

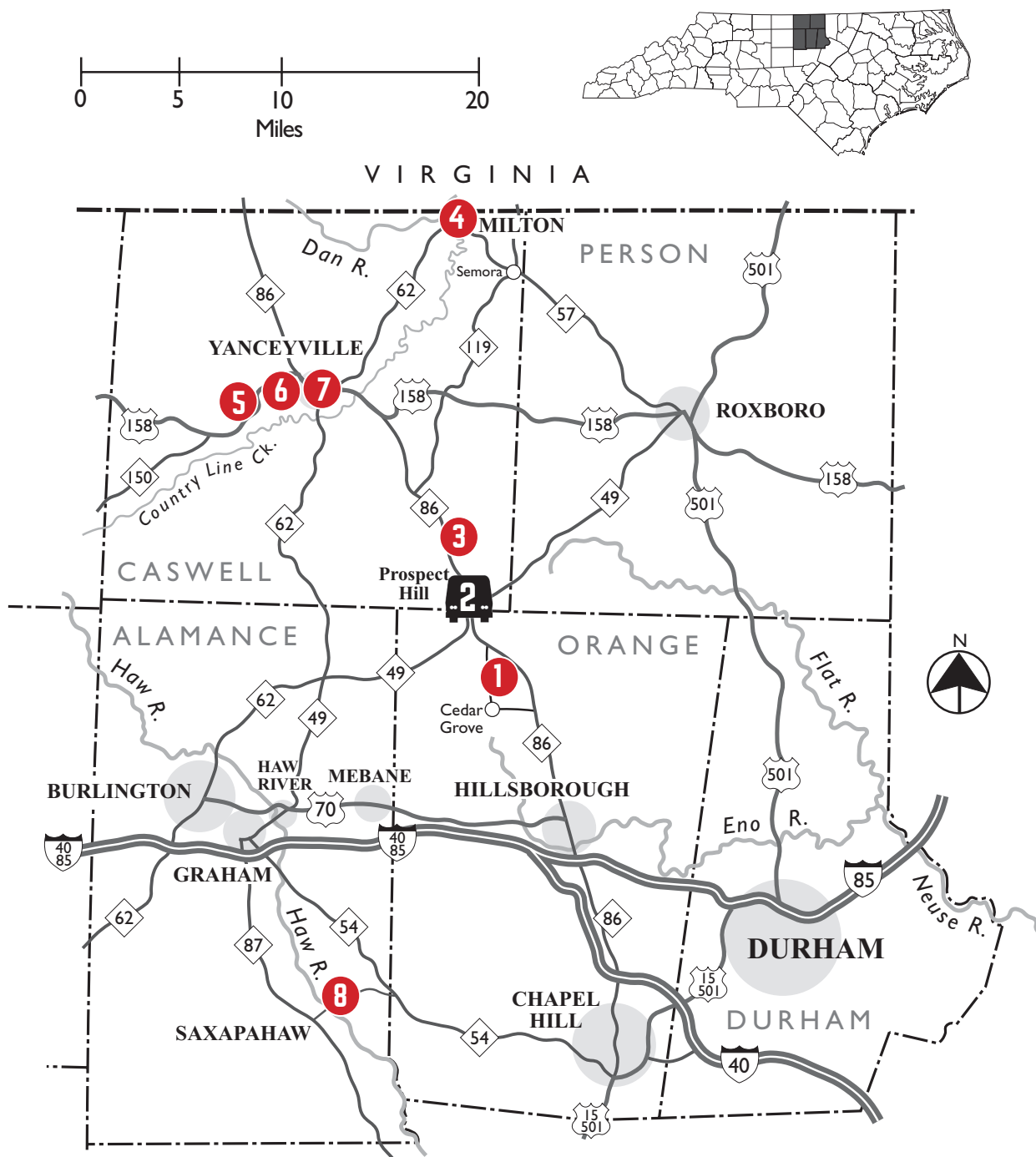
# BRIGHT LEAF CULTURE AND THOMAS DAY: ORANGE AND CASWELL COUNTIES



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# MAP OF BRIGHT LEAF CULTURE TOUR SITES



- |  |                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| <b>1</b> Captain John S. Pope Farm       | <b>5</b> Holderness House         |
| <b>2</b> Warren House & Store (Drive-by) | <b>6</b> Yancey-Womack House      |
| <b>3</b> Shangri-La                      | <b>7</b> Yanceyville Walking Tour |
| <b>4</b> Milton Walking Tour             | <b>8</b> Saxapahaw                |



## BRIGHT LEAF CULTURE AND THOMAS DAY

### INTRODUCTION: A RURAL LANDSCAPE

The northern tour leads us through a rolling countryside where we will see the vestiges of a long history of farming and especially of tobacco culture. In contrast to much of the Piedmont where urban and suburban development has transformed the countryside, here we will see a primarily agricultural and forested landscape, a patchwork of fields and woodlands dramatized by views from hill to valley and beyond. Although much of Orange County is urbanized, the northwestern sector we will visit is still strongly rural, and as of 2012, Caswell County's population was 99 percent rural.

#### The Architectural and Agricultural Landscape

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To some viewers, this landscape may seem to replicate that of centuries past and to represent “a place that time has passed by.” But such is not the case. Historically, this was a landscape of labor-intensive farming that employed hundreds of enslaved and free farm workers. As a result of changes in technology and economic transformations, today we see a relatively depopulated rural scene, where a few workers accomplish what once required a large work force of men, women, and children.<sup>1</sup> Many of the buildings where they worked and lived have vanished, leaving only a few of the hundreds of workers' dwellings, tobacco barns, and other agricultural buildings that defined the historic landscape until the not-so-distant past.<sup>2</sup>

Our drive will take us through an ever changing agricultural landscape. By June, tobacco farmers will have transplanted bright green tobacco seedlings from the covered planting beds into the fields. A few months later, when the tobacco has grown tall and begun to ripen, the harvest will begin and with it the curing season, now accomplished by largely mechanized processes. We will also see other row crops including soybeans and corn; cattle and sheep grazing in pastures; and a rapidly expanding quantity of hay fields. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, great expanses of the countryside were depleted and eroded, a situation that eventually generated attempts at reclamation.<sup>3</sup>

Today much of the landscape is forested, typically with new growth hardwoods and pines. Woodlands have always been part of this landscape, in part to supply farmers with “unimproved” land to be cleared for fresh fields required by tobacco. Some of the forests are destined for commercial use, while others are reserved for future crops.



*Old Griffin Place. Photo: NCHPO, 1972.*

The buildings along our route include a wide range of periods, types, and conditions. Some building types seldom survive, such as the many slave quarters that once stood in town and countryside; we will visit a few of the rare examples. There are also smokehouses, corncribs, and carriage houses in the town and country as well as sheds, garages, and other structures. Large hay barns are relatively few and probably date from the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Most distinctive in the landscape are the purpose-built tobacco curing barns that still stand (though in



dwindling numbers) despite long disuse. Built from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, they differ in form and function from the air-cure and general purpose tobacco barns prevalent in some regions including western North Carolina, Maryland, and Kentucky. They may be of frame or log construction and are generally square in plan with a single entrance; they were built air-tight to accommodate the precise heating regimen involved in “flue cured” or “bright leaf” tobacco. Many have metal or other sheathing for weather protection and air tightness, and several in this area were stuccoed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The traditional barns were supplanted in the mid and late 20<sup>th</sup> century by the labor-saving metal “bulk barns,” which we will see on many farms along with trapezoidal equipment sheds. (See “Tobacco Farming.”)



*Tobacco barn adjacent to tobacco field. Photo: Michael Southern.*

Another distinctive element of Caswell County’s landscape is the number of very small houses that still stand, though also in shrinking numbers. They represent a form seldom seen elsewhere in the state, though a few examples appear in nearby counties. These are typically compact 2-story dwellings of log or frame with one room per floor, plus a shed on the rear or a side. It is believed that most were built as tenant houses in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Many of them, like tobacco barns, have been stuccoed—during the 1930s according to local reports—creating an especially striking visual character. There are also many other log buildings, though their numbers, too, are dropping daily.

More widely recognized and surviving in better condition than these minimal houses and agricultural buildings are the handsome and substantial farm and town houses and churches from the area’s long history and especially its antebellum era of exceptional agricultural prosperity based on enslaved workers. Although many landmarks have been—and are still being—lost, both Milton and Yanceyville and the Orange and Caswell countryside include houses exemplifying regional builders’ conservative versions of a familiar sequence of American architectural types and styles. Most are built of frame, a few in brick.

Caswell County’s oldest architecture comprises several Georgian and Federal style houses built for prosperous planters and townfolk. Most of them are relatively modest, 1 or 1½-story dwellings with hall-parlor plans; only a few are 2-story residences. As represented in Milton, especially, their more or less elaborately crafted classically inspired detail varies from the robust forms of the Georgian mode to the delicate surface ornament of the Federal style.

More abundant is local architecture from the late antebellum “Bright Leaf boom era,” when Caswell County’s planters and merchants invested in larger houses and generally favored the nationally popular



*Brown House. Photo: NCHPO, 1972.*

Greek Revival style. Reserving the northern trend of pediment-front buildings for churches and public buildings, for their houses they like other North Carolinians preferred a symmetrical (usually 2-story) form with a low hipped or side-gabled roof and a 1 or 2-room-deep center-passage plan. Local builders incorporated bold, simple classical forms inspired by national pattern books such as those of Asher Benjamin and Minard Lafever, including pedimented and columned porches, large windows and doorways framed by broad, symmetrical moldings, and hefty mantels with columns or pilasters.



*Residence of R.A. Fleming & Bank of Caswell, Milton, NC. Photo: North Carolina Postcards, North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.*

In Caswell County, such houses often incorporate the woodwork of one of Caswell County's best known citizens—the free black cabinetmaker Thomas Day, who lived and worked in Milton from 1827 until his death about 1861, and is credited with a distinctive if still undocumented body of architectural woodwork as well as his famous and better documented furniture. (See “Thomas Day”.)

A noteworthy feature of local antebellum brick buildings, prevalent in but not unique to Caswell County, is a conservative hierarchy of craftsmanship: the long use of high-quality Flemish-bond brickwork in important buildings and the combination of Flemish-bond with other brick bonds

according to the prominence of the building and even the façade. Although Flemish-bond brickwork (with its checkerboard of alternating header and stretcher bricks) was succeeded by 1:4 and 1:5 bonds (meaning a row of headers and four or five rows of stretchers), and all-stretcher bonds in most urban centers, here and elsewhere some artisans and clients still favored it for fine work and used other bonds for less formal buildings or facades.

None of the builders for these structures has been documented, but two long-lived and traditionally trained brick builders active in the region (or their proteges) are likely candidates: Dabney Cosby (1793-1862) of Virginia and Raleigh and John Berry (1798-1870) of Hillsborough, N. C., who erected the (lost) Greek Revival style, brick Caswell County Courthouse in the 1830s. Berry was known for employing high-quality Flemish bond throughout his long life despite changing fashions. (See Cosby at <http://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000019> and Berry at <http://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000065>.)

In contrast to some parts of nearby Orange, Alamance, and Guilford counties where prosperous clients adopted nationally popular picturesque modes in the 1840s and 1850s, Caswell's elite seldom engaged in the taste for the full-blown Gothic Revival and Italian villa styles. Churches are typically simple in form, often with columned porticoes in Greek Revival or later Colonial Revival styles. A few buildings feature a bracketed Italianate cornice or a bit of Gothic-inspired trim. The spectacular exception is the boldly picturesque, Italianate style Caswell County



Courthouse designed by architect William Percival on the eve of the Civil War. He had created bold villas for contemporary planters elsewhere in the state; it remains an open question as to whether the Caswell elite might have emulated its style had the war not intervened. (See Percival at <http://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000124>.)

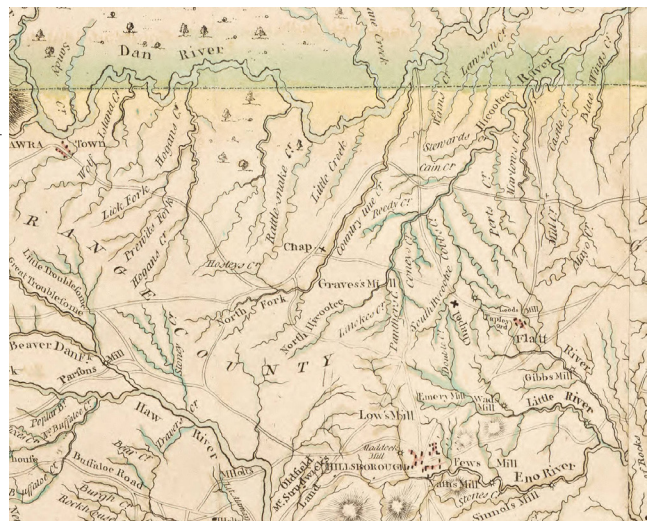
As in much of North Carolina, post-Civil War architecture generally exhibited economical and conservative versions of nationally popular trends. In contrast to booming industrial towns such as Durham, grandeur was not the order of the day. Technology made construction much cheaper than before, including doors and floors, balloon framing, and ornate decoration produced at sash and blind factories. Most farmhouses and outbuildings were built along familiar lines, often with material from local sawmills. Farmers and townspeople often incorporated or added a front roof gable to give their homes a modern flair—scores of 1 and 2-story houses with this feature dot the towns and rural landscape. Ornate front porches and mantels dressed up some existing buildings such as the Pope Farm house as well as new ones, and a few Caswell homeowners hired builders to erect houses with the irregular massing of the “tasty” and “modern” Queen Anne style popular in urban areas.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century likewise reflected widespread patterns including especially North Carolinians and other southerners’ propensity for the Colonial and Georgian Revivals, along with the economical and immensely popular Craftsman bungalow. Both styles appeared in new porches on existing houses as well as defining new building. Farm buildings continued along traditional lines for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From the mid-century onward, farm families responded to ideas promoted by the Agricultural Extension and other promoters of modernization by constructing new types of barns and other outbuildings as well as the immensely popular small ranch houses planned to accommodate the modern farm family’s needs and desires.<sup>4</sup>

Recent decades have continued the pattern of change with such building types as metal “bulk” barns, equipment sheds, and some larger residences often incorporating large garages. Despite many losses, there has been renewal of interest in the local architectural legacy. Newcomers as well as descendants of established local families, often encouraged by the statewide non-profit organization Preservation North Carolina, have engaged in the restoration of key landmarks, and the Tobacco Barn Preservation Project has begun work in Caswell and two Virginia counties. (See [www.presnc.org](http://www.presnc.org), <http://preservationvirginia.org/index.php/programs/tobacco-barns-protection-project>, and <http://www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/ctb/ctb.htm>.)

## History

Orange County, formed in 1752, was a great “mother” county from which many other counties were subdivided including Caswell, Alamance, and Durham. Hillsborough, the county seat of Orange, was the colonial center for a vast area before the county was reduced by the formation of other counties from it. The area was the longtime home of Siouan peoples, including the Occaneechi, whose name persists in the area, and it was crossed by their ancient trails. Mid-18<sup>th</sup>



*Detail of 1770 Collet map showing the Dan and nearby rivers with Virginia border shown near top. Courtesy of NCDAH.*



-century white and black settlement included immigrants arriving from the mid-Atlantic zone and nearby Virginia. It included both plantations and small farmsteads.

In some areas, such as present northern Orange County, small farms persisted, while in others antebellum planters consolidated larger holdings. The **Pope Farm** in Orange County, which dates from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, typifies the many modest farmsteads of this area, where land owning families raised crops and livestock for home use plus some cash crops including tobacco.

Caswell County was formed from the northernmost part of Orange County in 1777 and subdivided in 1792 into Person and present Caswell counties. Located along the Virginia border and the Dan River, present Caswell County was settled primarily by people of British and African backgrounds arriving from Virginia. Leasburg, now a small village, was the seat of the original Caswell County, and present **Yanceyville** (“Caswell Courthouse”) was established when the county was divided in 1792. The other principal town, **Milton**, was founded in 1796 as a tobacco inspecting and sales town overlooking the Dan River. A report of 1810 noted, “Indian corn, wheat, Rye, Oats, Cotton, tobacco and flax are raised in great abundance: Our Staple Commodities are, tobacco, cotton, and of late flour: We generally send our produce to Petersburg or Richmond.”<sup>5</sup>

With soils and topography well suited to tobacco cultivation, especially the highly desired and profitable “bright” leaf, antebellum Caswell became a leading tobacco producing county and developed a plantation economy and culture akin to those in eastern North Carolina and neighboring Virginia. The county’s planter and merchant elite class of whites became identified as an aristocracy known for a lively social life as well as for its political leaders prominent on the statewide scene. As in other plantation counties, the economy of antebellum Caswell depended upon the labor and skills of enslaved people, whose numbers increased markedly in the late antebellum era. By 1860 the county population comprised 9,355 enslaved people, 282 free people of color, and 6,578 whites.

Despite the county’s advantageous soils and numerous streams, the lack of good transportation limited its producers’ access to markets, and the problem grew more acute as other areas gained better routes. The Dan River was navigable in certain segments, but only to Virginia markets. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, local leaders worked to gain a railroad line, but without success.



*Dan River, near Danville. Photo: courtesy of Marmaduke Percy.*

One effort in the 1840s for a north-south route from Danville to Greensboro was quashed when the state legislature in 1848 authorized instead the east-west North Carolina Rail Road that tied the state together from east to west and boosted growth all along its route from Goldsboro to Charlotte via Raleigh and Greensboro; the town of Durham started as a stop on the line. The deciding vote was cast by state senator Calvin Graves of an old Caswell County plantation family; his vote benefited the state but shocked his constituents and spelled the end of his political career.

Like many of their fellow North Carolinians, many Caswell residents including slaveholders had opposed secession, but when the Civil War came, many of the white sons of the county joined the Confederate cause, and many never returned. After the war former slaves and former slaveholders had to devise new living and working arrangements, often through conflict. Although many former slaves sought their own farms, and some did obtain them, the tenant and sharecropping system became widespread (see below). Long-established families, black and white, confronted a changed world in which many struggled to claim or maintain position and others left for more promising locales.



*Sid Lea Cabin. Photo: NCHPO, 1972.*

Caswell County along with neighboring Orange and Alamance counties experienced an especially violent Reconstruction period. Some members of the county's newly emancipated and enfranchised black majority were elected to public offices, and others sought some degree of equity. The old leading class, who included many Confederate veterans, bitterly opposed the new social and political possibilities. The local Ku Klux Klan, which comprised members of the "best families," engaged in violent actions against local blacks and their white Republican friends which culminated in a notorious murder in the courthouse. The violence spurred many, including numerous black citizens, to leave the county to seek work in towns or to join the exodus northward known as the Great Migration. The Democrats, who included many of the old elite families' members, regained power and maintained a conservative political and economic structure over the following decades. (See "Reconstruction.")

After the Civil War, despite out-migration, the population held steady for a time and even increased to 10,656 people of color and 7,169 whites in 1880, but more departures over the years sapped the population and shifted it toward a white majority. Caswell County's towns were eclipsed by the industrial growth of Danville, Virginia, but also by Durham (on the North Carolina Rail Road) to the south and Winston-Salem and Reidsville to the west. A number of "Caswell County boys" joined the leadership in tobacco manufacturing in those and other cities.<sup>6</sup> In addition, local trade was profoundly altered by the tobacco trusts that redefined marketing, sales, and manufacturing of the golden leaf in Durham and elsewhere. The economic and political standing of the county dropped and never regained its antebellum stature.

