Ibzan Taner @ 75 cts per day". This was certainly a kitchen garden where herbs and summer produce was raised. It must have been a kitchen garden where Mary planted a few rows of corn. She probably also planted English peas, strawberries, cucumbers, okra, and other table vegetables in addition to culinary and healing herbs, and engaged her female slaves to help manage it. A kitchen garden was a woman's responsibility, and not part of Brevard's workday, so he saw little need to mention it in the journal. In general it took an acre of kitchen garden to feed a family of ten. Slaves were often permitted to keep their own kitchen gardens, and to raise chickens for their tables. Brevard's slaves may have done so. The journal doesn't mention slave gardens, but Brevard often did not record activity unrelated to the main business of his farm.

Brevard had an orchard and in February of 1847 he had "three Ohio men grafting apple trees… Mr. Taylor finished grafting trees between three & four hundred grafts." Brevard must have learned the process, the next month he "grafted 146 apple trees." He may have grown peaches and other orchard fruit, but he doesn't mention doing so, and the grafting event is his only mention of apples.

Livestock

In addition to hogs, Brevard raised cattle, horses, mules, and sheep. In January of 1856 he inventoried his Rural Hill livestock, the value of the animals is in parentheses. He owned 4 work horses ($300), 5 work mules ($680); 2 brood mares ($115); 1 mule colt, 1 year old ($50); 1 mule colt, 2 years old ($125); 1 jennet, 3 years old ($30); 2 bulls ($250); 7 beeves ($210); 9 cows ($440); 5 calves ($85); 6 calves, 1 year old ($150); 2 calves, 2 years old ($50); and 2 heifers, 3 years old, ($100). There may have been a similar assortment of animals at Dickson. Notice that mules were nearly twice as valuable as horses. Mules were a farm's most valued work animal. Mules are sterile males, a cross between a mare and a jackass, or a stallion and a jennet. (Jackasses and jennets are more frequently called donkeys today). Mules are stronger, more surefooted, and can work harder than horses. Their well deserved reputation for stubbornness may exasperate the farmer; but it serves the mule well. A horse can be worked to death; a mule will quit working when he is exhausted or extremely thirsty. In 1841 Brevard "bought a Giny @ McRee sale for $114." This was probably a jennet, often called a jenny.

Horses of course were for farm work and transportation. The horses and colts were all named. They were stabled, and probably pastured in fenced areas. He mentions pastures, and never mentioned marking or branding a horse.

The cattle were frequently named, as were the calves they produced. They may have also been pastured in enclosed places. Only once does he mention marking calves. Some cattle were for breeding, some were milk cows, and some, probably steers, were raised for beef. Several beeves, probably slaughtered rather than on the hoof, were sold for their meat. Brevard owned a Durham bull, of which he was very proud. When a calf was born Brevard often named its mother, but sires were rarely named, other than the Durham. In 1846 he wrote, "Killed my Durham Bull 1376 lb including hair & tallow". Perhaps the fellow had gotten old; he left several sons to carry on his job.

There are no oxen in the 1856 inventory, yet in 1853 Brevard had purchased two ox yokes at his Uncle Robin's estate sale. In 1839 he had "tied up two steers for oxen, Bender & Youles." He may not have been successful in training them to work; they are not mentioned again.

Through most of this period Brevard owned about 50 sheep. He mentioned clipping them usually in late April, then again in September. It is not unusual to sheer sheep twice a year in warm climates. His 1856 inventory does not contain sheep, yet it does list 3 pair of sheep shears. In 1853 he had bought 25 sheep from Robin's estate. He may have sold them, or neglected to list them. They were not particularly valuable. At Robin's estate sale he had paid $1.57 apiece for them.

Brevard's earlier journal of 1834 – 1854 did not inventory his livestock. The numbers in the 1856 inventory seem in keeping with the various animals named throughout the previous years. There is no mention in either journal of poultry, dogs, or cats, although he probably had them. Raising poultry was often the women's responsibility. Dogs were

used for hunting, and to keep wild animals away from the crops, chickens and other livestock. Cats controlled the vermin that ate the stored grain.

Other Farm Chores

Multitudinous loads of manure were hauled to the fields, mostly in the spring when preparing to plant. The instructional portion of the 1856 farm book suggests that manure should be a combination of animal waste and rotting vegetable matter; crushed limestone, shells, or similar minerals could be added. Whether Brevard followed this advice is unknown, however plowing under spent vegetable matter and dressing the field with animal manure would have the same effect. He sometimes mentioned stable manure, but more often simply uses the word manure. In 1840 he spread his fields with 205 loads of manure. In 1841 he hauled "in three days 49 loads manure with three hands, making 183 loads halled out, 140 loads put in the chesnut field for corn, not done halling but have quit halling for a while". These amounts are typical for the entire period.

Brevard frequently hauled stocks. An archaic definition of stock is a log or block of wood. Later it meant a supporting framework of timbers used during construction. Stocks – the wooden frame people were held in for punishment – derives from this meaning. In January 1841 Brevard "Commenced halling stocks to the mill for grist mill. Size 28 ft wide 34 ft long." After clearing some land he "Halled 121 Stocks to the mill from my new ground at the river in three days with three waggons." The next week was spent building several fences, making 1236 panels altogether.

Several of Brevard's slaves were trained as blacksmiths, and over the years he bought significant quantities of iron and steel. Yet there is no mention of a smithery or the goods it produced. The primary purpose of the journal is to record farming practices and results. Smithing, though essential on a large farm, may not have fit this purpose.

Miscellaneous and Interesting

Brevard often worked on the public road, something that was expected of good citizens. On August 16th and 17th of 1837 he worked "on the public road from the bridge to the widow Alexanders old place with fifty hands." This project probably involved white neighbors and their slaves; if all the "hands" were slaves they must have been hired for the job.

On December 21, 1836 Brevard "Let out the Bridge to be built across McDowells crick by John Nance for $200. 130 ft long." He and several others had been commissioned by the county to build a bridge across McDowell Creek on the road leading from Charlotte to Beatties ford. The "road leading from Charlotte" is present day Beatties Ford Road; it crosses McDowell Creek, east of Rural Hill. According to county records this bridge was frequently in disrepair. Brevard and others spent a great deal of time over the years keeping it functional.

In 1844 Brevard wrote that on October 24th and 25th, "A large mass meeting held by the whigs at Chowans ford [Cowan's Ford]… I think about 5 or 6 thousand persons attended". This was just two weeks before the presidential election in which Democrat James K. Polk faced Whig Henry Clay. The notice of the event printed in the Charlotte newspaper was a bit less partisan. "To the People of N. Carolina! Preparatory to the 4th of November, the Whigs of the 2d Congressional District, will hold a MASS MEETING at Cowan's Ford, on the 24th and 25th of the present month. Extensive arrangements have been made to accommodate all persons who may attend – and Whigs and Democrats are invited to attend and hear the discussions." The article continues with a list of dignitaries who had promised to attend, and members of the committees of Invitation and Arrangements. Brevard's brother Constantine was one of 18 men on the Committee of Invitation; Brevard and his uncles Robin Davidson and Dr. William McLean were among the 44 on the Committee of arrangements. The mass meeting supported Henry Clay for president but Polk won the election though he did not carry North Carolina, and probably not Mecklenburg County.[104]

On April 18, 1838 Brevard "Finished putting fish traps one full trap & 3 finger traps nine days with from eight to 10 hands." If only he had told us more.

The same year in May, 30 dozen candles were dipped, half for Brevard's father. This seems like a task of a simpler time on Brevard's bustling labor-hungry farm.

Then on September 18th, "The sun was eclipsed a little more than two thirds, beginning at 3 oclock & and ending at 5 in the evening."

[104] *Charlotte Journal*, October, 1844.

Appendices

A. Major John's Earliest Land Transactions

There are a number of real estate transactions in the records of Anson, Rowan and Mecklenburg Counties which, along with John's marriage to Violet Wilson, document the first few years of his adult life, when he was getting started as a farmer and laying the foundation for his later success. Early histories tell the story that John's father-in-law, Samuel Wilson, gave them a piece of land neighboring his on McDowell Creek as a wedding gift in 1761 and that they settled there and built Rural Retreat soon after they were married. However, deeds and court records of the time tell a very different tale. As a matter of fact, John Davidson bought his first piece of land in 1759, two and one-half years before he was married, not on McDowell Creek, but on Coddle Creek. This is where he started farming, where he and Violet lived for three and one-half years and where two of their ten children were born. It was not until 1765 that John bought 250 acres of land on McDowell Creek from his father-in-law for £45, built the cabin he called Rural Retreat and moved his family there from Coddle Creek.[105]

April 17, 1759: John was 23. He purchased 300 acres on Coddle Creek in Anson County for £50. The land was on both sides of Coddle Creek, below Joseph Tanner's bridge and mill. This land is today in Cabarrus County and lies just south of the Iredell County line. According to the deed, this piece of land originally belonged to John's step-father, Henry Hendry, and made up half of the land Hendry was granted in 1751. He lost this piece of land in a law suit brought by, among others, Samuel Wilson, John's future father-in-law. The land was auctioned by the Anson County Sheriff and purchased by John Dunn, Registrar of Deeds for Anson County. The deed for John's purchase was witnessed by his step-father, Henry Hendry.