Twentieth century observers frequently commented on Caswell's old-fashioned character. As in several other plantation counties, some longtime and former Caswell residents held a sense of a past golden age long gone while maintaining familiar social customs and family connections. A journalist wrote in 1908, "So far as the progressive spirit is concerned the county has slept just twice as long as Rip Van Winkle" (his nap lasted twenty years, according to the popular story). Some observers romanticized the county,



*Slade Cabin. Photo: NCHPO, 1972.*



especially its plantation heritage, as the epitome of the Old South. To the present, individuals and families pursue interests in the county's history and genealogy; several websites reflect this interest.

Tobacco cultivation in Caswell County continued along with other agricultural production. It was in the postwar period that the flue-cured method of treating bright leaf tobacco fully developed. Some local farmers prospered as did some local merchants and small manufacturers, as the multitude of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century farmhouses, stores, and tobacco barns attest. Initially many land owning farmers sought to hire newly free workers under terms very close to slavery, but largely at the behest of the workers and their families who sought greater autonomy, the system of tenant farming and sharecropping emerged, which produced a great many small farmhouses and farmsteads that long dominated the landscape. Thousands of black and white tenant farmers and hired workers and some small independent farmers of both races engaged in the demanding work of producing the still profitable golden leaf. In time, the farming practices eroded the soil, and a relentless cycle of loans, liens, and unpredictable crop prices coupled with racial oppression intensified poverty and spurred out-migration.

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the county saw substantial efforts to modernize local agriculture through state and Federal programs including several instituted amid the Great Depression. These included promotion of crop rotation and land-saving plowing methods, as well as the federal tobacco acreage and price control system.

Tobacco cultivation persisted through the 20<sup>th</sup> century and continues to the present, with new technologies and financial arrangements as well as a shrinking acreage devoted to the crop. As noted in "Tobacco Farming," government support programs and allotment systems and their recent demise have had profound effects. There have also been various efforts to establish local industries and to foster new forms of agriculture. As of 2010, according to the Caswell County

Historical Society website, flue-cured bright leaf tobacco still accounted for 75 percent of the value of agricultural production in the county and a still greater proportion of cropland acreage.

The rural landscape has always been tied to national and international economic trends, and that is intensely true of the present day. The landscape we will see reflects both continuity and tremendous if not always obvious changes, in field patterns and crop methods coupled with the losses of some building types and the advent of new ones, all reflecting farmers' ongoing accommodation of an endless saga of change.



*Chatham County Tobacco Barns. Photo: Dorothea Lange, 1939. Library Of Congress.*



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<http://www.caswellcountync.org/genealogy/index.php>

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ncccha/>

## Notes

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1. The number of farms in Caswell County dropped from 707 in 1987 to 563 in 2007 and the land in farms from about 130,000 to 102,000. The county's revenue in 2008 was predominantly from agriculture, though the number and percentage of workers listed as engaged in farming is low. The county's working residents are engaged in a variety of occupations (only a tiny percentage identified as "farming"), but non-employment figures are high. One chart indicates that slightly over half of county residents aged 25 to 64 were either unemployed or "not in the labor force," and larger percentages appear for older and younger people. See <http://statisticalatlas.com/county-subdivision/North-Carolina/Caswell-County/Yanceyville-Township/Employment-Status>. On Caswell County agricultural products see <http://ced.sog.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/CaswellCountyInventory2010.pdf>.
2. In the early 1970s, Ruth Little and Tony P. Wrenn's architectural survey of Caswell County—the first systematic county survey conducted by the State Historic Preservation Office—found a far denser built landscape full of large and small structures of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, many of which have been lost. The survival rate among substantial houses and churches, not surprisingly, has been better than that of the smaller houses and outbuildings. See Ruth Little-Stokes, *An Inventory of Historic Architecture: Caswell County, North Carolina*.
3. See Drew A. Swanson, *A Golden Weed: Tobacco and Environment in the Piedmont South* for an environmental history analysis that includes Caswell County.
4. On Woodley Warrick's architectural work for the Agricultural Extension Service in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, see Catherine W. Bishir, Charlotte V. Brown, Carl R. Lounsbury, and Ernest H. Wood III, *Architects and Builders in North Carolina: A History of the Practice of Building* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 377-379.
5. This was part of a description written in 1810 by Caswell County political leader and planter Bartlett Yancey in response to a questionnaire sent out by the editor of the *Raleigh Star*. Reports from only 12 counties are known to exist. They were published in the *North Carolina Historical Review* by A. R. Newsome in 1928 and 1929. For Yancey's full report see <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nccaswel/misc/yancy-ltr.htm>.)
6. One cause of the county's decline, according to a 1937 article in the *Caswell Messenger*, was that "so many of Caswell's talented young people have migrated to other counties and states in search of broader fields of opportunity"—a frequent pattern among rural counties. Among the notable white "sons of Caswell" were John B. Cobb, who became an American Tobacco Company executive in Danville; Thomas Williamson and his son Robert, partners in the Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company in Winston-Salem; William Louis Poteat, president of Wake Forest College, and his brother, Edwin McNeill Poteat, president of Furman College in South Carolina. William Holderness of the Holderness House moved to Thomasville; his son, George, born just after the war, established the Carolina Telephone and Telegraph Company in eastern North Carolina. Many retained affection for and connections with old Caswell.

The Pope family farm in northwestern Orange County presents an unusually complete example of the middle-sized farms prevalent in the North Carolina Piedmont during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast to the plantation culture that dominated Caswell County to the north, this farm represents the “yeoman farms” numerous in this area before and after the Civil War—a yeoman farm meaning a relatively small acreage cultivated primarily by a resident land owning family and a few other workers.

Still in family ownership, the Pope farm includes a regionally typical frame house of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century plus more than 20 frame and log domestic and agricultural outbuildings, including several tobacco curing barns. The 73-acre farmstead depicts a representative evolution over more than a century, as each generation addressed changes in agricultural practices, architectural preferences, and technology.



*Pope Family documentation.*

Cedar Grove Township, with much of northwestern Orange County, traditionally supported diversified agriculture and modest to moderate-sized farms. The well-drained soils encouraged cultivation of the highly profitable bright leaf tobacco as a cash crop from the 1850s through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, giving the area's farmers an added source of income. A substantial proportion of Orange County's tobacco was grown in this township.

Like many of their neighbors, for the Pope family tobacco was the primary cash crop: the labor-intensive leaf could yield good profits on a relatively small amount of land and support a family in comfort. Their tobacco-related buildings recall that such farmers not only raised and harvested the crop but also added value by processing it to high standards in these purpose-built structures before taking it to market. Until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, such intact farmsteads were abundant in the region, as well as hundreds of tobacco barns, but they are rapidly disappearing.

### Pope Farmhouse

The 2-story frame Pope Farmhouse, built for John and Mary Jane Pope about 1874, combines a conservative form seen in the region for generations with updates reflecting changing styles and habits. It follows a widely popular form often termed an “I-house” by folklorists—2 stories tall, 1-room deep, and more than 1-room wide—here with a center stair passage separating the two front rooms. Typical in the area, the exterior end chimneys are built of rough stone, parged and later painted, with brick stacks, a combination that probably reflects the economy of using local

stone and the ease of building a stack in brick. Originally there was a simple, 1-bay front entrance porch. Houses of this general character, varying in details and construction materials, were built from the late antebellum era through the early 1900s.

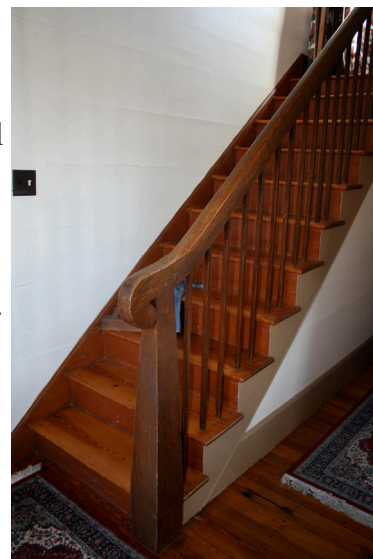
In the 1910s the Popes—probably John and Mary Jane's son Carl and his wife Lindie—updated the façade with a fancier porch with turned posts and decorative brackets; and, especially striking, added a front central gable at the roof line. A common



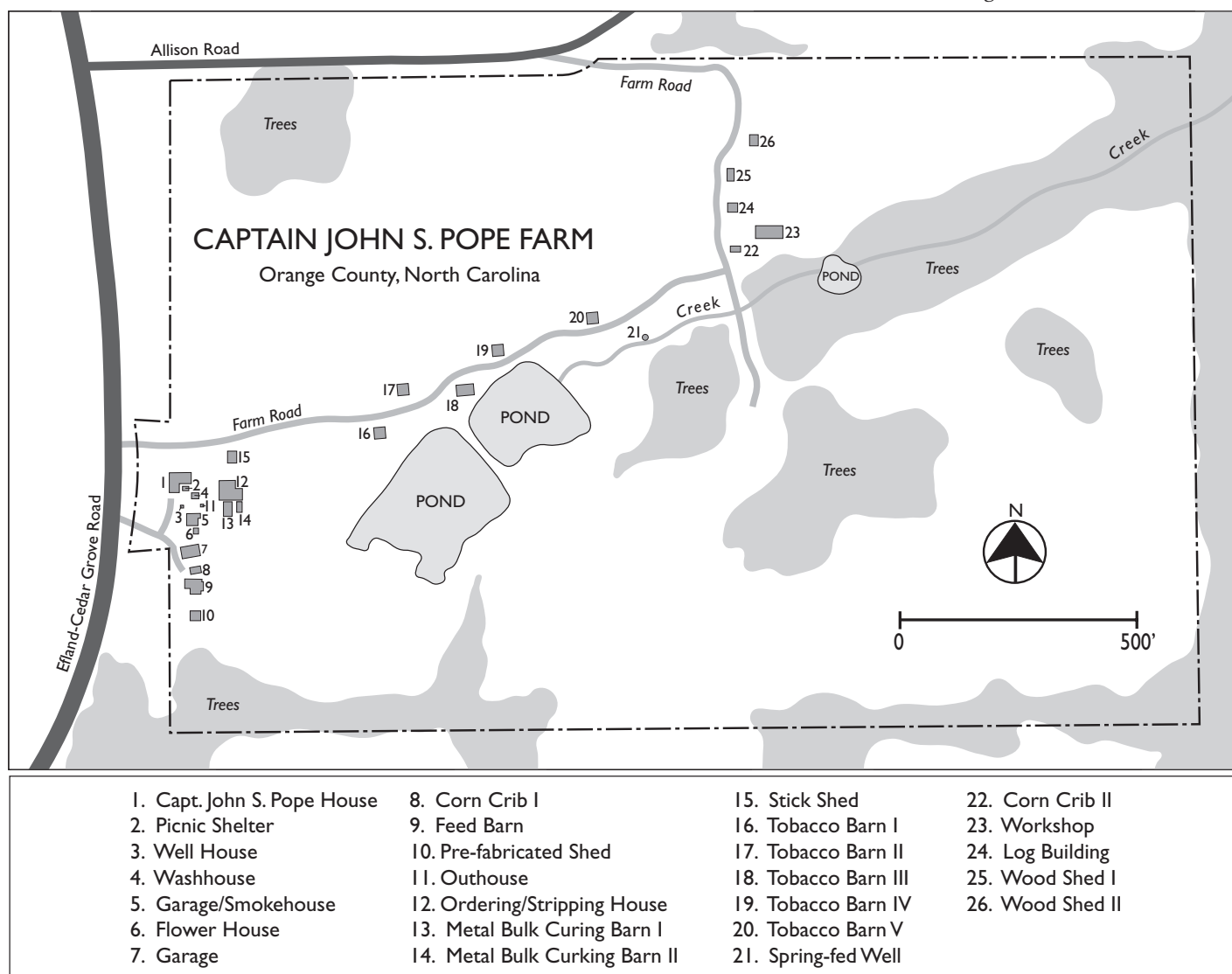
*Pope Family Farm. Photo: Heather Wagner Slane, 2012.*

feature throughout the state from the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century onward, this purely decorative front gable gives a more vertical character to the façade; it likely traces back to the picturesque influence of Andrew Jackson Downing's mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century pattern books. Such gables along with ornate porches were often original to houses built in the period, but in other cases, they were added as updates, as was true for the Pope family. The present porch dates from the 1930s.

The rooms are sheathed in planed boards and finished with wooden mantels and 2-panel doors of plain Greek Revival style, types that continued over many years. The downward curve of the stair newel and curving lines of the mantels have suggested to some observers a possible influence from the antebellum work of Thomas Day of Milton. A 1-story rear ell contains the dining room and kitchen, with a porch along the south side; the partition wall was moved to enlarge the kitchen, probably in the 1920s. Other rear additions have come and gone.



*Pope Family Farm, stairway. Photo: Heather Wagner Slane, 2012.*



*Pope Farm Site plan. Drawing: Michael Southern, 2016.*



## Outbuildings

The outbuildings include several built of frame or log during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries along with more recent structures. Among the older structures are a Well House (ca. 1920), Wash House (ca. 1875, 1930s), Garage with attached Smokehouse (ca. 1900, 1920), Flower House (ca. 1900), corn crib (ca. 1900), and a Feed Barn (ca. 1900). Tobacco-related structures include two metal Bulk Curing Barns (ca. 1955) exemplary of the mid and late 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; an Ordering and Stripping House (ca. 1935); and four wooden Tobacco Curing Barns (ca. 1875 to 1955). Except for the curing barn described below, the outbuildings may be viewed *only from the exterior*.

### Tobacco Curing Barn

One relatively intact tobacco curing barn is representative of many more. Probably dating from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the log structure stands about 300 feet northeast of the house and faces south. The log walls with roughly hewn sides are joined at the corners with V notches. Measuring 17 feet 8 inches by 17 feet 10 inches, it rests on a fieldstone foundation and has a



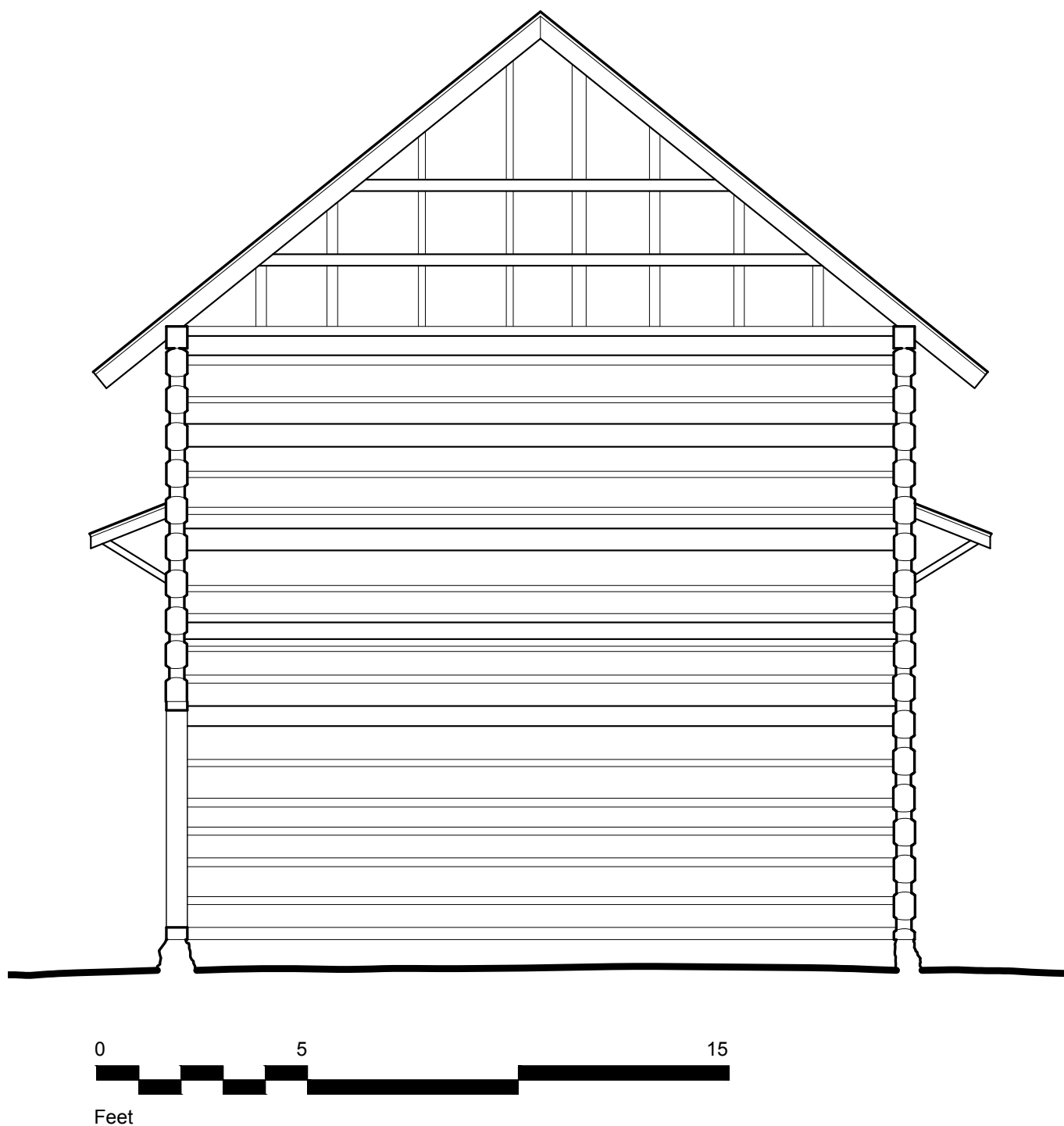
*Tobacco Curing Barn. Photo: Heather Wagner Slane, 2012.*

common rafter gable roof. To retain heat during the curing process, the interstices between the logs were filled with riven wood and clay. Metal sheathing covers the roof and much of the walls. Shed roof pents on 2 by 4-inch braces extend along all four walls at a height of about 10 to 12 feet from the ground; these plus the metal sheathing protected the log walls from rain. The batten door, hung on iron butt hinges, consists of 7½ inch-thick tongue-and-groove vertical planks attached with wire nails to the battens. There was an open shed on at least one side, of which remnants survive on the east end. Inside, the barn has a dirt floor and five sets of horizontal tier poles are spaced 4 feet apart horizontally and 1½ feet vertically.

As depicted in the section on Tobacco Cultivation, this and the Popes' other barns were scenes of intensive activity during the autumnal curing season. Men, women, and children gathered outside the barn, possibly sheltered by the shed, to grade tobacco leaves hauled from the fields and tie them to tobacco sticks. Men and boys hung the laden sticks between the poles until the barn was fully loaded. Men expert in curing regulated the heat in the barn for a period of three to seven days to achieve the "bright leaf" cure. The Popes had several barns to continue curing as the tobacco was harvested, built far enough apart to prevent a possible fire from spreading from barn to barn.

Like other farmers, the Popes used various heating systems and likely retrofitted this barn and others more than once. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, typically one or two wood-burning furnaces of stone or brick built into the foundation and fed from the outside provided heat to metal flues that extended across the barn. Later heat supplies included kerosene and propane burners. In this barn, the south, west, and north walls have square holes cut in the logs just above the stone foundation, which probably held adjustable air intake vents for kerosene or propane curers. What all methods had in common was a means to control temperature and to prevent smoke

from reaching and thus spoiling the tobacco. All tobacco cured in this way was called “flue cure” for marketing purposes. In the mid-20th century the family shifted over to metal “bulk barns,” of which two survive nearby.



*Section, Tobacco Curing Barn, John Pope Farm. Drawing: measured by Gary Stanton, Leslie Krupa, drawn by Robert Watkins. 2015.*

## Family History

The Pope family history exemplifies patterns of multi-generational households and land transfers that supported continuity in farm ownership. Family tradition states that shortly after their marriage in 1859, Mary Jane McDade (1835-1917) and John Saunders Pope (1836-1895), both of local farming families, planned and may have begun construction of their farmstead on land provided to them by her father, John Alphonse McDade (1807-1869), but their endeavor was delayed when John Pope enlisted in the North Carolina Infantry in October, 1861. Both the Popes and the McDades had lived and farmed in the area since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and participated in the venerable and still active Cedar Grove Methodist Church a few miles away. The churchyard there contains more than 700 graves, including those of the Pope and McDade families.



*Family portrait of John and Mary Jane Pope and children from Ancestry.com.  
<http://trees.ancestry.com/tree/24327660/person/1507313640/photo/266bdlbf2-458a-4fdd-b7ea-8a68029a90b1?src=search>*

After John S. Pope left for war, Mary McDade Pope lived with her widowed father, John McDade, during which time the Popes' first child, Thomas, was born in 1862. After Captain John S. Pope was mustered out in 1865, he and Mary and their children lived near her relatives in Caswell County, where in 1870 John was listed as a farm worker without real estate. Upon her father's death in 1869, Mary inherited a portion of his property, which became part of this farm, and it is believed that John and Mary built their house about 1874. By 1880 their household included three children—Thomas, Josephine, and Carl—and one black "servant," William Thompson.

After John S. Pope's death in 1895, Mary stayed at the farm with their son Carl (1871-1927) and his family until her death in 1917. In 1910 Mary had deeded the "John S. Pope Homeplace" to Carl, who resided there with his wife, Lindie Harris (1872-1947); within a few years the family added the decorative gable and porch. In this period, too, the Popes erected several outbuildings and tobacco barns. Carl operated a distillery and a sawmill, and he generally employed workers from the area to cultivate and cure his tobacco.

After Carl's death, Lindie and their children, including Robert Harris Pope, Sr. (1914-2009), continued to live and farm there, again improving the house and adding farm buildings. The family increased their acreage over the years. Much of the land was "unimproved," meaning that it was not under cultivation; it likely included woodlands, some kept to clear as needed for fresh ground for tobacco.

Tobacco production waned rapidly with the end of the allotment system. The present owner, Robert Harris Pope, Jr., the great-grandson of John S. Pope, raises organic tobacco for specialized markets. The Pope Farm has been recognized as a "Century Farm" by the North Carolina Department of Agriculture.

*See Heather S. Wagner, "Capt. John S. Pope Farm," National Register of Historic Places nomination (2012).*



## WARREN HOUSE AND STORE CA. 1858



## PROSPECT HILL

A pair of classic antebellum buildings marks a prominent crossroads in southeastern Caswell County called Prospect Hill. The brick temple-form store with 2-story pedimented porch—one of the state’s few surviving antebellum country stores—was built by Franklin Link Warren and served travelers on the Hillsborough-to-Milton stage road as well as local residents. As with other brick buildings in the county, the front wall shows a late use of Flemish bond, with a variant on the other walls—here a row of Flemish bond and three or four rows of stretchers. Across the road, Warren’s well-preserved, 2-story frame plantation house continues the Greek Revival style enriched with delicate latticed porches facing both roads giving a picturesque touch to a familiar form.



*Warren House. Photo: NCSHPO.*



*Warren Store. Photo: Ruth Little, 2015.*

## SHANGRI-LA CA. 1968-1977; HENRY WARREN, CREATOR

3

NC 86 N OF PROSPECT HILL. PRIVATE,  
VISIBLE FROM PUBLIC THOROUGHFARE.

Among North Carolina’s most visible examples of the richly detailed personal landscapes created by “folk” or “outsider” artists—the latter term referring to artists outside the academic art mainstream—the miniature stone village was constructed over several years by World War I veteran Henry Lafayette Warren after he retired from farming and running a gas station at this site. Far from being an eccentric loner like some outsider artists, or his work being unknown during his lifetime, Warren was an outgoing member of the community. He developed it to please his neighbors, and passers-by, and with their help.

Like many such personal landscapes, it developed over time in extemporaneous fashion. It features intricate detail including “found objects,” and it is often humorous, with various texts and mottoes. The village of some 25 buildings includes a church, a jail, a mill, a theatre, a house and garage, and an uncompleted hospital; landscaping and a rock retaining wall; and topical buildings of the day such as the Watergate Hotel.

Henry Lafayette Warren was a Caswell County native who lived with his family in a nearby stone bungalow which he built himself, near his stone gas station on the road from

Hillsborough to Yanceyville. A fragment of the old road shows its original proximity to the site. His house still stands, but not his gas station.

Warren began his “little city” in his front yard in his mid-70s—various dates are reported—mixing his own cement and using white flint rock quarried from his and a neighboring farm to erect the 3 to 4-foot high buildings. Like many such artists, he incorporated diverse objects into his work, including parts of tools and appliances, ceramic figures, and other items he found in local antique stores, as well as projectile points brought to him by local children to trade for candy. His neighbor Junius Pennix often worked with him.

Henry started with a single building and never meant to build so much, recalled his widow, Satira Warren, in an interview in 1988, but friends and neighbors kept suggesting new ideas.



*Shangri-La. Photo: Ruth Little, 2015.*

He worked on it constantly, except when Mrs. Warren insisted he put down his tools and come in when she had lunch ready.

He eventually named it “Shangri-La,” she said, because during World War II President Roosevelt talked about Shangri-La—the vanishing ideal place in the popular novel and movie “Lost Horizon” (1933, 1937). “I think that’s what Henry had in mind.” Henry Warren’s little city’s cheerful spirit reflects its maker’s warm personality and relationships. He welcomed visitors throughout his lifetime and loved to chat with anyone who stopped by. “Sometimes I

thought he was crazy,” said Mrs. Warren, “But I really think his building his city made him live longer.” His motto posted at the village is “Let me live in a house by the side of the road and be a friend to man.”

Henry Warren died in 1977 at age 84, with his village still unfinished, including the little hospital. Mrs. Warren survived him until 2009. While visiting Warren’s Shangri-La, we need to tread carefully and respect the fragility of the little world he created.

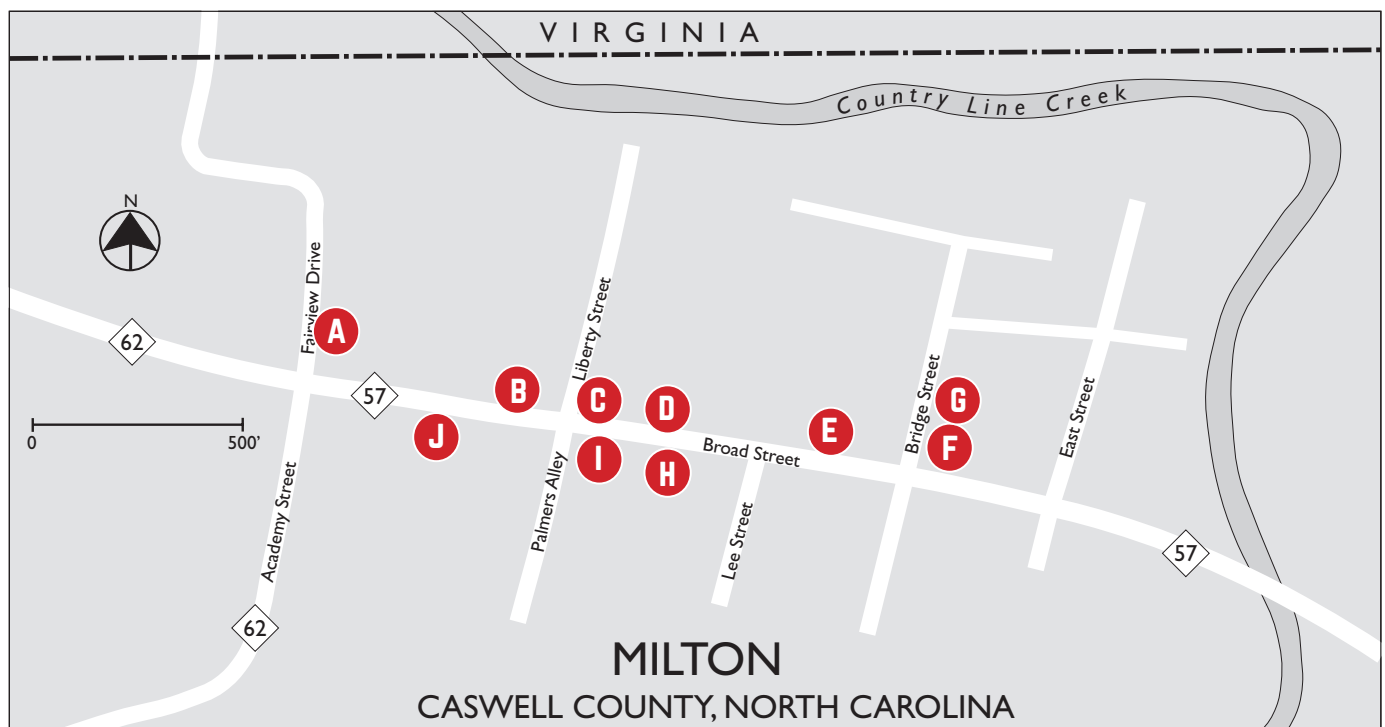
See: <http://www.roadarch.com/h/shang.html>; Emily Smith, “Shangri-La just grew and grew,” from an interview with Mrs. Warren, Associated Press, in the Rome, Georgia, *Rome News-Tribune*, Sept. 4, 1988; clipping in “Visionary Folk Art Environment Ephemera,” <https://www.flickr.com/photos/23280022@N08/sets/72157647521928467/>; and <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=FG4wAAAAIBAJ&sjid=RDYDAAAAIBAJ&pg=6821,769632&chl=en>.

Located on a promontory overlooking Country Line Creek, the Dan River, and the Virginia border, Milton has an evocative air of faded urbanity unmatched by any other North Carolina community, with a variety of large and small 19<sup>th</sup>-century buildings lining Broad Street and flanking streets. One of the few North Carolina communities that follows the linear town plan common in Virginia, with many of its buildings standing quite near the street, Milton today has a quiet atmosphere which belies its earlier history. For much of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, it was a busy river town where warehouses, tobacco factories, a textile mill, and other industries drew investors and entrepreneurs and supported banks, academies, shops, newspapers, and artisans including the renowned free black cabinetmaker Thomas Day (see “Thomas Day”). Although nearly all the vestiges of early industries and the various attempts at rail connections have vanished, the town retains a remarkable ensemble of houses, brick churches, and other structures from its chief periods of enterprise, including several 19<sup>th</sup> century domestic outbuildings including some believed to have served as slave quarters.



*Postcard of Milton. Courtesy of NC Collection, NCDAH.*

Milton was founded in 1796 as a tobacco and flour inspection town to compete with Virginia. Early 19<sup>th</sup>-century private and public works projects that promised to improve navigation on the Dan River spurred a land boom “flushed



- |   |                                      |                                     |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>A</b> Clay-Irvine House                | <b>E</b> Milton Commercial Buildings | <b>I</b> Union Tavern               |
| <b>B</b> Wilson-Winstead House (Melville) | <b>F</b> Oliver House                | <b>J</b> Milton Presbyterian Church |
| <b>C</b> E.D. Thomas Store                | <b>G</b> Milton Baptist Church       |                                     |
| <b>D</b> Milton State Bank                | <b>H</b> Friou-Hunt-Hurdle House     |                                     |



on by the madness of speculation.” The town served antebellum planters whose enslaved workers raised tobacco and other crops for shipment to distant markets by way of Petersburg or Richmond, and its fortunes rose with the late antebellum boom in the highly profitable bright leaf tobacco. Its elite social life and a race track attracted participants from miles around, and its residents and others who lived on nearby plantations included men prominent in the state’s political leadership.<sup>1</sup> Early town promoters saw Milton as rivalling Danville, Virginia, as a tobacco market and a center of trade and manufacturing.<sup>2</sup>

After the Civil War, Milton’s fortunes faded fast. Although local leaders had campaigned for a railroad to enable them to compete with other tobacco towns, one effort after another failed. A rail line completed in 1877 was too little, too late. Tobacco sales and manufacturing continued through the century, and some businessmen prospered—as evidenced by several late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings and updates of older houses—but the town was eclipsed by the burgeoning tobacco sales and manufacturing centers elsewhere. The emergence of Durham as a tobacco giant coupled with the new business methods established by the tobacco trusts at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century spelled the end of Milton’s *raison d’être*. Its population dropped from 1,200 in 1860 to 235 in 1970 and 166 in 2010. Some streets were abandoned and grew up in woodlands. As in other communities where a heyday of ambitious building was succeeded by economic decline and depopulation, Milton still retains architecture from its prime years as well as vestiges of the old streetscape which have escaped the waves of modernization that blasted many old town centers.

## CLAY-IRVINE HOUSE



Ca. 1810-1820

22 Fairview Drive

As the “madness of speculation” drove Milton’s early 19<sup>th</sup>-century prosperity, ambitious men constructed costly and elegant houses there, epitomized by the residence built for mill owner and land speculator Henry M. Clay. The most intact example of the county’s Federal



style architecture we will visit, it illustrates regional house carpenters’ renditions of popular styles in buildings of conservative form enriched by fashionable details.

Located on a dramatic corner site, the tall, 2-story frame house has a vertical form typical of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The carpenter’s lavish application of intricate surface ornament focuses on the fanlit entrance—along with the Flemish bond brick chimneys (now stuccoed), molded weatherboards, and modillion cornice bespeak the best craftsmanship of the day. A nice detail appears in the end boards that terminate the cornice in the profile of the modillions.

The interior follows a 1-room-deep center-passage plan, plus a later rear ell. The north entertaining room was probably the dining room. The finish, in keeping with the exterior, displays light forms and moldings characteristic of the Federal style, including mantels with reeded pilasters and other carved decoration. The heated cellar and the unheated,

Clay-Irvine House. Photo: Willie Graham, 2015.

partially finished attic may have provided sleeping space for enslaved members of the household.

In a common pattern, the house gained a rear addition within a few years, and in the 1850s the owners commissioned a Greek Revival update, that included those usual foci of fashion, the front portico and the columned parlor mantel. The mantel suggests the style of cabinetmaker Thomas Day, whose workshop stood just a block away.

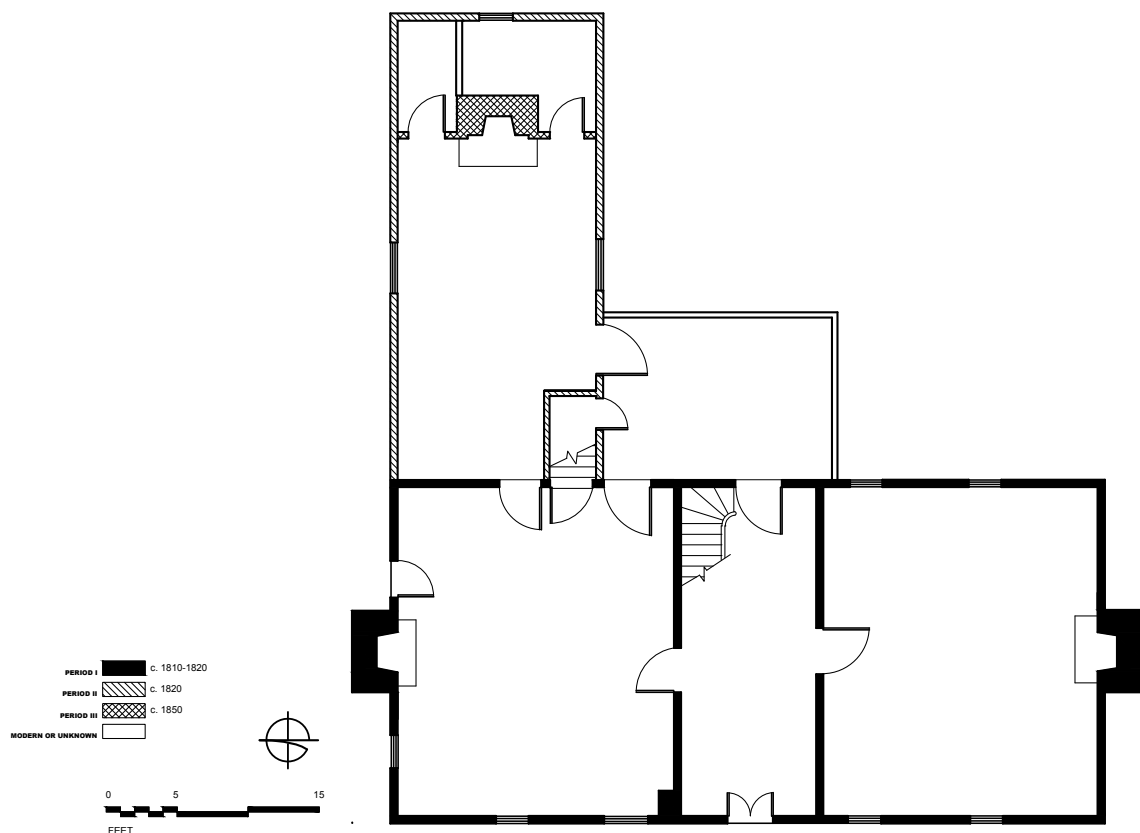
Little is known of the owners of the house. Its builder is said to be Henry M. Clay, who was in town by 1818. He was involved in the thoroughbred horse business popular in the Virginia-North Carolina border counties: he advertised in the *Milton Gazette and Roanoke Advertiser* on March 1, 1827 that his “celebrated race horse Sir William got by Sir Archey out of the noted running mare Belona...will stand the ensuing season in Milton.”<sup>3</sup> The house was later the home of tobacco businessman Samuel Irvine.

## Questions

What architectural clues suggest room uses? Which was the “better” of the original 2<sup>nd</sup>-story bedchambers? What evidence do you see to support or refute the notion of enslaved people sleeping in the cellar or attic? What changes were made to the original section when the rear addition was built? What was the arrangement and finish of the rear addition before the 1850s update?



*Clay-Irvine House, interior. Photo: Willie Graham, 2015.*



*Plan, Clay-Irvine House. Drawing: measured by Evelyn Strobe, Christopher Vann, and Gary Stanton, drawn by Evelyn Strobe, 2015.*



**E. D. THOMAS STORE**  
**Ca. 1850, ca. 1900**  
**Broad Street**

**B**



*E.D. Thomas Store. Photo: Marvin Brown, 2016.*

This 2-story brick store of ca. 1900 incorporates a few elements of an older 1 ½-story brick commercial building with brick walls in a Flemish-bond variation and a stepped gable.

**WILSON-WINSTEAD HOUSE (MELVILLE)**  
**Ca. 1835, ca. 1850s, ca. 1890**  
**93 Broad Street**

**C**



*Wilson-Winstead House. Photo: Carl Lounsbury, 2015.*

The large brick house set near the street exhibits an unusual floor plan that resembles some town houses in Virginia. The main entrance is a double door with an elliptical fanlight, and a narrower version opens on the north side. They serve an L-shaped passage that accommodates a very large parlor opposite the front entrance and two smaller rooms, plus a small unheated room in the front corner. Details of construction and finish illustrate the transition from the delicate Federal style of the Clay-Irvine House to the bolder Greek Revival mode at Clarendon Hall in Yanceyville and elsewhere. The construction date is based on local tradition; it is not entirely clear which elements date from which periods. Following a local pattern, the most prominent elevations—here the front and sides—are laid in Flemish bond with a variation on the rear. A Greek



*Wilson-Winstead House, interior.  
 Photo: Carl Lounsbury, 2015.*

Revival entrance porch shown in an 1880s photograph was replaced by a more ornate one, which has also been removed. The interior has a large, Doric-pilastered parlor mantel in the style associated with Thomas Day.<sup>4</sup> The ramped stair is atypical in having two balustrades and newels flanking the lower flight of stair. Each newel is topped with a rounded cap and surrounded by a ring of balusters carrying a horizontal handrail volute similar to Clarendon Hall. Behind the main house is an antebellum brick outbuilding in 1:4 bond covered by a steep gabled roof with pedimented dormers. In a typical format, it is believed to have contained a kitchen below and slave quarters above.