The early court records of Anson County are missing so we know nothing more about the suit, but it is interesting to note that John Davidson's first property purchase was for land that had been taken from his step-father by his future father-in-law.

Presumably John started farming this land at that time but he may have continued to live with his mother, sister and step-father who lived on the adjacent piece of property. He may also have built a cabin for his future wife and children.

June 2, 1761: Two and one-half years later, John and Violet were married and undoubtedly set up housekeeping on this land on Coddle Creek. Their first two children, daughters Rebecca and Isabella, were born there. Violet's family lived on McDowell Creek, some 15 miles away: these people were all close neighbors.

[105] Davidson, *Major John Davidson*, 9.

July 20, 1762: One year after he was married, Major John purchased another 240 acres in the same area. The transaction was entered in the Rowan County Deed book and says that the land was originally granted to Thomas McGuon by Lord Granville. This places the property in Rowan County north of the Granville Line, although that line marking the separation between Rowan and Anson Counties had not been laid out in 1762 and would not be surveyed until 1771. A confusing detail is that the deed states that the land was known as Henry Hendry's plantation which does not tally with McGuon selling land that he had lived on since it was granted to him in 1752. And no court records have been found indicating that Henry Hendry owned any land in Rowan County.

January 16, 1765: Three and one-half years after his marriage to Violet, John Davidson purchased a plot of land from his father-in-law, Samuel Wilson. This was for 250 acres in Mecklenburg County on McDowell Creek, very near the Wilsons. He paid Samuel Wilson £45 for the land.

As an interesting side light, this deed is the only mention in the public record of the given name of Samuel Wilson's second wife, Sarah. Early histories say that her family name was Howard but that her given name was not known. In this deed John Davidson's name is spelled "Davison." Samuel Wilson's name is spelled both "Willson" and "Wilson" in the same document.

John Davidson built the home he called Rural Retreat shortly before or after this transaction in 1765 rather than in 1761 as the early histories would have it. This piece of land and the houses built on it would be the center of the Major John Davidson's Rural Hill plantation for generations to come.

February 23, 1765: Just a month after buying the land on McDowell Creek, John was involved with his mother and step-father in selling a piece of land. In this transaction Henry Hendry, his wife Isabella (spelled both as Isabel and Esabel in the same deed) and her son John Davidson sold 180 acres to John Neichler for £50. The land was part of Hendry's original land grant and was on the west side of Coddle Creek. This deed is the first and only time that Isabella is identified as being married to Henry Hendry and, of course, does not indicate how long they had been married.

This 180 acre plot was part of the upper survey. The lower survey was the one taken in the court action mentioned above and later bought by John Davidson. Apparently John Davidson had some claim on this land although we have no way of knowing what that claim was. The land started at the north end of Henry Hendrys Lane (spelled Leann) at Thomas McQuown's Plantation and ran down to the lower survey, and mentions buildings and an orchard.

A provision is made in the deed allowing John Davidson to build a dam on the branch, a little above the old dam, in order to water his meadow on the lower survey. This "branch" may have been Coddle Creek or one of its tributaries. It also provided that John Davidson could use an old barn as long as it "continued." These provisions may have been the reason that John was included in the deed. It is possible that, although John did

not own any of this land, he was included in the deed to document his rights in building a dam and using the old barn.

February, 1765: No day is shown on the deed, but this transaction was about the same time as the previous one. In it Major John sold "19 acres and 20 perches" to the same John Neichler. (A perch is a surveying term. An acre is 160 square perches.) This transaction was recorded in the Rowan County Deed Book.

October 20, 1765: Nine months after John bought the land on McDowell Creek from his father-in-law, he and his wife Violet (they had been married 4½ years by this time) sold some of the land on Coddle Creek to James Ker and John Murphy. The land amounted to 228 acres and was sold for £140. He had owned the land for 6½ years. Since he originally paid £50 for 300 acres, this yielded a profit of 270% which is not a bad return in 6½ years. The deed mentions building, houses, orchard, meadows, water and water court. The meadow had been mentioned in the earlier deed.

The deed ensures to Joseph Tanner the full use of the waters of Coddle Creek for supporting a mill dam and mentions a deed dated May 1, 1762. This earlier deed does not appear in the Anson County Deed Book and was apparently not recorded. It was not required that all deeds be recorded and many were not. The deed also mentions Joseph Tanner's Bridge on Coddle Creek as the upper boundary.

The Deeds and their Transcriptions: For the researcher the first place to look for land records is in one of the excellent genealogical abstracts published for many counties. The transcriptions for Mecklenburg County, especially those by Herman Ferguson, are generally excellent and allow the researcher to understand the transactions and concentrate on making full transcriptions of the most important ones.

The April 17, 1759 deed was transcribed by Brent H. Holcomb and reads:

> Anson County Deeds, Volume 6, p 57, 58, April 17, 1759. "John Dunn Esqr., of Rowan Co., to John Davidson of Anson Co., black smith, for £50 proc. money...land granted to Henry Hendry 27 Sept 1751...sold at publick vendue by an execution recovered in the Court of Anson at the suit of Samuel Wilson, Samuel McCleary, &c...300 A, adj. Thomas McQuawns giving line on both sides Coddle Creek...John Dunn (Seal), Wit: James Gount, Henry Hendry."[106]

[106] Holcomb, *Anson County Deeds and Wills,* 61.

The July 20, 1762 deed was transcribed by Jo White Linn and reads:

> Rowan County Deeds, Book 5, p 222-3, July 20, 1762
> "Thomas McGuon to John Davison of Anson for 2 pds 8 sh proc 240 A where sd McGuown now lives, known as Henry Hendry's plantation, granted McGuown by Granville 25 March 1752…"[107]

The January 16, 1765 deed in which Major John purchased the land where he would build Rural Retreat and Rural Hill was transcribed by Brent H. Holcomb and Elmer O. Parker and reads:

> Mecklenburg Deeds, Volume 2, p 291-2, January 16, 1765. "Samuel Wilson & wf Sarah of Meck., to John Davison of same, for £45...250 A on McDowells Creek, about ¼ mile below his own line, adj. George Cathey, Senr. granted 1 Sept 1753...Samuel Wilson (seal), Sarah Wilson (seal), Wit: James Aston, Hance Mec Whorter, Hen. Hendry."[108]

Because of the importance of this deed to the Davidson family, the complete transcription is given below. For a discussion of the transcription of deeds, their spelling, punctuation, abbreviations and legal phrases, see Appendix L, below.

> Transcription of the deed from an image of the original deed book. Mecklenburg County Deed Book 2, p 291-2.
>
> "This Indenture made this sixteenth Day of January in the year of our Lord one Thousand Seven Hundred and Sixty five Between Wilson and Sarah his Wife of Mecklenburg County and province of North Carolina of the one part and John Davison of the Same County and province And afors^{d}. of the other part Witnesseth that the S^{d}. Samuel Willson & Sarah his Wife for and in Consideration of the sum of forty five pounds Current Money of the province Afors^{d}. to them in hand paid by the said John Davison the Receipt Where of the they s^{d}. Samuel Wilson and Sarah his Wife Doth hereby acknowlidge and themselves there with fully Satisfied hath Granted Bargained Sold Aliened & Confirmed and by these presents Doth Grant Convey Sell Alien and Confirm Unto the S^{e}. Jno Davison to him his heirs and Assigns for Ever Claim tract or parcel of Land Situate Lying and Being in y^{e}. County and province Afs^{d}. Beginning at M^{r} McDowels Creek about a Quarter of a mile Below his own Line at a Red oak and Runs North 40 W 8 poles to a hikory thence W 87 W 44 poles to a Red oak then N°. 76 W 100 poles to a Red oak thence N. 56 W. 36 poles to a hickory on the River then Down the River S. 63 W 22. poles to a Spanish oak George Cathys ___ Corner then along his Line So 5 W 79 poles to a Red oak then South 74 W 185 poles to a Red oak then So 20 E 100 poles to a hickory on McDowls Creek then up its Several Courses to the first Station Containing 250 acres of Land be the Same more or

[107] Jo White Linn. *Rowan County, North Carolina Deed Abstracts*, (Salisbury, N.C., Mrs. Stahle Linn, Jr., 1972), s. v. "Davison, John."
[108] Holcomb and Parker, *Mecklenburg Deeds, 1763-1779*, 49

Less the sd. Land being Granted by his majesty Patton Bearing Date the first Day Sepr. in the year of our Lord one thousand Seven hundred and fifty Three as by the Said patent may more fully and at Large Appear together With all the ___Commodities advantages hereditaments Ways Waters Water Coursed and Appurtenances Whatsoever to the Said to the Said Tract of Land and premises above mentioned Belonging or in any Way Appurtaining and also the Revession and Revissions Remainder and Remainders Rents and Services of the said Land and of Every part and parcel thereof and all the Estate Right Title Interest property Claim and Demand Whatsoever of them the S^{d}. Samuel Wilson and Sarah his Wife of in or to the S^{d}. tract of Land and premises and Every part thereof to have and to hold y^{e}. s^{d}. tract of Land and all and Singular the s^{d}. premises Above mentioned and Every parcel thereof the Quitrents Becoming Due and payable to our sovereign Lord the King his heirs and Successors only Excepted and ____ With the Appurtenances unto the Sd. John Davison Davison his heirs and Assigns to the only higher Use and Behoof of him the Said John Davison his heirs and Assign for Ever and the said Samuel Wilson and Sarah his Wife for them and their heirs y^{e} s^{d}. land and premises and Every part and parcel thereof Ag^{nst} them and their heirs & Assigns & against all & Every person and persons Whatsoever to the S^{d}. John Davidson to him his heirs Exr^{s}. Adm^{rs}. or assigns Shall and Will Warrant and for Ever Defend and upon the Reasonable Request ___ and Charges in the Law of the S^{d}. John Davison his heirs or Assigns Shall and Will Sign Seal and Deliver any ___ further and other Reasonable Instruments or of Waiting Whatsoever for the further and better Asourences and Conssideration of the hereby Granted Premises With the Appurtenances Unto the said John Davidson his heirs or assigns as by him or Them or by his or their Counsel Learned in the Law Shall or may Be Reasonably advised or Required In Witness Whereof the Sd. Samuel Wilson and sarah his Wife hath hereunto set their hands and Seals the Day and year first Above Written"

"Signed Seald and Delivered
In presence of
James Aston
Hance MacWhorter
Hen. Hendry

Samuel Wilson (Seal)
Sarah Wilson (Seal)

Mecklenburg County
The Clerks record of the probate
of this Deed is lost
Test Wm B Alexander Clk"

The February 23, 1765 deed was abstracted by Holcomb and Parker but the abstract is wrong in an important way that makes it appear that Henry and Isabel Hendry are selling the land to John Davidson and John Niehler. Rather, the Henrys and John Davidson are selling the land to John Niehler. For this reason a complete transcription is given below.[109]

> Transcription of the deed from an image of the original deed book. Mecklenburg County Deed Book 2, p 268.
>
> "This Indenture Made this 23^{d} Day Feby in the Year of our Lord one thousand Seven hundred and Sixty Five Between Henry Hendry and Isabel his Wife and John Davison all of the Province of North Carolina in Mecklenburg County of the one Part and John Neichler of the Same Province and County of the Other Part Witnesseth that the said Henry Hendry and Isabel his Wife and John Davison for and in Consideration of the Sum of Fifty Pounds Current Money of the said Province Paid to them in hand by the said John Neichler the Receipt Whereof they do hereby acknowledge & themselves therewith fully satisfied and Contented of Every Part and Parcel thereof Hath Granted Bargained sold Aliened and Confirmed and by these Present Doth Grant Bargain, Sell alien and Confirm Unto to the said John Neichler to him his heirs Ex^{rs} and assigns forever a Certain Tract or Parcel of Land Scituate Lying and being in the Province and county Af^{sd} on the West Side of Coddle Creek being Part of the Two Surveys Granted to the said Henry Hendy by his Majesties Patent the Lower Survey being Taken by Virtue of an Execution Directed to the Sherriff of Anson County and sold by the said Sheriff unto M^{r}. John Dunn attorney the Said John Dunn sold the said Survey unto the Within Mentioned John Davidson by Deed of Conveyance as by the said Deed may More fully and at Large appear Containing in the Whole one hundred and Eighty acres of Land be the same more or Less Beginning at a Sasafras at the North End of the Leann known by the Name of Henry Hendrys Leann and Joining To Thomas McQuowns Plantation Runing thence S^{o} 20 W. 48 Poles to a stake thence S^{o} 12 W 34 Poles to a hickory thence S^{o} 20 W 96 Poles to a White Oak Corner of the Lower Survey then N. 75 W 128 Poles to a Then N 45 W 30 Poles to a White Oak then N 5 E 100 Poles to a Black Oak thence to the Beginning Together With all the Buildings Orchards Profits Commodities advantages and appurtenances Whatsoever to the above Premises Belonging on or in any wise appertaining and also the Reversion and Reversions Remainder and Remainders Rents and Services of the said Land and Premis and of every Part and Parcel thereof Estate Right Title Interest Property Claim and Demand Whatsoever of them the said Henry Hendry & Esable his Wife and John Davison of in or to the said Tract of Land and Premises and every Part and Parcel thereof of the Quit Rents Becoming Due and Payable to our Sovereign Lord the King his heirs and Successors only Excepted and ___its Further Excepted unto the said John Davison to him his heirs & assigns forever full Power Priviledge and Liberty to Erect Build and support a Damm on the Branch a Little above the Old Dam in Order to Water Meadow Ground on the Lower survey as also the Benefit of Hog

[109] Holcomb and Parker, *Mecklenburg Deeds, 1763-1779,* 48.

yard During the Continuance of the Old Barn With all the Rest of the Appurtenances unto the John Neichler his heirs and assigns forever to the only Proper use and _____ of him the said John Neichler his heirs exc^{rs} adm^{rs} and assigns forever and the said Henry Hendry & Esable his Wife and John Davison for them and their heirs the said Land and Premises and every Part and Parcel the use against them & and their heirs and against all and every other person and persons Whatsoever to the said John Neichler to him his heirs Exc^{rs} adm^{rs} & assigns Shall and will Warrant and forever Defend and upon the Reasonable Request Cost and Charges in the Law of the said John Neichler his heirs and assigns Shall and will Sign Seal and Deliver any such ___ & Other Reasonable Instrument, Instruments of Writing Whatsoever for the further and better assurance and Confirmation of the hereby Granted Premises With the appurtenances unto the said John Neichler his heirs and assigns as by him or them or by his or their Council Learned in the Law Shall or may be Reasonably advised Devised or Required In Witness Whereof the said Henry Hendry Esable his Wife and John Davidson Hath hereunto Set their hands and seals the Day & year above Writen"

"Signed Sealed & Delivered
In Presence of
Thomas M"Quown
Hugh M" Quown

Henry Hendry (seal)
her
Esbel X Hendry (seal)
mark
John Davison (seal)

Mecklenburg County
The Clerks record of the
Probate of this Deed
Is lost
Test W^{m}. B. Alexander Clk"

There is another transaction that occurred about the same time, also in February 1765. In it Major John sold "19 acres and 20 perches" to the same John Neichler. (A perch is a surveying term. An acre is 160 square perches.) This transaction was recorded in the Rowan County Deed Book.

The February 1765 deed was abstracted by Jo White Linn and reads:

Rowan County Deed Book 6, p 310-1, February 1765
"John Davison of Mecklenburg Co. N. C. to John Neichler of the same place for 5 sh sterl 19 A & 20 perches adj the tract Thomas McQuoun now lives on adj the tract sd Davison sold to Henry Hendry…"[110]

[110] Linn, *Rowan Count Deeds.*

The October 29, 1765 deed was transcribed by Holcomb and Parker and reads:

> Mecklenburg Deeds, Volume 1, page 202-4, October 20, 1765.
> "John Davison & wf Violet of Meck., to James Ker and John Murphy of same, for £140...land adj. Thomas McQuowns, on both sides Coddle Creek, below Joseph Tanner's bridge, land granted to Henry Hendry 27 Sept 1751...sold by the sheriff of Anson County to suit of Samuel Wilson 27 Sept 1751...sold by the sheriff of Anson County to suit of Samuel Wilson and Samuel McCrury against the goods, chattels, etc. of Henry Hendry, and brought by John Dunn, Esq. then sold to John Davison 17 Apr 1759...John Davison (Seal), Violet Davison (Seal), Wit: Thomas McQuown, Henry Hendry."[111]

B. A Marriage Deed of Trust

In 1813 Major John's last remaining single daughter Margaret married Major James Harris of Cabarrus County. She was 36 which was quite old for a first marriage and Major John, being very well off, made provision for his daughter to continue to live the life she was accustomed to. Local histories and genealogies place the wedding date at December 10, 1813 but the legal documents described below are dated December 14, 1813 and refer to her "Marriage intended to be had & solemnized with Major James Harris," so the wedding must have been sometime after December 14.