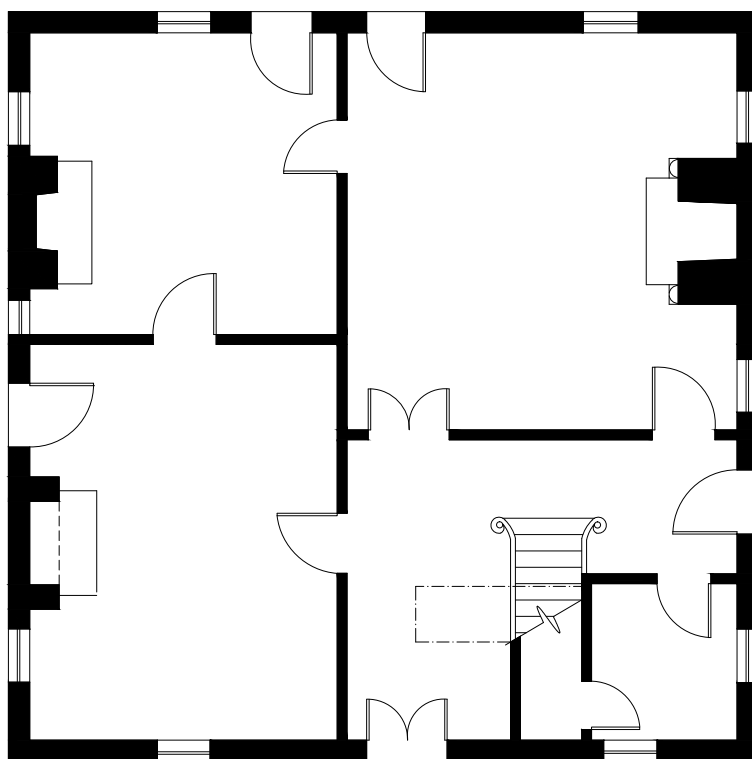
Local history indicates that the house and outbuilding were built for John Wilson (1796-1875), a merchant and planter who was a frequent purchaser of Thomas Day's



furniture. Married three times over his long lifetime, Wilson probably commissioned at least one renovation of the house. It was later the home of Edward D. Winstead (1852-1925), owner of a local tobacco factory, roller mill, and cotton gin.

### Questions

How did the building originally function? What was the reason for the unusual plan? Why are there so many exterior doors—one each in the front and sides and two in the rear? How was the unheated 1<sup>st</sup>-story room used? Was the house finished all at once in a mixture of Federal and Greek Revival styles (if so, very early for the Day mode) or was it finished in late Federal style and updated in 1850s? What evidence do you see for each scenario?



*Plan, Wilson-Winstead House. Drawing: measured by Leslie Krupa and Gary Stanton, drawn by Leslie Krupa, 2015.*

## MILTON STATE BANK

Ca. 1860

169 Broad Street



An elegant reminder of Milton's antebellum importance, the 2-story brick structure was erected as a branch of the State of North Carolina Bank in 1860. Like a handful of early bank buildings in North Carolina, it was planned for dual service as a bank and banker's residence.<sup>5</sup> Separate entrances—once defined by fenced walkways—denote the spaces within: the banking entrance opens from the street and the residential entrance via a porch on the side.

From 1834 onward, Milton had an agency, later a branch, of the State Bank of North Carolina, which operated in a building at the corner of Broad and Bridge streets. In January, 1860 the State Bank bought this lot on Broad Street for \$1,000 and in March advertised for proposals from builders to erect there a 2-story brick bank building 42 feet wide and 52 feet deep.<sup>6</sup> Weakened during the Civil War, the State Bank of North Carolina closed its branches in 1865 and began selling off its property. The Milton facility was sold to a local citizen in 1873 and 1893 it returned to banking use. From 1912 to 1963 it served as a combination residence and



*Milton State Bank. Photo: Michael Southern, 2013.*

post office. It later became a private residence, which has recently been restored by Judge Jim Long of Caswell County.

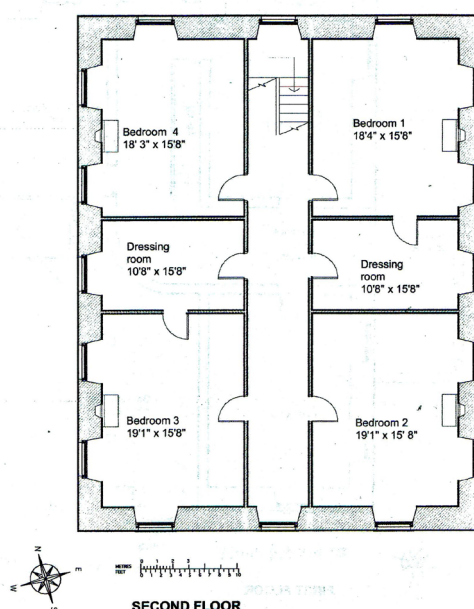
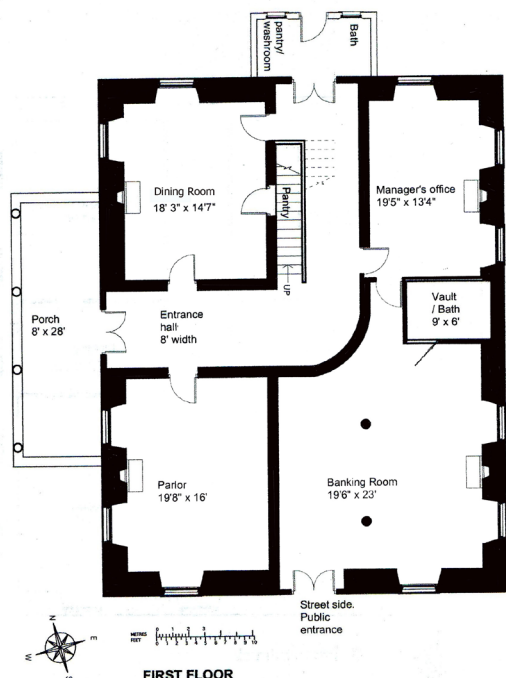
The beautifully crafted building displays a striking combination of old-fashioned and up-to-date features. The exterior brickwork is an essay in high-quality traditional craftsmanship at a very late date. Well-shaped, hard-fired bricks are laid in Flemish bond on all four sides and set in relatively narrow  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch lightly scribed lime mortar joints. This treatment, seen elsewhere in the 1820s and earlier, is akin to work by master bricklayer John Berry of Hillsborough, as shown in his Orange County Courthouse in Hillsborough (1844-1845). Other elements represent standard mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century practices, including wood lintels

over the doors and windows and the very large 6-over-6 sash windows with louvered blinds. A stylish Italianate touch appears in the bracketed cornice and the ornate side porch.

An ingenious plan accommodates the dual uses, with a curved L-shaped passage separating the commercial and domestic spaces in the 1<sup>st</sup> story, plus bedrooms above. Banking customers entered directly from the street and conducted their business in the large, bright banking room that fills the southeast quadrant. Two wooden columns, each a single piece of wood, support the 2<sup>nd</sup>-story partition above. A walk-in vault, measuring 9 by 6 feet, occupies the northeast corner of the room. It has a heavy metal door adorned with four decorative panels. A narrow passage beside the vault leads into a rear counting room, from which the banker could discreetly enter his residence.

In their private lives, household members and guests came to the side entrance porch and into an entry hall flanked by two entertaining rooms, probably a dining room on the north and a

parlor on the south. The passage curves north to form a stair hall to the back door, the entrance for servants coming from the rear service buildings. Upstairs, four bedchambers flanking a passage are separated by dressing rooms. The Greek Revival interior finish is similar to other local buildings, with mantels of simple pilaster-and-frieze format. The mantels in



*Plans, Milton State Bank. Drawing: Revised after original, courtesy of Judge James Long.*

the parlor and the bedchamber above it are replacements in Eastlake style. Although the original woodwork could be the product of Thomas Day's shop across the street, there are few flourishes of the type associated with his work.

Behind the main building stand three mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century service buildings representative of once common urban types. Covered with gable roofs, they are built of brick laid in a 1:4 bond with every fifth course laid in Flemish bond, a pattern seen elsewhere locally, especially in secondary buildings. Except for the smokehouse, their interiors have been reworked. Just behind the bank is a 20 by 30-foot kitchen and laundry building with interior-end chimneys and two front doors serving the two rooms. The two heated rooms upstairs likely served as chambers for enslaved people and later for free servants or renters. East of the kitchen stands a 10-foot-square dairy, and 4 feet north of it stands a 14 by 12-foot smokehouse, each with a front batten door. The smokehouse has pairs of collar beams attached to the rafters to support the meat hung to smoke and age, and the roof framing shows smoke blackening.

## Questions

Why would a builder combine such old-fashioned brickwork with otherwise up-to-date features in such a prominent building? Why did the builder and presumably the client choose a curved rather than right-angled passage? How does the arrangement of this building compare with other residential-commercial buildings you have seen?

## MILTON COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS



### Ca. 1880 and later 200 block Broad Street

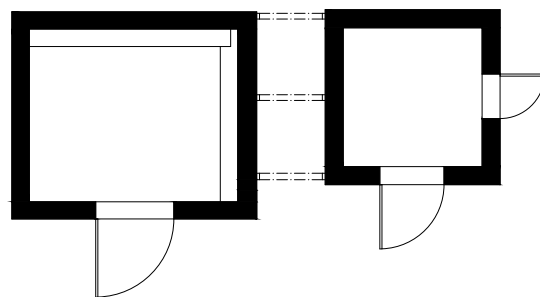
The intact row of commercial building is one of Milton's few vestiges of its mercantile and industrial activity after the Civil War. The brick buildings display typical commercial ornament of their era, with corbeled brickwork and arched openings. Especially notable are the original shop windows and the porches that shelter the sidewalk in front—the latter a common urban feature that seldom survives. The easternmost building (now a shell) was once Milton's movie theatre.



*Milton Commercial Buildings. Photo: Ruth Little, 2015.*



*Milton State Bank Outbuildings. Photo: Ruth Little, 2015.*



0 15

*Plan, Milton State Bank Smoke house and Creamery. Drawing: Audrey Wagoner, 2015.*



**OLIVER HOUSE****Ca. 1845****18 Bridge Street****F***Oliver House. Photo: Marvin Brown, 2016.*

The Oliver House is the best preserved of four raised cottages that once stood on Bridge Street. It probably represents other relatively small local dwellings long since lost; this building form was somewhat unusual in the Piedmont and the reasons for its use here are not clear. Set on a raised brick basement, the 1-story frame house has a hipped roof and a central chimney serving two flanking rooms. The interior is finished in simple Greek Revival style.

**MILTON BAPTIST CHURCH****Ca. 1835****44 Bridge Street****G***Milton Baptist Church. Photo: Marvin Brown, 2016.*

The highly visible, pediment-front brick church was built for a Methodist congregation and subsequently acquired by the Baptists. Sharing features with other local buildings of its day, it has walls built of Flemish bond on the front and 1:5 bond on the other walls, and the lintels atop the two front doors feature Greek key motifs similar to those at Clarendon Hall. Unusual in North Carolina but often seen in Virginia are the plastered panels above the side windows.

**FRIOU-HUNT-HURDLE HOUSE****Ca. 1860, late 1800s****170 Broad Street****H**

Believed to have been built in the late 1850s or early 1860s and updated several years later, the 2-story frame house follows a typical 1-room-deep center-passage plan plus a rear ell built in phases. Here the popular antebellum Greek Revival style is overlaid with more ornate features of the later 19<sup>th</sup> century including the present ornate porch, front entrance with arched panels, bosses, moldings, and red "Venetian" glass transom.

The interior displays elements of the late antebellum style associated with cabinetmaker Thomas Day, such as the pair of niches in the east parlor and the mantel in the west dining room, as well as simpler mantels and door and window frames. The later 19<sup>th</sup>-century update included

the ornate soapstone mantel between the east parlor niches. The evolution of the stair is unclear: its form and curvilinear stair brackets resemble other local antebellum houses, but the hefty turned newel and turned balusters are more like stairs in later 19<sup>th</sup> century-buildings. The rear ell (see plan drawing) developed in stages, all finished in simple Greek Revival style.

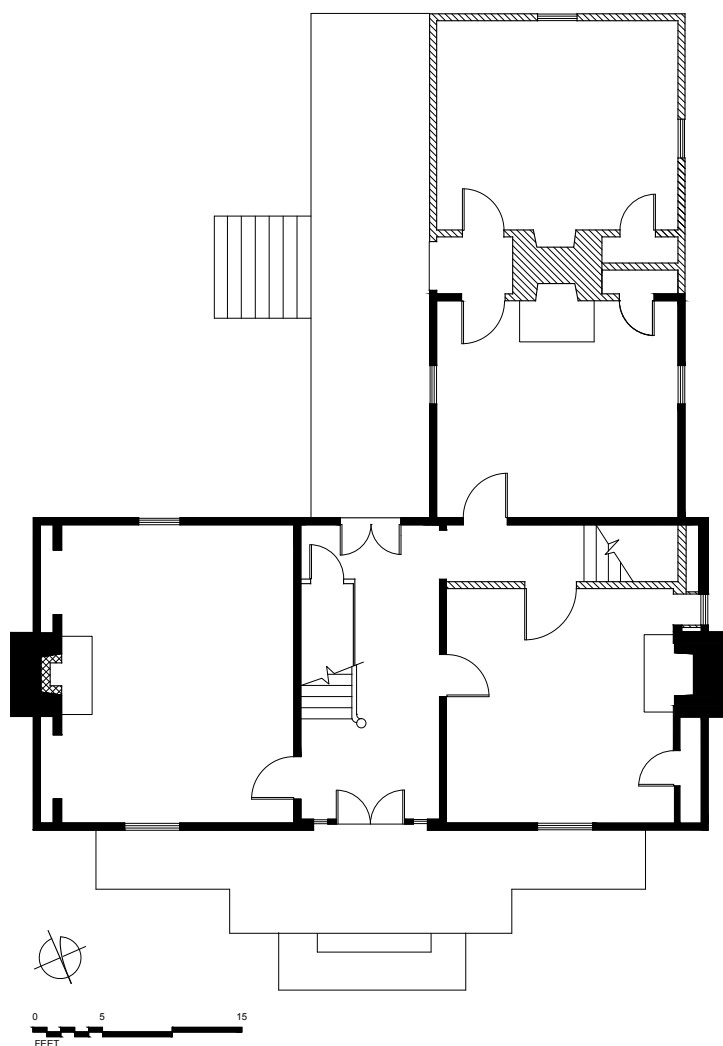
Especially intriguing is the frame Outbuilding behind the main house, which appears to date from shortly before the Civil War and is believed to have served as a kitchen and quarters for enslaved and later free servants. It measures 16 by 36 feet with a center chimney and corner staircases. The framing of the 1<sup>st</sup> story combines old-fashioned hewn heavy timbers and corner posts hewn to an L shape ("guttered"), with circular-sawn lighter framing elements. The whitewashing of the frame shows that it has always been left exposed. The two upper chambers have hearths that appear to be original.



*Friou-Hunt-Hurdle House. and Outbuilding. Photo: Ruth Little, 2015.*



*Friou-Hunt-Hurdle Outbuilding, interior framing. Photo: Gary Stanton, 2015.*



*Plan, Friou-Hunt-Hurdle House. Drawing: measured by Evelyn Strobe, Willie Graham, Joseph Bailey, Sunny Stewart, Christopher Vann, and Gary Stanton, drawn by Evelyn Strobe, 2015.*





*Friou-Hunt-Hurdle House, interior stairs. Photo: Willie Graham, 2015.*

Local history states that the house and presumably the outbuilding were constructed for Jarvis Friou, a boot and shoemaker of French ancestry who had moved to Milton in the 1830s or 1840s and built up a thriving business. By 1860 he was the proprietor of the Milton Hotel and owned \$4,000 in real estate and \$15,000 in personal property including 12 slaves. By the late 1870s the house was owned by Eustace Hunt, a prosperous tobacco farmer who had married Anna Stamps Watkins, a daughter of the former president of the nearby Milton State Bank. The Hunts likely expanded and updated the house for their large household of children and servants. Dentist James Hurdle purchased the house in 1904; the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor ell room nearest the main house is said to have been his dentistry office. Margaret and Jim Senter bought the house in the 1970s; their daughter Patricia and her husband Steve Williams are the present owners.

### Questions

How do you read the evolution of the house and how many phases does it represent? Was the stair treatment built in the earlier style and reworked or all built at once? What were the uses of the rear additions? How do you think the outbuilding was used, and how many families of free or enslaved people resided in the upper chambers?

## UNION TAVERN (THOMAS DAY HOUSE AND SHOP)

1818, ca. 1848

148 Broad Street

Indicative of the architectural refinement of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Milton, the 2-story brick building in Federal style was built to serve as a tavern for a prosperous clientele. Among the few surviving early taverns in the state as well as one of the oldest standing commercial buildings, it is best known for its role as the home and workshop of the famed free black cabinetmaker Thomas Day. Following a fire in 1989 and extensive restoration, the building maintains its urban presence if not its original interior.



*Union Tavern. Photo: Marvin Brown, 2016.*

Directly abutting the sidewalk, the main façade is laid in Flemish bond, while the other walls are laid in 1:4 bond. Sophisticated details for the locale include the well-executed Doric cornice and the three fanlit entrances. The trio of entrances opened into rooms planned for tavern use, with a center passage flanked by two large entertaining rooms, each divided crossways by a broad archway supporting a partition above. Four bedchambers flanked the upper passage. Before the fire,





Courthouse in Hillsborough are suggestive, including the Flemish bond brickwork and fanlit entrance entered at ground level through a Greek Revival portico.

Milton had no organized religious congregation until 1826, when local citizens raised money for a church and decided by 30 votes to eight that it should be Presbyterian rather than Episcopal. From the beginning, the congregation included enslaved and free black members as well as whites. Thomas Day and his wife, Aquilla, were members of the congregation, and local tradition credits him with making the pews with their curved armrests. The recent discovery of a template armrest in Day's shop supports that tradition: it may be seen at the museum in the Union Tavern.

## Notes

1. One of the county's leading planters and politicians, Romulus Mitchell Saunders (1791-1867), lived near Milton at Longwood in a house recently destroyed by fire. He served as legislator, Congressman, and judge before being appointed minister to Spain (1846-1849). He is remembered for his effort to purchase Cuba for the United States, to which the Spanish foreign minister responded that rather than selling the island, Spain would "prefer seeing it sunk in the ocean."
2. There was ongoing competition between Milton and Danville, Virginia. In an 1847 response to belittling comments from residents of Danville, the editor of the Milton *Chronicle* lauded the town's assets: "a male and female academy, five dry good stores . . . , a Drug and Medicine Store . . . , four large tobacco factories, one large factory, one branch bank, one large grain and saw mill, one magnificent hotel, one boot shoe confectionary and grocery store, one merchant taylor and draper and one tailoring establishments, three cabinet shops, three blacksmith shops, large tin and copper shop, two saddle and harness shops, two shoemaking shops, one coach making and repairing factory, two bakeries, one jewelry store, one printing office and the smartest wives, the prettiest girls, and the loveliest babies of any other town in these diggings." *North-Carolina Star*, Raleigh, December 8, 1847, reprinted from the Milton *Chronicle*.
3. Henry M. Clay of Milton, Caswell County, was cited in an advertisement placed by William Clay of Georgia in the Raleigh *Minerva* of June 26, 1818. Sir Archy, an "equine superstar" foaled in Virginia, spent a long career at stud in North Carolina. As one of the nation's great "foundation sires," his bloodline continues in nearly all the great American thoroughbreds including Man O'War, Seabiscuit, Secretariat, and now American Pharoah [sic].
4. The parlor mantel in the Wilson-Winstead House had been moved to the kitchen building where owner Jim Upchurch discovered it.
5. Other North Carolina examples of banks with bankers' residences include Beverly Hall, a private bank (c. 1810) in Edenton, the State Bank of North Carolina (1814) in Raleigh, and the Bank of the Cape Fear (1847) in Salem (Winston-Salem). As built, the bank measures 43 feet wide and 52 feet deep.
6. The advertisement for builders for the State Bank in Milton was dated March 17, 1860 and published in several newspapers including the Raleigh *Register* of April 3, 1860. The three building commissioners, including local bank president Samuel Watkins, sought proposals by May 1. No further information has been located about the contract or the contractor. The bank was evidently occupied by the end of 1860.
7. Insurance policy quoted in Marshall and Leimenstoll, *Thomas Day*, 45
8. *Wilmington Tri-Weekly Commercial*, October 5, 1854, reprinted from the [Milton] *Chronicle* of September 28. A Richmond newspaper also reported on the fire.

## THOMAS DAY (1801-CA. 1861)

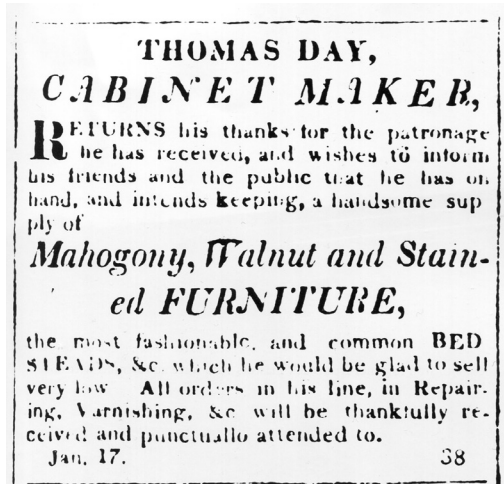
Thomas Day was an artisan of extraordinary ability and character who produced a body of distinctive work unique in North Carolina. A native of Virginia, he lived and worked in Milton from about 1823 until his death about 1861. He was primarily a cabinetmaker whose workshop was among the most prolific and prestigious in the state, producing bold and distinctive pieces in a range of Greek Revival, Empire, and Italianate styles; the sinuous, dynamic curves and elaborate openwork of his late antebellum work have suggested to many observers an African American sensibility rare in American furniture and woodwork of the era. Many pieces of his furniture are documented by receipts and correspondence; examples documented or attributed to his workshop may be seen at the Thomas Day Museum in Milton and the local history museum in Yanceyville. In contrast to his furniture, almost no documentation survives for Day's domestic architectural woodwork, but longstanding local tradition and subsequent stylistically based studies cite Day as the maker of distinctive staircases, mantels, and other interior woodwork in the late antebellum period.<sup>1</sup>

A few of the questions for our “detective work” in Caswell County:

Which elements of the houses we visit can be credited to Thomas Day, and which are likely from another source? How and why did Day develop such a distinctive, even idiosyncratic style? Do you perceive African American elements in his work? Why was he so favored by the white elite of his region? How reliably can we attribute work based on visual characteristics rather than documents?

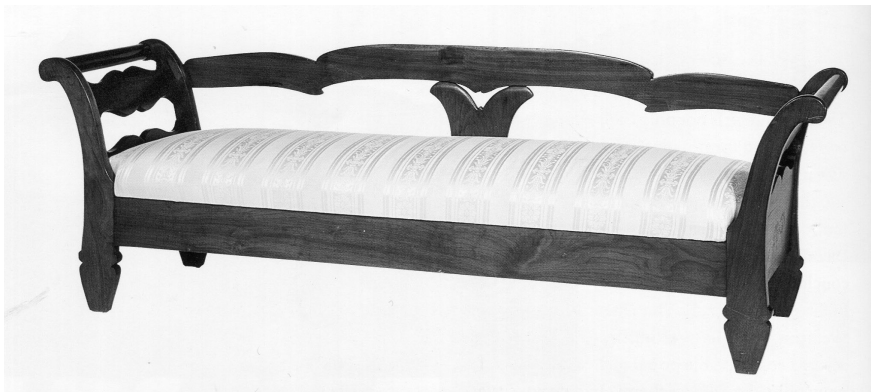
The VAF 2016 tour of Caswell County highlights examples of architectural woodwork credited to Day, a sampling of the much larger body of work that distinguishes late antebellum tobacco boom-era houses in Caswell and seven nearby counties in North Carolina and Virginia.<sup>2</sup> Like the customers for his furniture, the clients for these houses were among the richest local families at a time of extraordinary wealth in their counties. Day apparently worked with local builders such as white carpenter Dabney Terry to fabricate woodwork for new houses—typically 2-story, Greek Revival dwellings with center passage plans—and to provide elements to update existing houses.

Although in some respects the architectural woodwork attributed to Thomas Day's workshop has features akin to other work of the period, it also possesses a character distinct from the general run of late antebellum work, and that has much in common with his furniture. It ranges from fairly straightforward renditions of Greek Revival and Empire motifs to highly idiosyncratic forms. The Day-type mantels and door and window frames show an influence from architectural pattern books such as those by Asher Benjamin and Minard Lafever, while stairs have some similarities to those shown in publications by Owen Biddle and William Pain. Especially striking is the bold treatment of solids and voids, including highly 3-dimensional mantels featuring robust pilasters or engaged columns, frequently with Ionic capitals,



*Advertisement from 1827.*





Lounge, John Kerr.

and faceted and curving friezes. The characteristic “Day” stair newels take the most diverse and novel forms, often with the curve of the handrail volute turned sideways from the usual treatment to form a vertical, leaping form emerging from the stair.

The questions surrounding Thomas Day’s role in the area’s architecture are all the more intriguing because of his identity as a highly successful and respected free

man of color in a time and place when few free men of color attained and retained such stature. According to Day biographer Patricia Marshall and others, Thomas Day was born in Virginia to free parents of color, John and Mourning Stewart Day. He and his elder brother, John Day, Jr., gained a basic education and learned the cabinetmaking trade, probably from their father. In the 1810s the family moved to Warren County, N. C. In the 1820s John Day, Jr., and Thomas Day moved to the promising town of Milton in Caswell County. Thomas had lived briefly in Hillsborough beforehand. John Day, Jr., soon left to pursue a calling as a missionary, but Thomas remained. In an advertisement in the *Milton Gazette* of March 1, 1827, he returned his thanks for the patronage he had received and informed friends and the public that he had a good supply of mahogany, walnut, and stained furniture.

Attracting a large and distinguished clientele despite growing oppression toward free people of color, Day established a respected position in the community he had chosen. He bought land in Milton and in the countryside, participated in Milton’s Presbyterian congregation, and sent his children away to school. Like some other free people of color, he became a slaveholder, with two slaves in 1830 and 14 by 1850. In 1830, when Day married a free woman of color, Aquilla Wilson, in Virginia and sought to have her join him in Milton, the couple confronted an 1826 law against free people of color moving into the state. Such was Day’s local standing that 61 leading white citizens of Milton and Caswell County successfully petitioned the state legislature to enact a law permitting Mrs. Day to enter the state. The petition described Thomas Day as a “first rate workman, a remarkably sober, steady and industrious man, a highminded, good and valuable citizen, possessing a handsome property in this town.” Caswell County planter Romulus Saunders, then state attorney general, added a statement that as the owner of slaves as well as real estate, Day could be relied upon for “disclosure” in the event of any “disturbance among the Blacks. . . . His case may in my opinion, with safety be made an exception to the general rule which policy as this time seems to demand.”

It is not clear when Day may have begun to produce architectural woodwork; examples of the distinctive style identified with him date mainly from the 1850s. His best documented architectural project was the 1847-1849 seating, shelving, and other elements (all lost) for the debating halls and libraries in the newly expanded Old East and Old West buildings at the University of North Carolina. Correspondence between Day and university president David Swain displays language of mutual respect—including Swain’s addressing him as “Mr.

Day,” an unusual courtesy toward a person of color in those days—and illuminates Day’s workshop technology. When Swain encouraged Day to move to Chapel Hill to facilitate the project, Day declined, explaining, “The plank has to be of superior quality & dried in a stem kill [sic] which I have here. You Advise me to come thare to do the work. But I think I can prepare the whole shelving & Boxing here with the assistance of my Powr saws and bring it in wagons which I have, & put it up much sooner, better, & cheaper, to myself than to come & provide the lumber in that neighborhood. I can select better timber here and prepare it much better.”<sup>3</sup>

Day purchased and soon expanded the prominent Union Tavern (Thomas Day House and Shop) on Milton’s Main Street as his dwelling, workshop, and show room, indicating his position in the community. Unusual for a man of color, Day employed white as well as black men and boys in his shop, including a Moravian cabinetmaker and apprentices. In 1850, his shop included himself and his son Devereux as cabinetmakers plus five other free cabinetmakers—4 white and 1 “mulatto”—and a white apprentice. His real estate was valued at \$8,000. The 12 “hands” counted by the census likely included four or five enslaved workers. His workmen and machinery enabled Day to produce large quantities of work in short order: he promised to complete 47 pieces of furniture (much of which survives) for Governor David Reid within two months in 1855.

Because of the national financial crisis of 1857, Day like others was unable to collect on debts owed him and could not pay his own debts; he declared insolvency in 1858. With help from white house carpenter Dabney Terry, Thomas Day, Jr., a cabinetmaker himself, acquired the family home and workshop, where the elder Day renewed his business. On March 10, 1859, Day, Sr. announced in the *Milton Chronicle* that he wished “his Friends and Customers to know his Cabinet Establishment is Continued.” The census of 1860 showed Day, Sr., as a cabinetmaker and owner of \$1,500 in real estate, with his son Thomas in his shop along with a white journeyman cabinetmaker. With five workers and a 6-horsepower steam engine, Day’s workshop produced in that year 40 bureaus valued at \$1,000, 144 chairs (at \$720), 12 sofas (at \$360), and “other work” worth \$1,200. Thomas Day, Sr., is believed to have died in about 1861. Thomas Day, Jr. continued in the trade and later established a cabinetmaking business in Asheville, N. C.

*See images of architectural details at Holderness House and Outbuildings and Yancey-Womack House and Tobacco Building.*

## Bibliography

Patricia Phillips Marshall and Jo Ramsay Leimenstoll, *Thomas Day: Master Craftsman and Free Man of Color*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.



*Bureau, Caleb Richmond, ca. 1850-60.*

Patricia Dane Rogers and Laurel Sneed, "The Missing Chapter in the Life of Thomas Day," *American Furniture* 2013. Hanover, N.H: Chipstone Foundation, 2014.

Ruth Little-Stokes, *An Inventory of Historic Architecture, Caswell County, North Carolina*. Yanceyville: Caswell County Historical Association, 1979.

Tony P. Wrenn, "Thomas Day," in William S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, Vol. 2. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986.

## Notes

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1. Aside from the well-documented work at the University of North Carolina, the only known documentation for Day's architectural woodwork is a somewhat cryptic receipt citing a fire piece for Caswell County planter William Long in 1856.
2. According to Marshall and Leimenstoll, *Thomas Day*, interiors attributed to Day in the eight-county border region of North Carolina and Virginia include 46 in Caswell County, 13 in Person County, five in Rockingham, Surry, and Stokes counties, and 20 or more in the Virginia counties of Halifax, Pittsylvania, and Mecklenburg.
3. December 6, 1847, David L. Swain Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The expansion of Old East and Old West was designed by New York architect Alexander Jackson Davis. Dabney Cosby was the contractor.



# HOLDERNESS HOUSE AND OUTBUILDINGS

## 1850s, ca. 1963

5

3082 U. S. HIGHWAY 158 WEST,  
YANCEYVILLE VICINITY

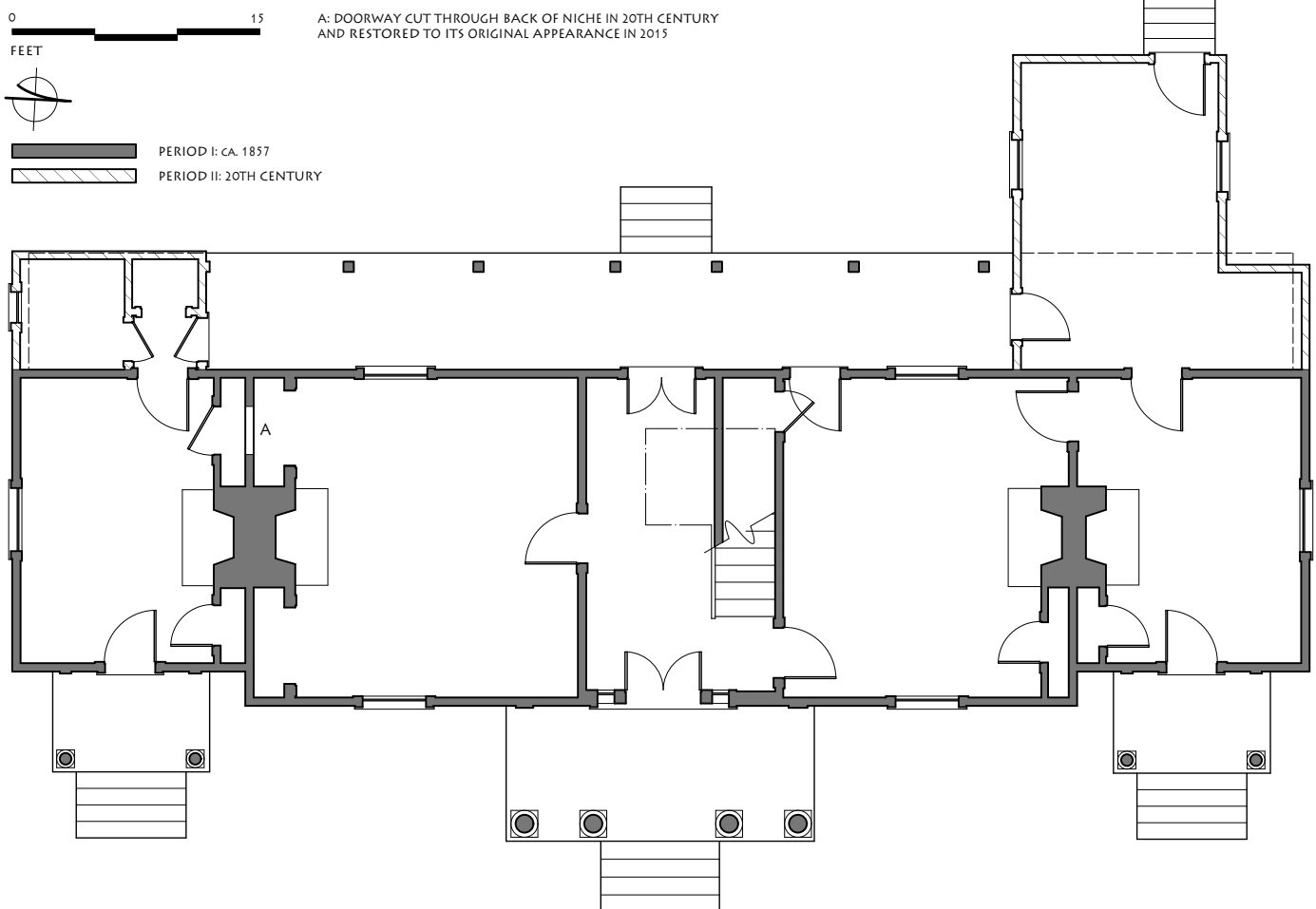
Built for planter William Holderness and his family, this 2-story frame plantation house exemplifies the region's Greek Revival style in its symmetry and bold forms, including the broad, 3-bay main block beneath a hip roof. The flanking wings are unusual in the county and result in an unusual plan. The house is especially notable for its ensemble of distinctive interior woodwork attributed to Thomas Day, the free black Milton cabinetmaker. There are three antebellum outbuildings including a Slave Dwelling, plus a ca. 1963 bomb shelter.

Typical Greek Revival detailing includes the large windows with wide, molded surrounds; the double-leaf front entrance with sidelights and a transom; and, especially, the trio of pedimented porticoes on the main block and wings, each with stout Doric columns and matching pilasters. Continuing an old tradition, the walls sheltered by the porticoes are flush-sheathed. The full-width rear porch with boxed posts is enclosed at the ends for a bathroom and a kitchen wing; the latter likely replaced a freestanding kitchen. Numerous doors accommodate access to the



*Holderness House. Photo: Ruth Little, 2015.*

### FIRST FLOOR PLAN



*Plan, Holderness House.*



main 1<sup>st</sup>-floor rooms, wings, and porch. Originally there was no interior doorway to the south wing room; a door inserted later has been removed.

In the full ensemble of architectural woodwork in the style attributed to Thomas Day, the entrance hall and flanking rooms are the most elaborate, with the *piece de resistance* the bold Day-style stair with a sinuous newel with unfurling tendrils. Covering the end wall of the (south) parlor is a typical composition with a mantel with engaged Ionic columns and a serpentine frieze flanked by arched niches with fluted surrounds and keystones. The dining room opposite has a similar mantel



with fluted pilasters, flanked by a closet and a doorway to the wing. Other rooms have simple pilaster-and-frieze mantels, some flanked by closets, of which the house has an unusual abundance for its day. A baseboard in the upstairs passage retains cream and black marbling likely representing a fuller program of decorative painting.

Three outbuildings are believed to be contemporary with the house. The Carriage House is a gable-fronted, frame structure set on stone piers, with wide flooring and exposed framing. The frame Smokehouse exemplifies an essential building type in a culture that depended on pork and corn. Smokehouses, purpose-built to cure and store the meat after hogs were slaughtered, were built tightly to keep the smoke in and to secure the valuable meat from theft. The double tier of joists was used for hanging the meat during smoking, aging, and storage.

The Slave Dwelling (*too unstable to enter*) is a log structure that comprised two dwelling units flanking a central brick chimney in the “saddlebag” form frequent among late antebellum slave houses. Only one unit survives: it is built of square-notched logs and has a whitewashed interior with exposed ceiling joists. At one time the logs were covered with painted weatherboards. Basements dug in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century for processing tobacco destabilized the building.

Holderness House, interiors. Photo: Willie Graham, 2015.



The underground Bomb Shelter was built at the height of the Cold War in a vaulted form with poured concrete and metal rebar. Featured in *The State* magazine on August 17, 1963, with photographs showing stylish modern furniture, it was used as a guest house and getaway.

Holderness House, Slave Quarters. Photo: Ruth Little, 2014.



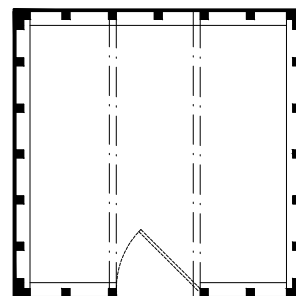
## Family History

The plantation house and outbuildings were constructed in the 1850s for William Holderness (ca. 1818-1890), a native of Caswell County, and his wife, Sarah Foreman (1827-1895), of Virginia, who married between 1850 and 1855. William assembled extensive holdings from relatives who left for Arkansas in the early 1850s. In 1860 the United States Census listed him as a farmer owning \$18,000 worth of real estate and a personal estate of \$18,400, which included 24 slaves. Along with many friends and relatives, William and Sarah Holderness left the county after the war, and their children made their marks in businesses and professions far from Caswell County. After a series of non-family owners, Howard Holderness, Jr., a direct descendant, and his wife, Mary, restored his ancestors' house.

See Ruth Little, "William and Sarah Holdernes House," *National Register of Historic Places nomination* (2014).

## Questions

In the dwelling, how do you explain the arrangement of doorways? What might have been the uses of the wing rooms? Why was the south wing room accessible only from the porches? There would have been many more slave dwellings on the plantation. Why might this one have survived?



Plan, Holderness House Smoke House.  
Drawing: Courtesy Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.