On December 14, 1813 Major John signed a deed of trust with his son Robert Davidson and his son-in-law William Bain Alexander "for & in consideration of the natural love & affection which the said John Davidson hath for his Daughter Margaret Davidson, for the purpose of making a Suitable provision for her on her Marriage intended to be had & solemnized with Major James Harris of the County of Cabarrus, and for the purpose of securing to her the absolute right of disposing of the property hereafter mentioned in the event of her decease without heirs of her Body then living, and further, for & in consideration of the Sum of ten Shillings."[112]

In this agreement Major John sold the seven slaves and their increase to his son and son-in-law for 10 shillings with the agreement that they would hold them for the benefit of Margaret. If he gave the slaves to Margaret without such an agreement they would become the property of James Harris as soon as he married Margaret. The modern version of this type of agreement is called a pre-nuptial agreement.

The document specified that Margaret, "during the joint lives of her self and James Harris her intended husband shall receive and have all the benefit & advantage which may arise from the use, hire or labor of the said Slaves and their future increase." On the death of James Harris she is to receive the seven slaves and their increase (to avoid their being included in Harris' estate). If Margaret died before James, the slaves were to be delivered according to her Last Will and Testament. If she died before James and did not

[111] Holcomb and Parker, *Mecklenburg Deeds, 1763-1779*, 8.
[112] *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Deed Books,* 20:31.

leave a will, then Harris was to get one-third of the value of the slaves and their increase and two-thirds would go to Margaret's brothers and sisters in equal shares, or to their children if they were not then living. The final clause overrides all of these if Margaret dies "leaving issue of her body." In that case on her death the slaves shall be divided equally between her children.

In a separate document dated the next day, December 15, 1813, James Harris binds himself to the same two men in the amount of $2,500. The condition of this bond is that since James Harris has received considerable personal property to the value of $1,250 in cash, bonds, notes, cattle, horses and furniture in consequence of his marriage that he is to allow Margaret, his intended wife, to enjoy the use of this property during their joint lives. And that James Harris shall leave this property to Margaret in his will and will give such property to beneficiaries of her will. If she dies without children and intestate he is to give 2/3 of this property to her brothers and sisters. In addition to this he must abide by the obligations of the preceding deed of trust.[113]

From the terms of these agreements it is clear that no one expected that, at the advanced age of 36, Margaret would have any children. However they did have one daughter, born in 1816 and named Violet after her grandmother. Margaret died in 1830 at the age of 53.

C. Courts and Legal Structure

In the Royal Colony of North Carolina the laws and legal structure were modeled on that of England with appropriate variations for local conditions. English Common Law prevailed and was enforced by county sheriffs and courts. The basic officers of the legal system were the Justices of the Peace. They were appointed by the Assembly, based on local recommendations and were chosen from among the "better sort of men." Appointment as a JP was for life, on good behavior – that is, a JP could be removed from office by the Assembly, but seldom was. A JP was given the honorary title of Esquire in court documents and was empowered to settle minor cases by himself. These included fines up to a minor amount and did not include corporal punishment such as branding or whipping. There were 20 or 30 or 40 JPs in each county. They met annually during court week to elect the sheriff, set tax rates and other such business. At this time they also selected 3 or 4 of their number to preside over the quarterly court sessions.

In each county the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions was held for one week every three months. The time for holding court was assigned by the Assembly so that the counties in a district held court on different weeks. This allowed the lawyers to "ride the circuit" from court to court and appear and represent clients in each court in their district. The District or Superior Court met twice a year and decided the most important cases, including those subject to hanging. The district court for the back country was held in Salisbury which was by far the largest and most important town in the area.

[113] Ferguson, *Deed Books 15-23,* 20:32.

The Assembly was the state's primary governing body and each county had two representatives who were elected by the voters in the county. The larger cities had one additional "borough representative" elected by the citizens of that city. Qualification for voting included being male, 21 or over and owning a certain amount of land. All elections were held by the public outcry method: On election day, the voters went to their local polling places, judges appointed by the County Court called out the names, the voters publicly stated their preferences and the judges wrote them down, tallied them and reported them to the Court which then declared the winners. Although secret ballots were used in some instances in ancient Greece and Rome, and were used in France after their revolution, the secret ballot we are so familiar with today was not used in the English speaking world until 1856 in Australia and was adopted in the US state-by-state between 1884 and 1891.

The Assembly met every year or two, usually in December or January, when the elected representatives were able to get away from their farming duties. There was a small upper body, called the Council. Its members were appointed by the Assembly. Members of the Assembly asked permission to introduce a bill and then read it out to the Assembly. The bill was read out two more times and voted on. If passed, it was carried to the Council which sat at the same time. If the Council passed the bill, they sent it to the Governor. At the end of the Assembly session, which could last several months, the Governor addressed the Assembly and told them which bills he had approved. These he sent to the Board of Trade in England which had authority over the colony. The board of trade submitted them, with their recommendations, to the King's Council who presented them to the King. The King either allowed or dis-allowed each bill and word was sent back to the Colony. It could take up to two years after a bill was passed to determine whether it was a law or not. In practice the bills were considered to be laws until "the King's pleasure be heard."

The Colonial Records contain the minutes of the Assembly and Council meetings and the bills introduced and voted on are named but not included in detail or even described. Of course many bills were introduced that did not pass and we have no information on these bills except for their titles. There are also a number of laws of this period which have been lost, leaving no record of them except for their titles.[114]

D. The Story of "Plum," Slave and Freedman

Between 1778 and 1800 a Negro man named Plum appears in the county records several times. His story illuminates the life of an exceptional man who was a Negro slave and then a free black man.

In 1778 Samuel Wilson (Major John's father-in-law) died and left his son John Wilson "a negro man Plumb" among other things.[115]

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[114] Saunders, *Colonial Records,* Vol 23, 24 and 25.
[115] Holcomb, *Mecklenburg Wills 1763-1790*, 72.

In 1795 John Wilson, died and, apparently without wife or children, left his plantation to his half-brother William Wilson "…except half of the orchard and the two fields … for the use of my negro Plum during his lifetime, and at his demise sd lands are to revert to the sd. William." He also left Plum "a mare, a plow and tackling, my belled cow and calf, all my everyday clothes," and "which negro I hereby set free from all servitude as a slave & the above articles to be at his own disposal with a red heifer...a ewe and lamb, six head of hogs..., two pots, and my bed and two blankets…and I also give to Plum an axe and a hoe."[116]

In July 1795 John Wilson's will was admitted to probate but it was caveated (questioned) by his half-brother William and others. In October 1795 the question was put to a jury who heard witnesses for and against and found "that the deceased had a right to devise" and the will was admitted to probate. [117]

Two years later the court ordered that Plum be set free. The actual wording of the court order is "Whereas John Wilson, Deceased, late of the County of Mecklenburg in the State of North Carolina, did by his last will & Testament emancipate and set free from servitude his Negro man Plumb, and whereas it doth further appear from the representation of sundry respectable persons that the Said Negro man Plumb is a sober, Honest, inoffensive, & Industrious person and that he is worthy of his freedom for Meritorious Services rendered to his late Master. Ordered therefore from the above considerations that the Said Negro man Plumb be emancipated and entitled to such priviledges & immunities as the Law of the State grant to those of Colour in Similar situations, and that the Clerk of the Court give a Certificate under the Seal of the County of Such Emancipation."[118]

Finally, in 1800 Hugh Torrence was appointed guardian of Plum "a free Negro liberated by Court at October Session 1797." A guardian was appointed by the court in cases where a person had tangible assets and was judged incapable of managing them because they were insane, a minor, a female or, in this case, a free Negro.[119]

E. Land Acquisition

When the British colonies in North America were first established all of the land belonged to the King of England who owned it by right of conquest. A man wanting to settle in the colony could find a piece of vacant land and ask the King for a Royal land grant which he was usually given. The word "grant" makes it sound like a gift but it was not free. Rather, a land grant is permission to purchase a certain amount of land for so many shillings per 100 acres. Most of the land Major John acquired by land grant was priced at 30 shillings (1½ pounds) per 100 acres.