Holderness House, Bomb Shelter. Photo: Ruth Little, 2014.



The photograph from the late 1800s shows later owners George and Martha Dailey at the Holderness House along with an unidentified girl at the gate and other people in the background. Also visible is the slave dwelling, with white-painted weatherboarding.



## YANCEY-WOMACK HOUSE AND TOBACCO BUILDING CA. 1810, 1856 (DATE BRICK)

6

US 158, YANCEYVILLE VICINITY

This plantation house illustrates one of many ways in which builders created a large and impressive house by erecting a stylish front addition to a smaller, older dwelling in response to changing family needs, budgets, and tastes. Nearby is an apparently unique survival of a log tobacco building believed to have been used for storing, ordering, and grading cured tobacco. Both buildings present questions for architectural sleuths (see below).



*Yancey-Womack House. Photo: Carl Lounsbury, 2015.*

The first section of the house was built about 1810, a date consistent with the cut nails with hand-struck-headed nails typical of ca. 1805-1815. It was the home of planter and political leader Bartlett Yancey, Jr. (1785-1828), and his wife Ann (Anne) Graves Yancey (1786-1855), who married in 1808 and were likely living here by 1814, the death date of their first child buried in the family cemetery.

The Yanceys' 1-story house with hall-parlor plan and heated garret typifies in its modest size and conservative finish all but the grandest houses of the region in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. High-quality

traditional craftsmanship appears in the beaded weatherboards and the double-shouldered west chimney with decorative glazed header brickwork. The interior has paneled and flush-sheathed wainscoting and flat-paneled doors hung on HL hinges, traditional hardware still often used in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The larger west room has the best finish, with paneled wainscot and mantel. The enclosed corner stair to the attic bedchambers was accessible from this room and the smaller east room.

In a regionally typical form, the steep gable roof breaks at the rear slope (with a second set of rafters) just below the ridge to shelter rear chambers that flanked an open porch. These rooms may have been part of the initial construction or added a short time afterward, perhaps to accommodate the growing family. (When Ruth Little and Tony Wrenn recorded this house in the early 1970s, the two rear rooms were separated by and opened into a central recessed porch. Later the partitions and ceiling were removed, exposing the framing and other structural elements.)

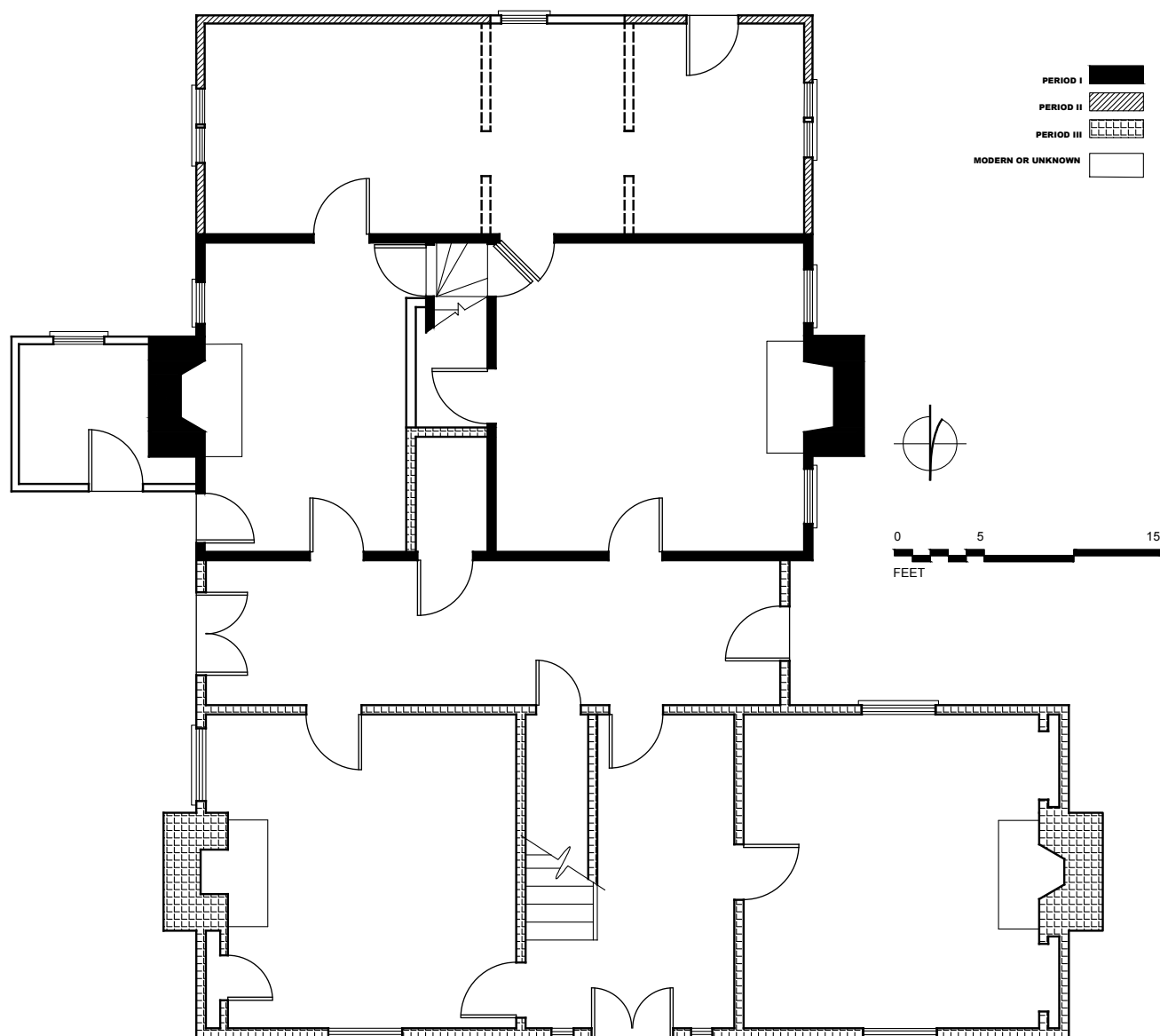


*Yancey-Womack House, rear. Photo: Willie Graham, 2015.*

Exemplary of the late antebellum era is the 1856 addition built facing the road for Ann Yancey's daughter, Ann (Anne) Elizabeth (1821 -1900), and her husband, Thomas Womack (1831-1889), who married in 1855. Typical of the era are its central passage plan, 1-room deep, and robust Greek Revival style finish. Although the present front porch dates from the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Greek Revival columns survive at the front and side porches.

Of special interest is the method of joining the new house to the old one. There were various ways to add a new house to an existing one. Here the carpenter built a 1-story lateral hallway along the rear of the new section, with doorways into the older house and entrances at either end. He also built a 2<sup>nd</sup>-story room atop the east end of the old house and made various changes to the older building.

Ann and Thomas Womack like many of their contemporaries commissioned an ensemble of interior woodwork typifying the craft of the popular Milton cabinetmaker Thomas Day. Arriving by the front double doors, one faces a handsome stair with a bold, S-shaped newel suggestive of a harp. Slender balusters carry the rounded and ramped handrail, and curvaceous



*Plan, Yancey-Womack House. Drawing: measured by Sunny Stewart, Evelyn Strobe, Willie Graham, drawn by Joe Bailey, 2015.*





*Yancey-Womack House, interior.*  
*Photo: Willie Graham, 2015.*

step-end brackets echo the newel. The parlor (west room) displayed a Day-style ensemble, with a columned mantel (now lost) flanked by arched niches. As was usual, the dining room across the passage and other rooms have simpler Greek Revival and Italianate mantels and trim. Near the house is the small, frame building said to have been Yancey's law office and dating from the Federal period. The family cemetery lies nearby.

Especially remarkable is the Yancey-Womack Tobacco Building, which probably dates from the 1850s and is among the state's oldest examples of a packing, ordering, and stripping barn. It is an important reminder that tobacco farmers not only raised the crop but also added value to the leaf by processing it to exacting standards before taking it to market.

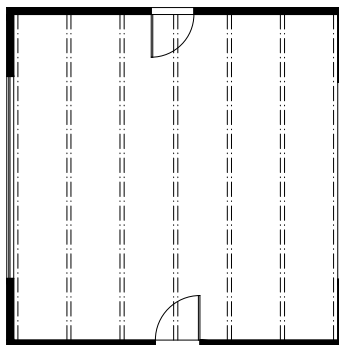
The 28-foot-square log building is constructed with traditional materials and methods: covered with a gable roof, it is set on a rubble stone base and has walls of hewn logs with diamond-notched corners and original (or early) clay chinking. The front and rear circular-sawn batten doors and their cast-iron butt hinges suggest an 1850s date. The low, wide windows, one on each gable end, have sliding wood sash.

Stovepipe holes are located above the doors. A 20<sup>th</sup>-century shed on the front (north) may have replaced an earlier one, and traces of short, pent roofs occur on both gable walls. The interior, open to the rafters, contains six rows of tier poles, creating six "rooms" about 4-feet wide to carry tobacco sticks for hanging tobacco. The bottom pole is well above head height to allow for work activity on the board floor. The earth cellar is lit by small openings in the foundation.

The multi-purpose structure illustrates the complexity of antebellum bright leaf tobacco production as described in "Tobacco Farming." After the tobacco was cured in barns a short distance away, the farm workers moved the tobacco leaves, tied onto sticks, to this structure and hung them in the upper area to await processing. After the leaves absorbed some moisture from the air, the workers moved the sticks and leaves to the cool and humid basement, where they were further softened or "brought to order" to prevent crumbling. Finally, the workers carried the tobacco back upstairs to be stripped from the sticks



*Yancey-Womack Tobacco Building. Photo: Carl Lounsbury, 2015.*



0 5 10 15

*Plan, Yancey-Womack Tobacco Building.*  
*Drawing: Courtesy Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.*



*Yancey-Womack Tobacco Building, interior. Photo: Willie Graham, 2015.*



and sorted for grading. Skilled graders typically sat at long tables, illuminated by the side windows, to accomplish this exacting task. The (absent) stoves vented by the stovepipes may have been installed to keep the workers warm enough to handle the leaf. The quality of grading and sorting as well as the quality of the leaf itself helped determine the price the tobacco would bring. Once graded and sorted, the tobacco was ready for shipment or carrying to market. Depending on the era, it might be packed in hogsheads or left loose.

## Questions

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In the house, were the rear rooms of the older section part of the first phase of construction or added slightly later? What evidence supports the alternatives? Where was the original front entrance of the rear section? (No evidence of an original door to the main room of the rear section has been found.) What was the advantage of building the transverse passage as a means of linking the old and new sections? What other changes were made to the old Yancey House when the Womack House was added? In the tobacco building, what evidence do you see of the various uses of the spaces in the structure? Do you accept the 1850s date? How may the uses of the building have changed over time? Was the cellar a later addition? Were the windows later as well?

## Family History: Genealogy Alert

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The history of the Yancey-Womack plantation is woven into the local plantation family network; some readers may skip over these details, while for others they illuminate the larger pattern of social and economic connections within one plantation world. Bartlett Yancey, Jr. was the 10<sup>th</sup> child of schoolteacher Bartlett Yancey, Sr., who died before the boy was born, and Ann Graves, a sister of Yanceyville patriarch John H. Graves. Brilliant though impecunious, Bartlett, Jr., studied at the University of North Carolina, made influential friends, and in 1808 married his cousin, another Ann Graves, who was the ninth of John H. Graves' 10 children. Ann's father likely gave the couple the land for their home and probably slaves as well.<sup>1</sup>

Bartlett, Jr., and Ann Yancey had eight children, of whom three daughters lived into old age. Bartlett established a respected law practice and became a Congressman (1813-1817) and speaker of the North Carolina State Senate (1817-1827). He advocated for state internal improvements, public education, and the University of North Carolina until his sudden death in 1828 at age 43. A few years later a western North Carolina county and the Caswell County seat were named for him.

Ann Graves Yancey survived her husband for nearly 27 years, operating the plantation with enslaved workers and probably the help of overseers. In a frequent pattern, 1 daughter, Ann Elizabeth, remained single and lived with her mother until the older woman's death. The 1850 census showed Ann Graves Yancey, aged 63, with \$21,000 worth of real estate and 62 slaves.<sup>2</sup> At her death in 1855, Ann Graves Yancey left her extensive property to her children and grandchildren. She gave Ann Elizabeth for her lifetime her home plantation of 500-600 acres on the Yanceyville-Hillsborough road, which was then to go to Ann Elizabeth's children, if any, or otherwise to another family member. She also bequeathed to Ann Elizabeth household items including "two large parlor mirrors and one dozen gilt chairs" indicative of the family's style of life, plus 1/5th of her estate not otherwise disposed of.<sup>2</sup>

Within a few months of her mother's death, Ann Elizabeth married the considerably younger Thomas Jefferson Womack of a local planter family. The newlyweds soon constructed the stylish front section of the house (date brick 1856) and had the first of their four children. The United States Census of 1860 listed Womack, a farmer aged 29, heading a household that included Ann Elizabeth, 39, and their children aged three and two. Womack was listed with \$8,900 in real estate and \$33,000 in personal property, which included a large but unknown number of slaves. Some of this wealth likely represented Ann Elizabeth's inheritance including her life estate from her mother.

Like other planter families, the Womacks experienced dramatic economic losses as a result of the Civil War, but in the 1870 census Thomas still had \$4,000 worth of real estate and \$1,000 in personal property. Thomas was among several local planters active in Democratic politics. Ann and Thomas lived here for many more years and were interred in the nearby family cemetery. The house was renovated in the early 2000s to accommodate a restaurant, which has since closed.

It is not certain whether the ca. 1850s tobacco building was built for Ann Yancey or for her daughter, Ann Elizabeth, and husband, Thomas. Tobacco was likely the farm's biggest crop and required the work of many hands, whether enslaved before the Civil War or free afterward. According to the United States Census of 1850, Ann Yancey, identified as a farmer, produced 2,800 pounds of tobacco in that year, and Ann E. Yancey (possibly Ann Elizabeth Yancey or another woman) produced 4,200 pounds. In July, 1854, the *Wilmington, N. C. Tri-Weekly Commercial* carried a report that "the large tobacco barn of Mrs. Ann Yancey was destroyed by fire.... There was in it about twelve or fifteen thousand pounds of tobacco of choice quality." The tobacco was valued at about \$1,500, a substantial portion of the income the Yancey women had anticipated for the year. Since one tobacco worker might cultivate 1,500 pounds per year, the fire destroyed the work of eight to 10 slaves. It is possible that the current barn replaced the building destroyed by fire. Tobacco cultivation continued here for many years, but only this specialized building represents tobacco processing on this site.

*See Ruth Little, Bartlett Yancey House, National Register of Historic Places nomination (1973).*

## Notes

1. Both of these women were named Ann or Anne but also called Nancy, a standard naming pattern of the time. John H. Graves's will left specific property to his sons and also confirmed unrecorded gifts to his sons-in-law for the benefit of his daughters; these likely included Bartlett Yancey, Jr., and Ann Graves Yancey.
2. The Bartlett & Nancy (Graves) Yancey Family Bible includes a list giving the names, birth dates, and mothers' names for 141 enslaved people born between 1810 and 1864; it includes a few early death dates but does not record the enslaved people's last names or subsequent life events. See <http://homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~elacey/yancey/bartlettib.htm>.
3. In this period, the law provided that when a woman married her property went to her husband unless other legal arrangements were made. By leaving property to Ann Elizabeth only for her lifetime, Ann Yancey Graves like other parents of daughters meant to assure it would not become the husband's property which he might dispose of as he chose. None of Bartlett, Jr., and Ann Graves Yancey's sons had children; Ann's only grandchildren were her daughters' children. The Yancey daughters' husbands included leading political and industrial figures. Mary Yancey wed Giles Mebane and allegedly proposed the county name of Alamance, and Virginia Yancey married George Swepson, a controversial figure during Reconstruction. For Ann Graves Yancey's will including bequests to her children and grandchildren see <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ncccha/pdf/wills/willofannyanney.pdf>.

Established as a centrally located county seat called Caswell Courthouse after the original Caswell County was subdivided to form Person and Caswell counties in 1792, Yanceyville possesses one of the most striking antebellum courthouses in the state and a diverse collection of other buildings from its 19<sup>th</sup>-century heyday. A dominant influence in the town's history was the Graves family. John Herndon Graves (1746?-1829), a politically prominent planter and veteran of the American Revolution, was among the founders who owned 100 acres at the center of town. He soon bought out the others and over the years gave property in land and slaves to his numerous children, including prime town lots to his sons. Graves family members appear in the histories of several local buildings. In 1831 the town was renamed Yancey, then Yanceyville, after John H. Graves's distinguished and recently deceased son-in-law, Bartlett Yancey, Jr.; see Yancey-Womack House and Tobacco Building.

Primarily a government center in contrast to the riverside market town of Milton, during the county's antebellum era of tobacco prosperity, Yanceyville supported cultural societies, hotels and taverns, tobacco factories, and shops and artisans selling fashionable coaches, furniture, and clothing. Local men published influential articles on tobacco cultivation and curing. After the Civil War, Yanceyville, like much of the county and region, continued to base its economy on the cultivation of bright leaf tobacco. During Reconstruction, it was the scene of violent strife when the formerly Confederate planter-merchant elite and others clashed with northern and local black and white Republicans, a conflict that resulted in 1870 in state military rule and was soon succeeded by the reestablishment of the local white elite (see "Reconstruction"). Lacking water power for industry or a rail connection, the town remained relatively small but continued to serve its purpose as county seat. Its current population is about 2,000.

Most of the notable 19<sup>th</sup> century-architecture concentrates around the courthouse and along West Main Street. In a pattern common in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but seldom surviving to the



- |   |                                  |                                |
|---|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>A</b> Caswell County Courthouse      | <b>E</b> Graves Store            | <b>I</b> Harrellson House      |
| <b>B</b> Caswell County Jail            | <b>F</b> Kerr House and Tavern   | <b>J</b> Thornton-Hunter House |
| <b>C</b> Clarendon Hall                 | <b>G</b> Turner-White Apartments | <b>K</b> Dongola               |
| <b>D</b> Graves-Florance-Gatewood House | <b>H</b> Sallie Martin House     |                                |



present, the streets are lined with a mix of businesses, industries, churches, and large and small houses. Only a few examples remain, however, of the dwellings of the many slaves and poorer whites or of the outbuildings that once filled the back lots.

## CASWELL COUNTY COURTHOUSE

1858-1861

**Courthouse Square**

**A**

**William Percival, architect; David McKnight, contractor**

A grand gesture of county pride and progress on the eve of the Civil War, the picturesque and eclectic courthouse was a radical departure from the traditional and classical forms familiar in the county and the soberly classical courthouses in the region. It is one of the few landmarks in the county with a documented designer or builder. To replace a Greek Revival courthouse built in 1831-1833 by John Berry of Hillsborough, the county commissioners chose an architect known for novel designs. (The existing courthouse had suffered from a fire, and local leaders decided to replace it rather than restore it.) Early in 1858, county leaders decided on a plan by John W. Cosby, the son of the well-known brick builder Dabney Cosby of Virginia and Raleigh. Nothing is known of Cosby's design, which was not used.

Research by William Bushong revealed that by the summer of 1858, architect William Percival had persuaded the commissioners to employ him instead and was advertising for builders to bid on construction of the courthouse. Why they changed course is unknown. Drawings and specifications could be seen at Percival's office in Raleigh or at the old courthouse in Yanceyville (*Greensboro Patriot*, September 3, 1858).<sup>1</sup> The contractor, David McKnight, was a Greensboro brickmason who had been involved in major recent projects including the North Carolina Hospital for the Insane in Raleigh, designed by New York architect Alexander Jackson Davis, and the North Carolina Railroad Company Shops in present Burlington.