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[116] Ferguson, *Mecklenburg Wills, Books A-J*, G:34.
[117] Ferguson, *Mecklenburg Minutes, 1780-1800,* 3:245, 266.
[118] Ferguson, *Mecklenburg Minutes, 1780-1800,* 4:74.
[119] Ferguson, *Mecklenburg Minutes, 1780-1800*, 4:274.

Land granted by the King was also subject to a "Quit Rent." This was an annual payment made by the property owner to the King, generally two shillings per 100 acres. Quit Rent was a holdover from medieval times when favored nobles received land from the King and in turn owed him their loyalty including military support whenever required. As times became more peaceful this military obligation was replaced by an annual monetary contribution – a rent to quit them of the military obligation. Quit Rents continued in the British Colonies right up until the American Revolution although, due to a chronic shortage of hard money, they apparently were seldom paid in full.

During and after the revolution the land grant custom continued even up into the 20th century, but that of quit rent did not. These grants, whether issued by the King or by State governments, were signed by the Governor and were often, but not always, registered in the county where the land was located.

Other ways of acquiring land were to receive it as a gift, as an inheritance, or to buy it from the owner. Purchase deeds occasionally tell us something about buildings and other improvements that were on the land but they do not give very much information. The deed was for the land, not the house that was on the land so sometimes it will say "the Manor House" sometimes "buildings" and usually no mention of improvements. As with grants these deeds were sometimes but not always recorded in the county deed book.

Another variation was buying the land from the University of North Carolina. When the University was founded in 1789 its charter granted it the rights to all escheated property, that is property which comes to the state due to abandonment, failure to pay taxes or a person dying without a will and with no known heirs. The University sold this escheated property to support it operation.

The term "metes and bounds" is used to describe the surveying method used to measure out the land when it is claimed or sold. The corners are marked out by blazes on existing trees, or by posts or rock piles placed in the ground and the land is described using angles and distances between these corners. This is in contrast to the later or "military" method of surveying in which the entire land is pre-surveyed and measured out in square mile "sections." This latter method prevailed in the new territories and states from the early part of the 19th century while metes and bounds remained the method in the original thirteen states.

In the very early days some of the land surveys were quite approximate. In heavily forested and undeveloped land there was a great temptation to do an "armchair" or "fireside" survey instead of going out and clearing all boundary lines of brush and trees in order to sight the angles and measure the distances between the corners. In later years there are many court records appointing juries to procession specific lines or pieces of property to determine the correct boundaries. Often a plat was found to contain a good deal more or less land than the original deed claimed. In some cases this could be as much as plus or minus 20 or 30 percent. Most deeds stated the calculated or estimated acreage and then the words "the same more or less" indicating the approximate nature of

the measurement. That same phrase is used in deeds today when our measurements are much more accurate.

F. The Value of Money in the Colonial and Early Federal Periods

In dealing with public records such as deeds and wills from this period it is confusing to try to determine what something cost. Although it is nearly impossible to determine the value of an 18th century item in 21st century money, a familiarity with the types of money in circulation at the time can help us understand in a general way.

In the early colonial period the official money was the British pounds, shillings and pence. Twelve pence made a shilling and 20 shillings made a pound. This was "hard money" made of gold, silver or copper. The value of gold and silver coins lay in the value of the precious metal it contained and there was no Royal paper money. This money was symbolized as £, s and d. The pound sign (£) is a stylized L, shortened from the Latin *libra ponde,* a pound by weight. (This accounts for the abbreviation lb. for pound weight). The word shilling (s) is from the German for divide. Varieties of this word were used in a number of European currencies. The penny (plural pence) is from the Old English and symbolized as d, from *denarius*, an ancient Roman coin. There were various ways to write money amounts but a common one was £..s..d as £10..4..8 being 10 pounds, 4 shillings, 8 pence.

In addition to British money, there were lots of other coins in unofficial circulation. The most common was the Spanish Dollar. It was sometimes cut up into eight pie-shaped pieces. These were called pieces of eight and each one was a bit. Thus we have today two-bits, four-bits, six-bits and a dollar. These Spanish coins were made in Mexico and Peru and were very uniform and of full weight in the amount of silver they contained. They were highly trusted, circulated widely and were common in the British colonies. Other coins such as the Dutch Guilder, Portuguese Crusado, French Louis, German Mark and many others also circulated. It took a high level of intelligence, knowledge, and calculation to do business in this mixture of coins.

In America there was always a shortage of this hard money. Monetary theory at the time held that the wealth of a country and thus its prosperity lay in the amount of hard currency held within its borders. The mother country was anxious to take in hard money but reluctant to let any of it go, so Parliament established tariffs on imported goods and laws prohibiting shipping hard money out of England. Several times the Royal Colony of North Carolina petitioned the King to allow the importation of copper half-cents to encourage commerce but this was denied each time.

Because of this shortage of hard money, monetary transactions were mainly by book entry or personal note. Examination of account books of the era show that a merchant, doctor or lawyer kept a blank book in which they kept an account for each customer and accumulated their transactions. Often the accounts were settled in December and January when it was also customary to negotiate and sign contracts. In this way the little hard

money in circulation could go from hand to hand to hand, settling a whole series of debts. Some debts were settled with personal notes which could carry an interest charge but often did not. Moreover, it appears that a great many debts were never settled in hard money or notes. A few were off-set by the exchange of labor or other goods and many were settled on the death of one of the parties. Estate papers often listed a great number of debts, credits and notes which all had to be settled by the executor before the estate could be closed. It sometimes took years to settle an estate and dispose of the various kinds of property. When the movable assets of an estate were auctioned off, the payments could be by notes due in six or twelve months' time.

In 1704 Queen Ann issued a proclamation to all of the colonies establishing what came to be known as "proclamation money." This law set the value of the Spanish dollar a full 33⅓% above their value in silver in the hope of attracting more hard money to the colonies who in turn would be able to pay their taxes and quit rents in hard money. Four years later Parliament extended this over-valuation to all foreign coins. Eventually the term Proclamation Money or "proc money" came to be applied widely and prices were stated in either Sterling or in proc. Money.

In general it was not legal for the colonies to print and issue their own paper money but at times of emergency they did issue notes denominated in proc money. These were a temporary expedient and were to be retired and destroyed over a few years as they came into the treasury in tax payments. However many of them were extended and continued to circulate for many years, often at a highly inflated exchange rate. During the American Revolutions such "fiat money" issued by Congress inflated to the point where it was worth virtually nothing or, as the saying went, "not worth a Continental." The same applied to a lesser degree to State Money issued during and after the Revolution.

From time to time during the Federal and anti-bellum period notes were issued by state, national and private banks, but during this period most ordinary transactions continued to be transacted by book entry and personal notes. These were always in terms of North Carolina currency although each state issued notes of its own. These notes circulated widely and their relative value compared to North Carolina currency varied widely and rapidly. To further confuse things, the money in circulation and in daily use was in dollars and cents but public fines, fees and taxes continued to be denominated in pounds, shillings and pence.

In looking at the old records and trying to figure out whether a person was well off or not, it is helpful to remember that during this entire time, a man's work was worth about a dollar a day for plowing, hauling and harvesting. This varied during times of war or financial panics, but always returned to about this value. Slave labor was worth somewhat less and that of a skilled craftsman, black or white, was worth more. Remarkably, the wage of a dollar a day was very much the same from the colonial period through the First World War and right up until the US went off the gold standard. Since then there has been so much inflation to our money supply that it is very difficult to compare prices from decade to decade much less from century to century.

G. A Confusion of Counties

Tracing court records, deeds and wills is confused by the fact that new counties were constantly being formed during these early years. As the population of a county increased due to immigration from other colonies or other countries, a county reached a size where it could be split into two or more separate counties. In this case the Colonial Assembly passed a law establishing the new county and setting up a commission to build a courthouse, prison and stocks. Forming more counties was of benefit to people living in that county because the new courthouse would be closer to where they lived and also because each county had two representatives in the Assembly.[120]

Anson County was formed in 1750 from Bladen County. It was named for Admiral George, Lord Anson who was famous for sailing around the world and capturing a Spanish Treasure Ship. Admiral Anson also commanded the fleet that carried Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz to England to marry King George III. The new county comprised the entire territory west of the Pee Dee and Yadkin Rivers. The line ran east of the Pee Dee and then continued vaguely north to the Virginia Line. During the westward expansion, these new county lines ran through unsettled and unexplored territory, so the boundaries were necessarily vague until they could be surveyed, which often happened many years later. The western boundary was "The Great South Sea," or the Pacific Ocean. The earliest settlers in the back country all lived in Anson County.

By 1753 enough settlers had established themselves in the northern part of Anson County that Rowan County was formed. This new county comprised all of Anson County north of the Granville Line. The eastern boundary was a line extending due north from where the Anson County line crossed the Granville line, to Virginia. The northern boundary was the Virginia line and the western boundary was the Great South Sea.

Although at this time North Carolina was a Royal Colony, more than half of the land in the colony belonged to Lord Granville, one of the eight original proprietors. When the other proprietors sold their land back to the King in 1729 Granville decided to keep his part. The original Carolina Colony extended from the Virginia line south to where Daytona Beach, Florida is today, and extended from sea to sea. When the King gave Lord Granville the northern 1/8th of the Carolina Colony he was giving him a piece of land which would later make up over half of North Carolina. Lord Granville's line extended straight east and west where the Mecklenburg-Iredell County line is today.

Lord Granville's name originally was John, Lord Carteret and he had inherited his proprietorship from his grandfather, Sir George Carteret. Theirs was a distinguished family and one of his modern descendants was Diana, Princess of Wales. In 1744 his mother died and John inherited her title making him John, Earl Granville. Thus the southern boundary of his land became the Granville line. He has the distinction of being the only person for whom two of North Carolina's 100 counties are named: Carteret County and Granville County both refer to him.

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[120] David Leroy Corbitt, *The Formation of the North Carolina Counties 1663-1943*, (Raleigh, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 2000).

By 1762 there were enough settlers in the western part of Anson County that they petitioned the Assembly to form a new county to be named Mecklenburg in honor of the ancestral home of the new Queen, Princess Sophia Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz. This county was south of Rowan, north of the South Carolina Line and extended to the Pacific Ocean. There was one problem in that the North and South Carolina dividing line had not been agreed to by the two governments. This was to cause much trouble to the residents of southern Mecklenburg County when it was finally decided on in 1772, but it did not affect the residents of the northern part of the county.

Finally (for our purposes) in 1768 Mecklenburg County was divided at the Catawba River and the western part became Tryon County, named after Royal Governor William Tryon. In 1779 Tryon was divided into two counties, Lincoln, next to Mecklenburg, and Rutherford, further west. Also, in 1788 Iredell County was formed from western part of Rowan County and in 1792 Cabarrus County was formed from the north-eastern part of Mecklenburg. In 1846 Gaston County was formed out of the southern part of Lincoln County. Due to the mid-century formation of Gaston County, some of the properties that were in Lincoln County during the time period covered by this study are now in Gaston County.

During these early days the dividing lines between the counties, and between the states, were not always marked out, so the early settlers sometimes were not sure which county they lived in. This causes additional confusion in researching court records.

H. A Confusion of Names

Nearly every name in the written record appears in a variety of spellings. Over the years this has been attributed to illiteracy or to having an active imagination, or to a man deliberately changing the spelling of his name because of a family feud. Although these things may have happened occasionally this is not the reason for the wide variety of spellings.

There were no birth certificates or other official documents recording names at birth or at any other time. Even the most intelligent and educated man had little occasion to write his name and then only when he signed a personal letter or a promissory note or receipt. Some of these documents have survived but by far the majority of the examples we have of these names are in County Court minutes, Deeds and Wills.

In these public records the writing was done not by the individual named but by the County Clerk, Register of Deeds or other public official. Moreover, these were often written out days or weeks later, based on notes taken during the court proceedings. When the clerk came to write up the record of a week of court proceedings and to put them down “in a fair hand” in the Court Minute Book, the individuals were not present to tell him how to spell their names. Thus we have cases where a person’s name can appear in

two or even three different spellings in a single court document. Often the public spelling of a name changed when a new County Clerk came into office.

All documents of the time, both public and private, were written by hand. Many people wrote a fine hand, but some never mastered the art. Important documents were often copied and recopied by some number of people, so naturally errors occurred. This was especially problematic when people's names were involved. A name has no context, so scribes wrote what they believed they saw, and when recording oral communications, what they thought they heard. Scribes often spelled names phonetically which frequently differed from the correct spelling.

I. Naming Conventions and other John Davidsons

A peculiar naming convention can be noticed among Scots-Irish Presbyterians in the US in the late 18th and early 19th century. First of all, up to about 1800 very few had middle names. The few exceptions such as John McKnitt Alexander would carry the same middle name for generations because it was a name of great honor. The middle name McKnitt was such an integral part of Alexander that his name often appears, even in deeds and court records, as "John McKnitt" without the Alexander. Middle names began to appear about 1800 as the increased population of the area led to some confusion in legal records. Soon the use of middle names was widespread and many people used their middle name rather than their first name.

A larger confusion, however, came from the naming of both boys and girls after their parents and grandparents. In many cases, although not in all, the first born son was named after his paternal grandfather while the second son was named after his father, and the third son was named after his maternal grandfather. After that there was more variation but, except for some imaginative ones such as Sugar Dulin and his brother Salt, Darling Belk, Philemon Morris, and so on, most names were chosen from a handful of old family names, other familiar names, or Biblical ones. Girls likewise were often given family names, although the naming structure was not as rigid as for the boys. On the other hand, there were common nicknames for girls some of which are not common today, such as Ann called Nancy, Mary called Polly and Martha called Patsy.

All of this can lead to great confusion in examining legal records. In our case, if there is only one John Davidson publically active at the time, he generally appears as John. If there are two or more, then one may be John and a modifier may be added to the others such as Major John, or John Senior or Junior. People were also differentiated by where they lived or their occupation, as in John Davidson (river) or John Davidson, Black Smith.

However, as soon as there is only one active again, the records revert to just plain John. In some cases a nickname stuck, such as in the case of Silver-Headed Jacky Davidson. Martha "Patsy" Davidson's husband, Major John Howard Davidson, was sometimes called "Long Headed Jacky".

This confusion may be the original source for the old southern custom of applying imaginative nick names such as Bubba, Sonny, Skipper and so on. By the third or fourth generation of Major John Davidson's family, there could have been 6 or 8 Johns and 8 or 10 Roberts, all cousins of each other.

The fact that John Davidson was a very popular name across the Carolina Piedmont during this period adds an extra level of difficulty to the task of trying to find out who Major John was and what he accomplished. For that reason we have discounted any mention of John Davidson which did not fit in with farming in the Hopewell area during his active lifetime – 1756 when he turned 21 to 1823 when, at the age of 88, he retired from active farming. Some court records refer to Major John Davidson or to John Davidson Senior or Junior but there is little consistency to these references.

Here are some of the conflicts. None of those listed below are Major John Davidson.

- John Davidson of Chestnut Level, Pennsylvania came to the backcountry about 1752. This was the brother of George Davidson and they were brothers or cousins of Major John's father Robert. This John Davidson settled in Rowan County for a while, then moved to the west, settled and built a fort, later called Davidson's Fort near where the town of Old Fort is today.
- In 1776 a John Davidson and his wife were killed by Cherokee Indians near Davidson Fort. This may have been the man who built the fort or some other John Davidson.
- In 1780 John Davidson, son of Colonel George Davidson, and his family were butchered by the Cherokees near Old Fort. This may have been a confusion with the couple who died in 1776, or there may have been two John Davidsons who met the same fate.
- There was a prominent merchant named John Davidson living in Charlotte in 1800 and 1806, and probably before and after those dates.
- A John Davison, Blacksmith bought land on Fishing Creek in 1763. This was then in Anson county North Carolina and is now in South Carolina near Historic Brattonsville.
- A John Davidson died in 1778. His executors were James and John Davidson
- There was a Major John Davidson in the Anson County Militia in 1776 and 1777, the same time that our Major John was serving in the Mecklenburg Militia.
- There was a Captain John Davidson in the Rowan County Militia in 1776 and 1777.
- There was a Captain John Davidson who was the horse wrangler for the Cherokee Campaign of 1776.
- There was a private John Davidson in the Continental Line in 1781
- A Field Return of the Southern Army under General Gates at Camp New Providence was issued by "John Davidson, B. M." which stands for Brigade Major, a staff position like an aide de camp to General Gates. The entry is not dated, but General Gates was at Camp New Providence only from November 23

to 28, 1780. This was most probably an officer in the Continental Line and not our Major John.[121]

- In 1786 John Davidson was an administrator of the will of James Davidson, along with the widow, Jane Davidson. This was probably the Charlotte merchant since we do not know of a James Davidson connected with Major John's family. This James Davidson had a minor son named John Davidson.
- Major John Davidson, called "long-headed Jacky" was not related to Major John as far as we can determine. He married Patsy Caldwell, daughter of the Revd. Alexander Caldwell and Major John's daughter Sarah.