Percival, a somewhat mysterious architect recently of Virginia, was an effective self-promoter whose brief tenure in North Carolina (1857-1859) produced a series of stylish private and public buildings including Gothic Revival churches in Raleigh and Tarboro, Italianate university halls at Chapel Hill, and eccentric Italianate villas in Tarboro and Raleigh. The

*Raleigh Standard* of November 16, 1859, praised the Caswell County Courthouse then underway, for which Percival had displayed drawings at the State Fair in Raleigh.

Percival created an exotic, highly 3-dimensional composition with arched 2-story pavilions creating the effect of a villa or palazzo, topped by a domed cupola. Tall, arched windows define the courtroom floor as a *piano nobile*, and an arcaded loggia opening from the courtroom features pilasters with capitals of corn and tobacco celebrating local agricultural wealth.<sup>2</sup> The grand courtroom retains its elaborate molded plaster ceiling, an arched judge's niche, and



Caswell County Courthouse. Photo: Michael Southern, 2016.

cast-iron railings. In a common pattern, the first story contains a long passage flanked by offices. When Percival disappeared from North Carolina late in 1859, he left this and other projects incomplete, but it was evidently finished by the contractor by the summer of 1861. By that time, many of the county's men had left to fight in the war that would transform the slave-based economy that had produced the grand courthouse.

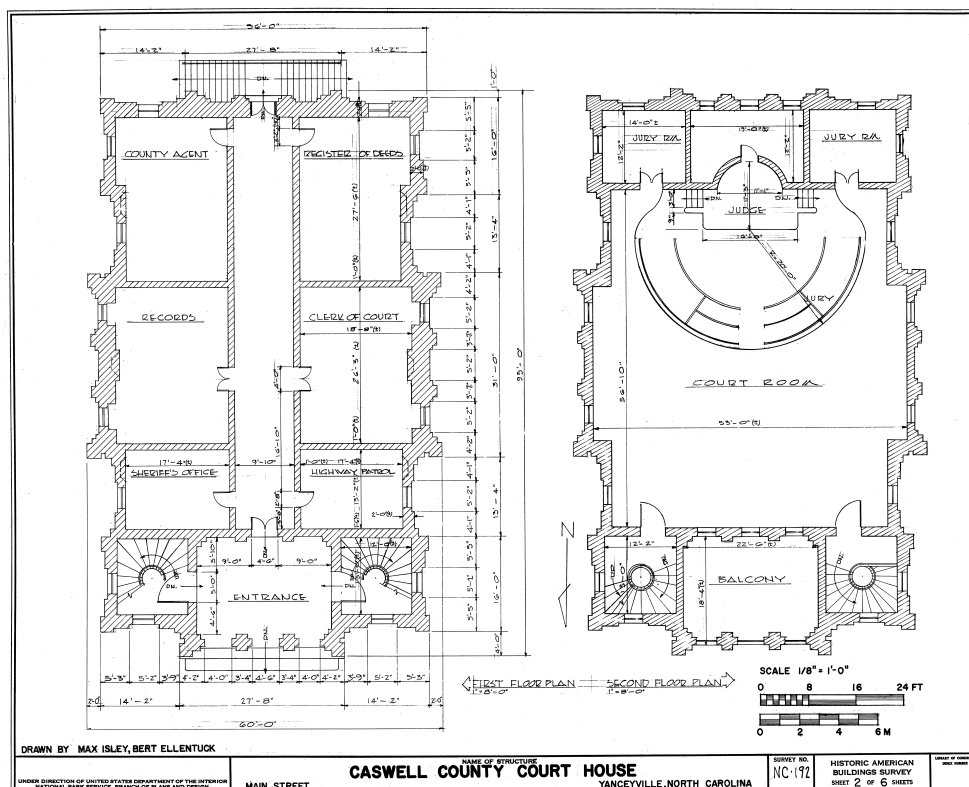
During Reconstruction, the notorious murder of the local white Republican state senator John W. Stephens by local Ku Klux Klan members took place in a ground floor room of the courthouse on May 21, 1870.

The murder, perpetrated by several prominent local men, led to the imposition of militia rule and eventually to the end of Republican governance in the state. No one was convicted of the murder. (See Reconstruction and the Ku Klux Klan in Caswell County.) Divergent local legends report that the murder was a bloodless one and that there was so much blood that the floor boards had to be replaced three times. The courthouse functions were moved to a new building in 1977.

As in many southern county seats, the courthouse faces a Confederate monument. The bronze figure atop a high base is depicted in full Confederate uniform, including a broad-brimmed hat, and carrying a rifle. The memorial was erected by the Caswell Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1921. In contrast to more defiant texts on some such memorials, and perhaps reflecting the post-World War I date, it is dedicated "To the sons of Caswell County who served in the war of 1861 in answer to the call of their country. In whatever event that may face our national existence may God give us the will to do what is right, that like our forefathers, we may impress our time with the sincerity and steadfastness of our lives."

## Questions

What did the choice of the novel and picturesque courthouse design indicate about the perspective of county leaders on the eve of the Civil War? Why did the KKK members select the courthouse as the setting for the politically and racially motivated murder? What do you think of the conflicting stories about the blood from the murder?



*Plan, Caswell County Courthouse. Drawing: HABS.*



## CASWELL COUNTY JAIL

### 1908

### Behind Caswell County Courthouse

B



*Caswell County Jail. Photo: Michael Southern, 2016.*

The 2-story brick structure is especially interesting for its original cell block and the array of manufactured jail fittings, including some from the Stewart Jail Works of Cincinnati noted on an emblem on the building. The B. F. Smith Construction Company of Washington, D.C. constructed it in 1907-1908 for \$6,800. Like many jails of its era and before, it was built to house the jailer and his family on the first floor and prisoners on the second floor. The thick brick walls feature decorative corbeling and a variety of arched and rectangular openings. Obvious security measures include the barred windows, a sturdy wooden entrance, and a heavy, steel door at the rear corner leading to the stair to the cell block.



*Caswell County Jail, lock.*

The 1<sup>st</sup>-floor accommodations for the jailer and his family included three main rooms plus a kitchen, where a cook prepared meals for both the family and the prisoners. In the 2<sup>nd</sup>-story cell block, as the Caswell County Historical Association website notes, the cells retain “cold steel walls covered with years of graffiti, the artwork and philosophy of the countless prisoners housed there.” The website also notes the indoor “hanging cell” with a trap door, which may never have been used: when the jail was built, executions in North Carolina were still handled at the local level, and this cell was built into the jail for that purpose at a time when public hangings were on the way out in the state. The state soon took on responsibility for executions, eliminating the need for the special cell. The jail served until 1973, when a new one was built. Long neglected, it was restored in 1985-1986 by community volunteers. See <http://ncccha.blogspot.com/2006/06/caswell-county-jail.html>.

### Questions

How does this jail compare with others you have seen from the period? Do you know of other jail fittings by the Stewart Jail Company? Why would the county want the jailer to live in the same building as the prisoners?



*Clarendon Hall. Photo: Willie Graham, 2015.*

## CLARENDON HALL

### 1842-1843

### 53 W. Main Street

C

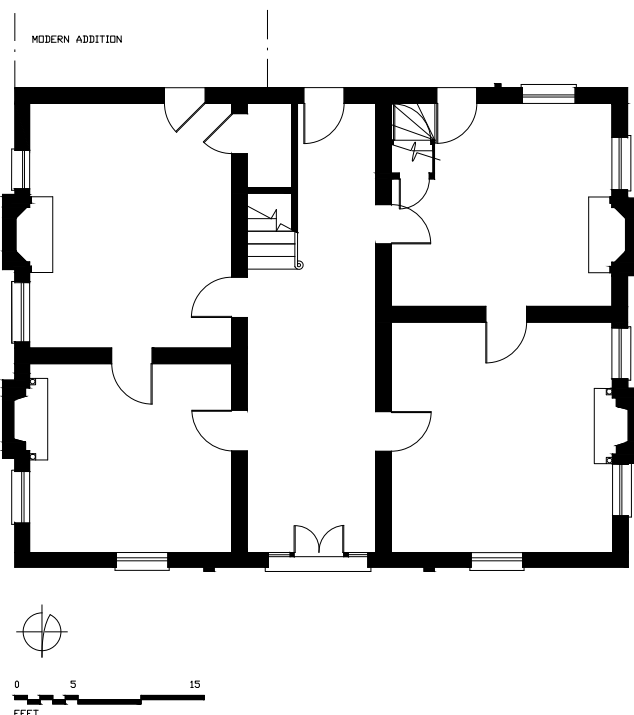
Located just a few steps from the courthouse, the imposing and elaborately finished Greek Revival brick house built for planter and banker Thomas Donoho Johnston (1800-1883) proclaims its owner's



stature as one of the wealthiest men in the antebellum county. A brick dated 1842 indicates its construction date. As a brick residence 2 stories tall and a full 2 rooms deep, it like nearby Dongola represents the most costly antebellum residences in the region. In a local pattern, it has Flemish-bond brickwork on the front, and rows of Flemish-bond separated by four to six courses of stretchers on the sides and back.

The robust Greek Revival woodwork provides a lexicon of popular pattern book motifs of the era, including Asher Benjamin's *Practical House Carpenter* (1830) and *Practice of Architecture* (1833). On the exterior, these include the Greek key lintels above the windows and the entrance porch with an urn-topped balustrade. Interior treatments show a hierarchy from room to room. Mantels feature motifs from Benjamin's *Practice of Architecture* in various combinations of pilasters, engaged Ionic and Doric colonnettes, Greek key motifs, faceted frieze tablets, and shallow, pedimented backboards with "thumbs" or acroteria at the ends. The stair follows a popular design adapted from a plate in Owen Biddle's *Young Carpenter's Assistant* (1805 and later) and seen in both Federal style and Greek Revival buildings. Its rounded handrail atop slim balusters forms a volute over the newel and curved curtail step, and delicate step-end brackets have a spiral and bud motif, which appears in stylized form in the uppermost flight. The artisans who built the house remain a mystery. Thomas Day biographer Jo Leimenstoll and others point to hints of Day's style in certain details of the mantels and stair. Notably, some of the pattern-book motifs seen at Clarendon Hall recur, often in stylized forms, in later work associated with Day along with other elements from Benjamin's *Practice of Architecture*.

A native of the county, Thomas D. Johnston was a merchant, operator of a blacksmith shop, president of the Bank of Yanceyville (chartered in 1852), and civic leader who became known as the richest man in Yanceyville. He married Sarah McCabe in 1825 and moved to Caswell Courthouse by the late 1820s. He bought this property from members of the Graves family and built the present house ca. 1842-1843. After Sarah's death in the early 1840s, Thomas remarried in 1845, the young widow, Adaline Williamson Daniel (1820-1885), who was of a local planter family. In 1850, the Johnston household included 10 children aged from 23 to a baby, and Thomas owned \$12,000 in real estate and 52 slaves. By 1860, in contrast



Plan, Clarendon Hall. Drawing: measured by Sunny Stewart and Gary Stanton. drawn by Joe Bailey and Willie Graham, 2015.



Clarendon Hall, interior. Photos: Willie Graham, 2015.

to the many who suffered losses from the Panic of 1857, he had enlarged his fortune—to \$40,000 in real estate and a stunning \$121,000 in personal property that included 84 slaves at his plantations and 32 elsewhere. Even after the war, in 1870 Thomas was a property-owning merchant with \$10,000 worth of personal and real property. In an early project of Preservation North Carolina, the house was restored in the 1970s by its present owners, Margaret and Ben Williams; he was the longtime director of the North Carolina Museum of Art.

## Questions

What were the uses of the four main rooms? Where might Johnston's domestic slaves have lived? Why did the builder use different brick bonds on different facades? Why would the interior have generally Greek Revival features combined with a Federal style stair? Do you see any similarities to Day's attributed distinctive style in this house?

## GRAVES-FLORANCE-GATEWOOD HOUSE



**Ca. 1822; mid and late 19<sup>th</sup> century**

**15 E. Main Street, at Courthouse Square**

The 2-story frame house with four exterior end brick chimneys was apparently built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and remodeled during the mid and late 19<sup>th</sup> century during its varied uses as a residence, a school, and a small hotel. The ornate porch and the decorative front center gable reflect updates in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, probably during the ownership of the Florance family who acquired the property ca. 1880. Local history states that the house was built for Captain William Graves (1780-1845)—a son of town founder John H. Graves, probably on property his father gave him, and his second wife and cousin, Ann Lea Graves (1794-1857), who married in 1815. Ann survived her husband for several years and in 1850 was operating a hotel in her home.

In about 1880, the house was acquired by the local Florance family and continued with descendants. In 1930 Mary Lea Florance (1903-1995) married the county sheriff, John Yancey Gatewood (1893-1954); after his death she wed John Richard Nicks (1904-1976), whom she survived for many years. The only Gatewood child, Maud Florance Gatewood (1934- 2004), became one of Yanceyville's most illustrious citizens as a nationally renowned artist who returned to the county in 1975 and was Caswell's first female county commissioner—"Just me and the boys," she said. Now owned by the Caswell County Historical Association, the house

has an exhibit of Maud Gatewood's work in the room where she was born, plus a local history museum that features a pistol owned by John W. Stephens, who was nonetheless murdered in the nearby courthouse, and furniture documented or attributed to Thomas Day of Milton. Moved to the site is a typical tobacco barn.

## Questions

What evidence do you see from various periods of the history of the house? What dates do they suggest and what types of changes?



*Graves-Florance-Gatewood House. Photo: Ruth Little, 2015.*



## GRAVES STORE

E

1830s

28 W. Main Street

One of three pediment-front brick stores in the county, the building was typical of traditional mixed uses in having the shop below and living quarters above. The façade features Flemish-bond brickwork beneath a stuccoed pediment. There are front and rear rooms on both floors and an enclosed corner stair. The rear rooms have simple mantels, and the rear 1<sup>st</sup>-story room and both 2<sup>nd</sup>-story rooms have chair rails, perhaps indicating their domestic use. A full basement opens to the street. In 1811 town founder John Herndon Graves deeded the entire block to his son Azariah (1776-1837); a bachelor and a merchant, Azariah built the store for his own use and apparently lived upstairs. After Azariah's death, his siblings conveyed the property to merchant Owen McAleer, who ran the store until his death before 1850. It was later used as a post office, newspaper office, and lawyer's office.



Graves Store. Photo: Marvin Brown, 2016.

## KERR HOUSE AND HOTEL (RICE TAVERN)

F

Ca. 1844

W. Main Street

This large brick building, referred to in a deed of 1874 as the old Rice Tavern, served an essential role in the county seat for nearly a century. Izban Rice evidently had the 2-story brick building constructed several years after purchasing the property in 1832. The Greek Revival structure has four main rooms per floor heated by twin chimneys at each gable end. The walls are of a Flemish bond variation, and the extended lintels with bullseye cornerblocks show a treatment often seen in Virginia. It initially had a wider, columned porch.

After a series of owners, the building was associated with the Kerr family who lived here for many years after the Civil War. John H. Kerr (1844-1924), a Confederate veteran who served as clerk of the county court, purchased the property in 1874. In 1870 he married his cousin, Eliza Catherine Yancey (1844-1927), like him a descendant of John H. Graves. From the 1880s until 1927, Eliza operated "Kerr's Hotel" here, which became a regional social center known for its fine repasts. Son Albert Yancey Kerr (1878-1942), a locally prominent political figure, and his second wife, Mary Oliver (1896-1982), continued to operate the hotel as a popular gathering place for judges and lawyers attending court sessions for several years. The Kerrs' updates included a ca. 1928 brick dining room wing and the 1930s replacement of the porch. Their daughter, Katherine Kerr Kendall (1921-1997), was a genealogist and local historian.

The Caswell County Historical Association web site includes a 1934 account by a reporter who wrote that the white-columned house did not look like a hotel, and



Kerr House and Hotel (Rice Tavern). Photo: Marvin Brown, 2016.



the “tall man in the soft hat, well-fitting suit, and high pale kid shoes did not look like a hotel keeper. ‘Do you run this house as a hotel?’ I asked. ‘We take people,’ he replied courteously. ‘Come on in.’”

See <http://ncccha.blogspot.com/search?q=Kerr+Hotel> and <http://ncccha.blogspot.com/2009/12/kerr-house-yanceyville-north-carolina.html>.

## **TURNER-WHITE APARTMENTS (ALBERT GALLATIN YANCEY HOUSE) G**

**1840s, 1936**

**188 W. Main Street**



*Turner-White Apartments (Albert Gallatin Yancey House).  
Photo: Willie Graham, 2015.*

This striking building is unique within the local tradition of expanding older structures. An antebellum, 2-story brick house was transformed in 1936 into a white-stuccoed apartment house in Art Moderne style with a curved entrance bay and glass block windows. The architect of the remodeling is said to be a Mr. Moorefield. A telltale survival from the original house appears in the end chimney with curved shoulders typical of local antebellum work. Part of the local network of family residences, it was built as the home of Dr. Albert Gallatin Yancey (1817-1887), and his second cousin, Mary Graves Miles (1823-1898), who married in 1843. Their six children included Eliza Yancey who married John H. Kerr and ran Kerr’s Hotel next door.

## **SALLIE MARTIN HOUSE H**

**Early 1840s, 1850s**

**303 W. Main Street**

The neatly finished 1-story brick house with heated garret rooms recalls the importance of small but well-built dwellings in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Its builders combined traditional aspects of form and plan—a hall-parlor plan plus rear shed rooms added within a few years—with stylish finish including Greek Revival elements similar to the much larger Clarendon Hall. Typical of local brickwork, the main façade is of Flemish bond, and the side and rear walls are of 1:5 bond. Flat jack arches without keystone bricks top the windows and front door.

The interior combines simple Greek Revival elements with others that may reflect an 1850s update. The northwest front room, the parlor, features a bold mantel in the style of Milton cabinetmaker Thomas Day along with symmetrically molded door and window frames.

Evidently when this room was updated, its original mantel and chair rail were moved to one



*Sallie Martin House. Photo:s Willie Graham, 2015.*



of the new shed rooms, while the other front room remained unchanged. A corner stair leads to the

bedchambers, with only the “parlor chamber” having a fireplace. These chambers retain some original painted and grained doors. Little is known of the history of the house, including the identity of its initial owner. At one time the house was stuccoed and had a full-width porch; a recent restoration uncovered the brick walls and installed a small entrance porch.

## HARRELSON HOUSE



ca. 1885

**296 West Main Street**

This 2-story frame Victorian house, a rare late 19<sup>th</sup>-century dwelling in Yanceyville, was built for merchant Walter Harrelson (1859-1928) and his wife, Fannie Delilah Graves (1861-1928), a granddaughter of Jeremiah Graves of Dongola. The house has dual facades with identical entrance porches with chamfered porch posts, decorative brackets, and sawn balustrades. The main front faces Dongola, the other West Main Street.



*Harrelson House. Photo: Marvin Brown, 2016.*

## THORNTON-HUNTER HOUSE



Ca. 1810

**327 W. Main Street**

Believed to be the oldest structure in Yanceyville, the little frame house with its steep gable roof is an important survival of the modest, well-crafted dwellings of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. With two 1<sup>st</sup>-floor rooms, front and back, sharing a corner fireplace, it is even smaller than the first section of the Yancey-Womack House in the country. Exemplary of its good craftsmanship are the beaded weatherboards and 9/9 windows with molded window sills. The chimney on the east side has 1:5 brickwork now covered in stucco. The front room has elaborate, vernacular Federal style woodwork. Rising between the two rooms, a tight, enclosed stair winds up to two garret rooms with batten doors, horizontal wood sheathing, and later mantels.

The early history of the house is unknown, though it may have been built for a member of the Graves family. The first owner associated with it is Dr. Robert B. Thornton (d. 1875), who married Susan F. Smith in 1833 and is said to have had his residence and office here. Their daughter, Donna Rebecca (1840 - 1897), married Jeremiah Graves, Jr. (1835-1901) of Dongola across the street. The house was later the home of the Hunter family, who expanded it in the 1920s.