J. The Lunacy of Rev. Alexander Caldwell

Sarah, the 5th daughter and 6th child of Major John and Violet Davidson, married the Revd. Alexander Caldwell in October 1794 at the age of 26. Alexander Caldwell was from a fine religious family and was the pastor of Rocky River Presbyterian Church. His brother, the Revd. Samuel C. Caldwell was the pastor of both Hopewell and Sugar Creek Presbyterian Churches. His father was a minister as was his grandfather, the Revd. Alexander Craighead, the first and most influential minister called by the Presbyterian Churches of Mecklenburg County.

Three years after their marriage, in 1797, Rev. Alexander Caldwell was dismissed by the session of Rocky River Church because he had become "deranged." In the October court of 1798 a jury was appointed to determine "the mental situation of Alexander Caldwell…& whether he may be in a State of Lunacy." The jury included his father John Davidson, his brother Robert Davidson, John McKnitt Alexander and nine others. They found him to be in "a State of Lunacy as not to be able to take care of his own property, and further that he has lost property for the want of that capacity," and recommended that his brother, the Revd. Samuel. C. Caldwell, be appointed as his guardian to take charge of his property.[122] [123]

In the same session the Court appointed the Revd. Samuel C. Caldwell as his brother's guardian. Evidence from the US Census confirms family stories that Sarah and her three children were living at Rural Hill by 1800. Either her husband was not capable of taking care of them or providing for them or perhaps he was violent or abusive to her or the children. Sarah and the three children continued to live at Rural Hill until at least 1820.

Sarah's three children were

- Martha "Patsy" Caldwell, born July 28, 1795
- John Hancock (or John D.) Caldwell. His birth date is not known, but the evidence of 1800 census indicates that he must have been born between Patsy and David in order to have been less than 10 years old in 1800. He was probably born in 1797.

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[121] Saunders, *Colonial Records,* 15:162.
[122] Spence, *Rocky River Church.*
[123] Ferguson, *Mecklenburg Minutes, 1780-1800, 4:130.*

- David Alexander Caldwell, born January 17, 1799

Note that John was born about the time his father was dismissed from Rocky River Church, and that when the Revd. Alexander Caldwell appeared in court and was declared a lunatic his wife Sarah was 6-months pregnant with her third child, David Alexander.

The 1800 and 1810 censuses indicate that Sarah and the three children were living at Rural Hill. The 1820 census indicates that John Caldwell, age about 23 was no longer living there. Sarah and her other two children remained in the household.

In the February court of 1822 the Revd. Samuel C. Caldwell petitioned the court to be released from the guardianship of his brother "Alexander Caldwell, a Lunatic." The Court appointed Majr. John H. Davidson, John Caldwell and David Alexander Caldwell, all heirs of Alexander Caldwell, to be his guardians, and a committee was appointed to "Settle with the Revd. Saml. C. Caldwell as guardian of his Brother Alexander Caldwell, a Lunatic."

Majr. John H. Davidson was known as "long-headed Jacky" and was the husband of Martha "Patsy" Caldwell, the eldest child of Alexander Caldwell. John and David Alexander were the two sons of Alexander. David Alexander Caldwell, the youngest son had just turned 21, so these three took on the guardianship of their father (and thus of their inheritance) as soon as the youngest of them was of legal age.

In the May, 1822 court session the Revd. Samuel C. Caldwell's guardianship of his brother was declared fully settled. In fact the committee determined that he had overpaid the sum of $10.00.

On January 18, 1824 all of Sarah's brothers and sisters gave her the gift of "a negro Man Named Cyrus" and recorded the gift in the February court records. This was just after Major John broke up housekeeping in the fall of 1823 and Cyrus probably came from the general distribution made by the Major.

About 1799 or 1800, when Sarah moved back home to Rural Hill, her three children were all under the age of five. It is probable that these three children spent considerable time with her brother Robin and his wife Peggy at Holly Bend, not only visiting but living there for extended periods, as was the custom of the times for orphans.

- In 1853 David Alexander Caldwell was one of the executors of Robin's will and received a bequest of 15 Negros and 500-600 acres of land (see the section on Robin and Peggy). When a man or a couple had no children and expected that they would not have any, they sometimes took into their home a male relative, usually a nephew. They raised this person as their own child and made them heir to the bulk of their estate.

- In Robin's will Patsy received 10 shares of stock of The Bank of the State of North Carolina and three Negroes. Being raised at Rural Hill, she may have lived

at Holly Bend for some time, learning the arts of spinning and housewifery from her Aunt Peggy. She had married Col. John H. Davidson and lived in Alabama at the time of Robin's death.

- John H. Caldwell is not mentioned in either Robin's or Peggy's will. From court records we believe that he was alive at the time. This is a mystery to be investigated another time.

K. Road and River Work

In these times roads were laid out and maintained by overseers appointed by the county court. All property owners near the road were required to provide labor (theirs or some of their "hands") for the maintenance of the road. From time to time the assembly passed laws regulating these roads which specified the width and height which was to be cleared, and kept cleared, for the roads. Laying out a road consisted in finding the most convenient way for the road to run and clearing the trees and underbrush to the specified dimensions. They did not make any excavations or move any dirt except where creek banks had to be knocked down to allow a crossing. Maintenance involved clearing fallen limbs and trees, cutting back the undergrowth, and filling in or rerouting a road after a washout. In Mecklenburg County, with its rich red clay, it was noted by travelers that in wet weather the roads were bottomless mud holes except on the tops of hills where they were as slick as ice.

Throughout the colonial period there were a number of laws passed regarding the clearing of rivers. Just as with roads, supervisors were appointed who were responsible for gathering hands from the local farms and clearing their assigned section of river of fallen limbs and trees and other snags. Although this was convenient for navigation, the stated purpose of the laws was to keep the rivers clear for the passage of fish. This went so far as to prohibit any dams that stretched more than three-fourths of the way across the major rivers including the Catawba. There were several fisheries on the Catawba and at that time most rivers in the eastern US had massive shad runs each year. There is some evidence that the Catawba yielded hundreds of barrels of salt fish each year and that running a fishery was a profitable enterprise.[124]

L. Deeds of the 18th and 19th Centuries and their Transcriptions

A Deed was a document transferring a piece of property from one or more persons to another. The original deed, signed by the parties and witnessed, was kept by the buyer as his proof of ownership. Often, but not always, the deed was registered in court and copied into the county deed book. Sometimes a deed was registered in a different county or state than where the property was located, or registered in two or more counties. Sometimes a deed was registered in court but not copied into the deed book or copied into the deed book but not registered in court. There were also Deeds of Trust, legal

[124] Saunders, *Colonial Records,* Vol 23, 24 and 25.

agreements concerning things other than real estate, which could be registered in court and entered into the deed books.

The court registration was a very minimal statement usually including the names of the parties and witnesses, and sometimes the acreage and price. The county Register of Deeds copied the deed into the deed book which sometimes resulted in copying errors, changes in spelling and punctuation and other errors such as phrases duplicated, added or dropped.

In recent years authors have transcribed and extracted great numbers of these deeds along with court records and wills for genealogical purposes. This is of great benefit to the historic researcher but these extracts sometimes leave out information vital to a complete understanding of these transactions. For very important deeds it is necessary to go back the original source and make a complete transcription. Except for a very few cases where the original deed has been preserved by the family and still exists, the county deed books are the only original sources available.

A number of deeds list the wife of the seller, which sometimes appears nowhere else in the legal record in this time before marriage licenses existed.

In this study we have transcribed a small number of very important deeds and those transcriptions are identified in the text. The spelling, capitalization and punctuation are as close to the original as possible. Large blocks of legal language are fully included. Abbreviations with super-scripts are transcribed as they appear. Some example are S^d for said, Exr^s for Executors, Adm^{rs} for Administrators, y^e for the, Agn^{st} for Against, and the various months. Where a word could not be positively identified it is replaced with ____. In many deeds words or phrases are repeated by the Register, especially when continuing to the next page.

Land descriptions always appear in the deed but are seldom included in the court registrations or in the genealogical abstractions. The surveying method is called "Metes and Bounds." The survey starting point could be a stake in the ground, a tree, or the corner of someone else's property. From that point the survey is by direction and distance such as S 47 E 25 p which means a direction of 47 degrees east of south for a distance of 25 poles. A pole is 16½ feet long. Each line segment ends at a marker where the next line segment begins. Usually the marker is a specific type of tree such as a Red Oak, a White Oak, etc. Some line segments go along the course of a river or stream and quite usually the final segment is "and so on to the beginning." Some line segments coincide with another person's property or join at someone else's corner. By following these directions and distances, it is possible to make a drawing of a piece of property, but it is never easy and in some cases not possible. Determining exactly how much property someone had and exactly where it was is a very difficult and time consuming task and is not always possible.

M. Iron Making in Eighteenth Century North Carolina

The manufacture of iron and steel goods in North Carolina started in a small way before the American Revolution, encouraged by a number of laws passed by the assembly. Small quantities of ironware – cannons, cannon balls and other goods – were made and the furnaces were singled out for destruction by the British Army as they advanced through South Carolina and into North Carolina. Hill's Iron Works on the Catawba in South Carolina was destroyed by Cornwallis' forces in 1780.[125]

After the war iron making started up in a number of places, encouraged by laws passed by the Assembly. In 1788 a law was passed granting 3,000 acres of vacant land, free of all state and local fees, and free of all taxes for ten years, to anyone who would build an iron-works. The only requirement was that the land had to be unfit for cultivation and they had to produce 5,000 pounds of iron within three years.

The largest and most successful iron making area was "The Big Ore Bank" a ridge of iron ore running south-west to north-east through Lincoln County. By the first quarter of the 19th century there were approximately eight blast furnaces and eight forges in Lincoln County. Iron Makers included Major John Davidson, his two sons-in-law Alexander Brevard and General Joseph Graham, General Peter Forney, John Sloan, James Madison Smith, John Fulenwider and others.[126]

The iron making industry that was established in North Carolina in the early 19th century used charcoal, iron ore and limestone combined in a blast furnace to produce cast iron goods such as pots and pans plus "pig iron."

The blast furnaces built at that time were stone cylinders roughly 30 feet high by 10 feet in diameter. They were usually sited beside a hill for ease of loading and near a water course for power and located near deposits of iron ore and limestone with forest land for charcoal. Large quantities of these materials were assembled throughout the year and the furnace was "put into blast" in the late fall when agricultural work on the plantation was mainly finished and the hands were available to work the furnace.

The process of iron making uses iron ore which is iron oxide with sand and other impurities, charcoal for heat and carbon plus limestone as a flux. The burning charcoal produces carbon monoxide and melts the iron ore and limestone. The carbon monoxide combines with the iron oxide forming molten iron and releasing the impurities. The molten limestone combines with these impurities forming liquid slag. Without the limestone the impurities from the iron ore would not melt and would form solid inclusions in the final iron product.

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[125] Lester J. Cappon "Iron-Making – a Forgotten Industry of North Carolina" *The North Carolina Historical Review 9*, No.4 (1932), 331.

[126] Paul Archambault, "The Iron Industry of Lincoln and Gaston County, North Carolina (Gastonia, NC, The Schiele Museum, 2005, Typescript essay) pages not numbered.

As these physical and chemical reactions take place the molten iron flows to the bottom of the furnace. Floating on the molten iron is a layer of molten slag. Above this is the mixture of charcoal and other ingredients still undergoing reaction. In the bottom of the blast furnace there are three holes. Highest up is the hole to allow air to be pumped, or "blasted" into the furnace. This air is pumped in by bellows run by a water-driven mill. Below the air inlet is a hole for drawing off the slag. Below that is a hole for drawing off the iron. In front of the furnace is a large bed of sand. Impressions are made in the sand of the items to be cast in iron such as fire backs, fire dogs, pots, pans and ovens plus depressions to make pig iron ingots.

From time to time the iron master knocks out a clay plug in the slag hole to allowing the slag to run out, cool and solidify so that it can be hauled away. When sufficient iron has accumulated for a run, he knocks out the clay plug in the iron hole, allowing the molten iron to run into the impressions in the sand bed. When sufficient iron has been run out a new clay plug is pushed into the hole.

When the cast iron pieces have cooled enough to be handled they are removed to be broken apart and cleaned up and the sand bed is prepared for the next run. All during this time small batches of the three ingredients are dumped into the top of the blast furnace. This process is continuous and runs night and day for the entire season of four to six months. In times of emergency such as war, some furnaces were kept in blast the year around.

The iron ingots that came from the furnace were known as "pig iron." The liquid iron ran out of the furnace through a main channel to depressions in the sand arranged in rows. When the iron was cooled and removed from the sand the individual pieces of iron looked like small pigs lined up to nurse at their mother.

The fuel source used at this time was charcoal. In England in the early 18th century, as their forests became depleted, the furnaces switched to using coal which was processed into coke by the application of heat. However, in the US charcoal continued to be used as long as the forests were available. The making of charcoal was hot and dirty work that went on all year. Trees were felled and the trunks cut into four-foot lengths and split lengthwise. After a period of seasoning they were stacked vertically into a pile and covered with turf and mud. A hole was left in the middle running up to the top as a chimney and the wood pile or kiln was set on fire. The fire consumed some of the wood and heated up the rest, driving off volatile gasses and leaving behind only the carbon as charcoal.

The charcoal maker kept watch and adjusted the fire for several days. He opened vent holes around the bottom if the fire was not burning hot enough and closed them if it was too hot. At least once in the process the kiln became hollow and the charcoal maker had to climb up on the burning pile and jumped up and down to collapse it into a more compact form. When the maker judged that most of the wood had been converted into charcoal he closed up the vent holes, smothering the fire and letting the charcoal pile cool. After a few days he broke open the pile, broke up the charcoal with sledge

hammers and carted the charcoal off to the blast furnace. Then the process started all over again.

Iron ore was dug out of deposits and broken up with sledge hammers to be mixed with the other ingredients. Likewise limestone was dug out, broken up and transported to the blast furnace. In Lincoln County the iron ore came from "The Big Ore Bank" and limestone was transported from a deposit near Kings Mountain. Later, limestone deposits were discovered near the furnaces, reducing labor costs and increasing profit.

By 1792 Major John had accumulated sufficient capital to not only purchase large amounts of land in Mecklenburg County, but also to enter the iron business with his sons-in-law Alexander Brevard and Joseph Graham in Lincoln County. A very large ridge of good quality iron ore ran northeast-southwest through Lincoln County and supported a thriving iron-making industry from 1790 to 1880. Reminders of that industry survive today in place names such as Iron Station and Bessemer City.[127]

It is said that when Major John arrived in the Carolina back county, in 1752 at the age of 16, he was already trained as a blacksmith. It is also possible that he had been exposed to iron making since he came from an area in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania where there were a large number of iron making and processing establishments in the mid-1700s.

In April 1792, in Lincoln County, 12 men were appointed to a jury to examine two pieces of land, one owned by Alexander Brevard, John Davidson & Co., and the other by Peter Forney, Esqr. Pursuant to the law passed by the Assembly in 1788 to encourage the building of ironworks, they were to see whether any of the land was fit for cultivation. They were also to lay out and mark a road "from the Duch Meetinghouse past the forge now abuilding by Brevard, Davidson & Co." This was the beginning of the industry which would make Major John, Alexander Brevard and Joseph Graham very rich and prominent members of the community.

An iron-works required a good bit of land for quarrying the iron ore and limestone and a great deal more for raising the trees which are cut and made into charcoal to run the blast furnace. A good sized blast furnace produced about 340 tons of iron in a five-month winter production season. This required 170,000 bushels of charcoal which consumed the trees on 120 acres of woodland. New trees were planted as the old ones were cut, but it took 25 years for those trees to grow big enough to use for making charcoal. It took about 3,000 acres of woodland to sustain a substantial iron-making operation.[128]

Eventually Brevard and Davidson brought Joseph Graham into the business and merged with Peter Forney. Graham and Brevard built their homes in Lincoln County where they built blast furnaces and forges at Mt. Tirzah Forge and Vesuvius Furnace on Leeper's Creek. In 1795 Forney sold his interest in the enterprise which continued under the name

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[127] F. B. McDowell, *The Broad Axe and the Forge*, (Charlotte, Charlotte Printing and Publishing, 1897), 12.
[128] Kay Moss, *Journey to the Piedmont Past*, (Gastonia, N. C., Schiele Museum of Natural History, 2001), 117-19.

"Joseph Graham and Company." In 1798 and 1799 they added at least 296 acres to their holdings.

In 1804, when Major John sold his interest to his sons-in-law, the business owned 5,000 acres, nine slaves, $8,876 in cash and notes and other property valued at $5,000. When Davidson left the business it continued as Graham and Company until 1814 when Graham left the business. Brevard continued and expanded the business, selling his iron products as far away as Camden, SC. After Brevard's death in 1829 his family continued the business until 1870.[129]

[129] Powell, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography,* S. V. Brevard, Alexander.