*Thornton-Hunter House. Photo: Marvin Brown, 2016.*



**DONGOLA**  
**1835-1836**  
**336 W. Main Street**



*Dongola. Photo: Ruth Little, 2001.*

The most monumental dwelling in the county and among the grandest in the North Carolina Piedmont, this 2-story, L-plan brick house presents an ensemble of late Federal and early Greek Revival elements often seen in the 1830s. Rare for its time and place is the towering portico of stuccoed brick columns, in an unfluted Doric order favored by Asher Benjamin, complemented by a Doric entablature. Following a local pattern, the main (east) façade and side elevations are laid in Flemish bond brickwork, with a variation of common bond on the rear. A different hierarchy appears among the single and triple, arched and square-headed windows. The interiors are some of the most sophisticated in the county, including a

neoclassical mantel with fluted colonnettes and a frieze with swags flanking an urn.

Jeremiah Graves, Sr. (1786-1868), a tobacco planter and a grandson of John H. Graves, is said to have had the house built in the mid-1830s, inspired by a Virginia house he saw on a trip to Richmond. He and his wife, Delilah Lea, who married in 1816, had at least 9 children. Jeremiah Jr., the youngest, inherited Dongola, married Donna Thornton (Thornton-Hunter House) in 1860, and had a large family. The house remained in the family until 1962 when it was bequeathed to the North Carolina Baptist State Foundation for use as a retirement home. It is now a private residence. In *The Early Architecture of North Carolina* (1941), architectural historian Thomas T. Waterman suggested similarities between Dongola and the Virginia houses Horn Quarter and Hemstead, while some observers have seen a similarity with Virginia work by Dabney Cosby. Both avenues deserve further study.

## Notes

1. William B. Bushong, "William Percival, an English Architect in the Old North State, 1857-1860," *North Carolina Historical Review*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (July, 1980) and William B. Bushong and Lawrence Wodehouse, "William Percival," in William Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, Vol. 5 (1994).
2. At the University of North Carolina, New York architect Alexander Jackson Davis had used a Corinthian type order with corn and wheat—akin to Benjamin Latrobe's earlier U. S. Capitol—for the portico of Smith Hall (1849-1852), a building familiar to both Percival and Caswell County leaders. It may have inspired the design of the Caswell County Courthouse loggia capitals.



## RECONSTRUCTION AND THE KU KLUX KLAN IN CASWELL COUNTY

During the turbulent Reconstruction era, which lasted from the end of the Civil War through the mid-1870s, Ku Klux Klan violence roiled much of North Carolina. It was especially acute in 1868-1870 in Caswell County and Alamance County, just to the south. The KKK originated in Tennessee in 1866 among whites embittered by the outcome of the war, who sought to defend their position against perceived threats from the new freedmen. It soon spread throughout the South. The KKK comprised many of the white elite, who used scare techniques and violence to intimidate and occasionally kill blacks and white native and northern Republicans. (The original Klan generally subsided in North Carolina later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the members of its 20<sup>th</sup>-century incarnations had different social identities.)

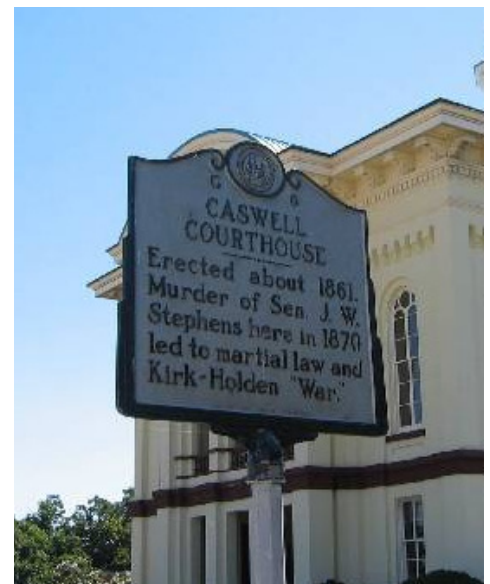
Klan activity in North Carolina intensified after the Republican-dominated Congressional Reconstruction forced the state to adopt a new constitution in 1868 enabling black men to vote, and Republicans elected William Holden of Raleigh as governor, as well as several black legislators and local officeholders. The KKK supported the white Democrats' determination to regain power. The concentration of Klan violence in 1868-1870 in Alamance and Caswell counties resulted from the fairly even balance of power between white Democrats, including members of the local elite, and Republicans, including white Unionists and newly enfranchised blacks. Matters came to a head on February 26, 1870, in Alamance County when a Klan mob lynched Wyatt Outlaw, a prominent black citizen and Union veteran, at the courthouse square in Graham.

This event was followed in May by the murder in the Caswell County Courthouse of white Republican and native North Carolinian John W. ("Chicken") Stephens. A member of the Union League active in politically organizing the local majority black population, he was elected to the State Senate in 1868, largely on the strength of black votes. On May 21, 1870, Stephens was attending a Democratic political rally at the courthouse when Frank Wiley, a Klansman and former county sheriff, lured him to a downstairs room, where other Klansmen lay in wait to murder him. As the last surviving participant, John Lea, later stated, one of the men held a gun to Stephens and disarmed him of three pistols. Stephens "was then stabbed in the breast and also in the neck . . . and the knife was thrown at his feet and the rope left around his neck. We all came out, closed the door and locked it on the outside and took the key and threw it into County Line Creek." (See <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nccaswel/misc/confession.htm> for Lea's confession.)

Stephens's body was discovered the next day and suspicion immediately fell on "a well-known secret association." These two murders along with other violence turned the tide of history in North Carolina. That summer, Governor Holden declared Alamance and Caswell counties to be in a state of insurrection and called upon George Kirk, a white Union officer, to lead a militia



*First marker in 1936 stated: "Caswell Courthouse. Erected about 1861. Alleged Ku Klux murder here, 1870. Led to martial law and Kirk-Holden War." Photo: Rootsweb/ancestry.com*



*Current marker, installed 1970.*

campaign to put down the violence. More than 100 Caswell and Alamance men were arrested, including several accused of the Stephens murder. However, no one was ever convicted.

Democrats used the unpopular militia campaign, which they called the “Kirk-Holden War,” to win a legislative majority later in 1870 and then to impeach and remove Governor Holden, effectively ending Congressional Reconstruction and Republican governance in the state. In Caswell and Alamance, as elsewhere, members and sons of the old leadership returned to political dominance and worked to solidify their economic position.

During the late 19th century and much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, state and national histories as well as popular literature and movies depicted Reconstruction as a grim period when heroic white conservatives across the South fended off “Negro domination.” Beginning in the 1930s, other historians challenged this interpretation by emphasizing Reconstruction’s reforms and opportunities and the struggle for racial justice and equal rights. (See for example William Archibald Dunning, *Reconstruction: Political and Economic, 1865-1877* [1907] and “Birth of a Nation” [1915]; and W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in American, 1860-1880* [1935]; John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War* (1961); and Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* [1988]). Although the revisionist accounts have been widely accepted by historians, the older sagas persist in popular memory.

## SAXAPAHAW

8



See “Piedmont Patchwork” tour information for background on Saxapahaw.

Aerial image of Saxapahaw. Photo: Courtesy of Mac Jordan.

# TOBACCO FARMING AND BUILDINGS IN NORTH CAROLINA'S OLD BELT

## History

Various regions of North Carolina, like various regions of the nation, have cultivated tobacco in myriad ways, raising different types of tobacco and curing it differently with air or heat. North Carolina's "Old Belt"—about 16 counties in the northern Piedmont near the Virginia line, including Caswell, Orange, and Durham—was the heart of the state's tobacco production for many years and a vital element in its national leadership in the field.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, many North Carolina and Virginia border counties produced large quantities of dark tobacco, often on rich alluvial soils beside streams. In the late antebellum period, "bright" or "yellow" tobacco was developed. This highly sought after leaf grew best on "thin" upland soils and was cured by a carefully regulated heating process. Much of the heavy labor and skilled work on antebellum tobacco farms was done by enslaved people.

After the Civil War, the bright-leaf curing method called "flue curing" took a dominant role. Free people of color as well as white workers continued the labor-intensive processes. Through much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the region relied on flue-cured bright-leaf tobacco—which grew even more desirable with the expansion of cigarette manufacturing—as a mainstay of the economy.

## Cultivation and Curing

Cultivating and curing bright-leaf tobacco as practiced from the late 1860s through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century required numerous steps and much manual labor over many months. The tobacco year began in February or March when workers—owners, tenants, hired hands, and their families—sowed the tiny tobacco seeds in a prepared plant bed. A protective cloth covered the bed until the seeds sprouted and grew into small plants. Meanwhile, the workers plowed, fertilized, and laid out a field in mounded rows separated by shallow furrows. In May, weather permitting, they carried the fragile plants to the field, punched holes in the mounds with wooden pegs, and planted the crop by hand. Over the following months they carefully nurtured the plants, regularly loosening the soil and removing weeds and grasses that threatened the young tobacco. The summer work involved whole families and sometimes high school or college students from town working a summer job or helping out country cousins.

After about nine weeks of care, the plants had grown tall and required "topping." The workers passed down the rows and cut the flower or



*Cured, bright leaf tobacco. Photo: Michael Southern, 1985.*

## Stephen Slade and Bright Leaf Tobacco

It was in Caswell County in 1839, according to a widely accepted legend, that a great advance in curing came about. According to the story told by tobacco historian Nannie May Tilley, Stephen Slade, a slave who belonged to tobacco farmer Abisha Slade, fell asleep while tending a barn of fire-cure tobacco. Waking to find the fire almost out, he ran to the charcoal pit of a nearby blacksmith shop on the farm, seized some charred logs, and put them on the dying embers, suddenly raising the heat and producing tobacco of a bright yellow hue. Thus was discovered a certain sequence of heating that would produce a highly desirable leaf, to the profit of the grower. In the same period, growers were experimenting with different types of seed and soils to produce the finest leaf. They developed specific methods of planting, tending, harvesting, and curing for the best results.





*FSA caption: Mrs. Jones, wife of tenant farmer, dropping tobacco plants in places scooped out for them. Near Farrington, Orange County, North Carolina (Jack Delano, May 1940).*



*FSA caption: Negro tenants topping and suckering tobacco plants. Granville County, North Carolina (Dorothea Lange, July 1939).*



*FSA caption: Tobacco field in early morning where white sharecropper and wage laborer are priming tobacco. Shoofly, North Carolina (Dorothea Lange, July 1939).*

seed cluster from the top of the stalk. They then bent low to remove the lower-quality leaves growing near the ground. The equally backbreaking work of “suckering” and “worming” followed. The laborers pulled out shoots or suckers that proliferated after topping and yanked hornworms—long, fat, tobacco-green caterpillars—from the leaves.

In September or October, when the plants had begun to yellow and speckle, workers returned to the fields to harvest the crop. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century they cut the whole plant down. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century they became more selective, and worked even harder, picking or “priming” only mature leaves. They placed the primed leaves in burlap-walled sleds that mules drew through the fields and then on to the tobacco barns. Mules were the tobacco farmer’s valued companions, for tractors and other mechanisms did not reach most fields until after World War II.

The purpose-built tobacco barns on the Captain John S. Pope Farm and others we will see along the way represent the flue-cure system of preparing bright-leaf tobacco for market. Their form changed little into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Most tobacco barns were roughly square in plan, often measuring 16 feet on a side, though some were larger. Some were wood-framed and tightly sealed with boards, building paper, asphalt sheathing, or sheet metal. Many were built of logs chinked with clay and occasionally pieces of wood, some exposed to the elements, others later sheathed. The barns usually had a single door and a pair of openings on one side for flues. They were planned to support heavy loads of hanging tobacco and to be as air-tight as possible for the exacting regulation of temperatures needed for the desired “bright” yellow cure. Furnaces of various types supplied heat to flues that extended across the barn floor. Later systems used kerosene and propane burners in the barns that did not have flues.

We can imagine the familiar scene around a tobacco barn as it occurred in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. After seven or eight months of nurturing, plowing, planting, loosening, weeding, topping, suckering, worming, and priming, the tobacco arrived at the barn, where men, women, and children gathered to prepare the leaves for curing. Working under shed roofs attached to the sides of the barn and sharing stories and news, they sorted the fresh leaves by size and tied them onto tobacco sticks, usually in clusters of three leaves called a “hand,” with about 30 hands per stick. As these were ready, men and boys carried the sticks full of leaves into the barn. Each barn had horizontal poles running its length, from which the sticks of tobacco were hung—“put up” or “put in”—for curing. The horizontal space between poles, usually about four feet, was called a “room,” and the vertical space was called a “tier.” A 16-foot square barn was typically four rooms wide and five tiers high, plus two additional tiers in the gable. The workers hoisted the loaded sticks up into the barn until it was properly packed. A typical barn might hold about 400 sticks per cure. When the barn was full,

the farmer or another worker lit the furnaces to begin the cure. The quality of the cure was crucial to all of the workers' fortunes for the coming year.

A cure would take three to seven days, depending on the weather. Knowledgeable workers stayed by the barn day and night to control and adjust the temperature. Each barn was used for a succession of cures as the leaf ripened in the field. Once the cured leaves reached the right degree of dryness and color—always a judgment call—the heat was turned off and the tobacco allowed to hang for a time to re-humidify, so it was not damaged when moved.

Workers then shifted the sticks of tobacco to a nearby building called the packhouse or, occasionally, pack barn. We will visit such a building at the Hampton-Ellis Farm. A packhouse generally looks much like a tobacco barn, square and solidly built of log or frame, tightly sheathed, and fitted with poles. It is taller, though, and the tobacco poles are hung more closely inside. A packhouse could hold many barns' worth of tobacco.

After the entire crop was cured, it was ready for final processing. If the hanging leaves were dry and brittle, they were further softened—brought to “order” or “case”—by exposing them to damp air or steam. This took place in the packhouse, in an attached shed or structure called an ordering house, or in an ordering pit.

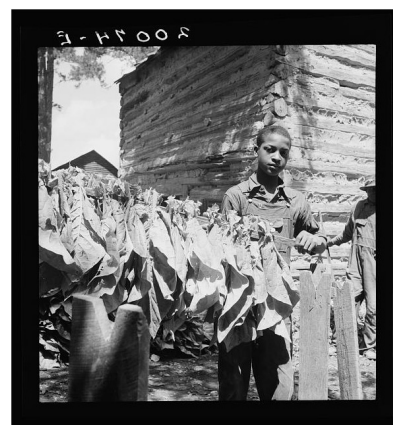
When the leaves were supple enough not to crumble, workers would “strip” or remove them from the sticks and sort them by quality. They usually did this work in a building dedicated to the task (though there are photographs of laborers handling leaves in their dwellings). The striphouse, generally attached to the packhouse, had natural light on one or two sides provided by a band of windows placed at table height. After stripping and sorting, the workers tied the tobacco leaves back into hands by grade.

In the early years workers packed the dried tobacco into hogsheads; later the farmer carried it in bundles to market by horse or mule-drawn wagon, truck, or automobile. Throughout the curing season, farmers hauled their cured leaf to nearby market towns where they hoped it would bring a good price as it was auctioned to tobacco companies. Auctioneers disappeared from warehouses at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but in the past few years some auctioning has been revived in the state.

Beginning in the 1950s, a new process called “bulk curing” rendered traditional bright-tobacco curing barns, packhouses, ordering houses, and striphouses obsolete. Whole tobacco plants were, and still are, cut and packed into manufactured, metal “bulk barns,” which have automatically regulated heat. Coupled with increased mechanization in the field, this reduced the Old Belt labor force. We will see some early bulk barns at the \*John Pope Farm.



*FSA caption: Mr. Taylor and wage laborer slide the tobacco to barn from the field, about quarter of a mile. Granville County, North Carolina (Dorothea Lange, July 1939).*



*FSA caption: Tobacco strung on sticks. Granville County, North Carolina (Dorothea Lange, July 1939).*



*FSA caption: Wives of tobacco tenants pile the tobacco before the barn preparatory to firing. Granville County, North Carolina (Dorothea Lange, July 1939).*



*Digital Forsyth caption: Hanging the tobacco in the tobacco barn for curing, 1939 (Frank Jones, August 1939) Photo: Courtesy of Forsyth County Public Library Photograph Collection.*



*FSA caption: Tobacco barn. Person County, North Carolina. Piece of sheet iron on the left is used to cover the opening of the furnace when starting the fire (Dorothea Lange, July 1939).*

Along with changing technology, changing government policies in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have affected tobacco cultivation. In the 1930s, during a period of overproduction and devastatingly low prices, the Federal government instituted an “allotment” system of acreage and price controls. The system changed over time but continued to support many a small family farm as well as larger agriculturalists. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Federal government phased out the allotment system; farmers today contract with tobacco manufacturers directly. The end of the acreage and price controls in place since the 1930s had the effect of putting many tobacco farmers out of business and consolidating acreage under fewer farmers. The traditional barns and other outbuildings that once numbered in the tens of thousands—difficult-to-reuse survivors from a past era of farming—are now dilapidated, picturesque, and ever-disappearing features of the agricultural landscape.

### The Photographic Record

An essay on 20<sup>th</sup>-century Southern migration focused on Granville, Vance, and Warren counties (east of the counties we will tour) includes agricultural statistics that help explain what has happened to the farm buildings, people, and animals depicted in the following photographs. In the three counties between 1950 and 1997, the number of farms dropped almost 85% and total farm acreage was more than halved. Between 1950 and 1978, the number of tenant farms fell by  $\frac{2}{3}$ rd, and between 1940 and 1992 the number of full-time farm operators and field hands dropped 80%. From 1945 to 1992, the number of black farm owners and hands collapsed by over 95%. In 1950 almost 12,000 mules toiled in the fields of the three counties; not a single mule worked the land in 1978. These figures clarify why so many of those pictured in these photographs—white and especially black farm owners, tenants, hired hands, families—are no longer part of the scene. Their departure reflects the shift to tractors and bulk barns, which made traditional tobacco buildings as well as mules and the work of thousands of farm hands redundant. This situation places the current “Old Belt” rural landscape within the broader picture of migration out of the rural South and nationwide agricultural change (<http://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/classroom-content/teaching-and-learning-in-the-digital-age/migration-and-the-american-south>).





*Digital Forsyth caption: Larry Williams keeping the fire going in the tobacco barn (unidentified photographer, 1962). Courtesy of Forsyth County Public Library Photograph Collection.*



*A Carolina Plantation Owner Inspects His Tobacco in Curing Barn*

*Rear of postcard caption: After tobacco leaves are strung on sticks, they are hung in barns for curing. Fires are built in furnaces visible in foreground, which carry heat through flues maintaining constant temperatures during curing process, ca. 1915-30. Courtesy Durwood Barbour Collection of North Carolina Postcards, UNC-CH.*



*FSA caption: Detail of house where tobacco is "put in order." A fire is built to make the tobacco moist and pliable. Fred Wilkins farm, Tally Ho, near Stem, Granville County, North Carolina (Marion Post Wolcott, November 1939)*



*FSA caption: Tobacco warehouse during auction sales in Oxford. Granville County, North Carolina (Marion Post Wolcott, November 1939).*



*FSA caption: Hillside Farm road leading from sharecropper's house back to the public road. Disc harrow rusting in field and tobacco pack house with log "o[r]dering house" adjoining. Person County, North Carolina (Dorothea Lange, July 1939).*



*FSA caption: Mr. and Mrs. Fred Wilkins grading and stripping tobacco in strip house on their farm. Tallyho, near Stem, Granville County, North Carolina (Marion Post Wolcott, November 16, 1939).*



*Tobacco Bulk Barn, Vance County, Circa Early 1960s. (Henderson Daily Dispatch.)*



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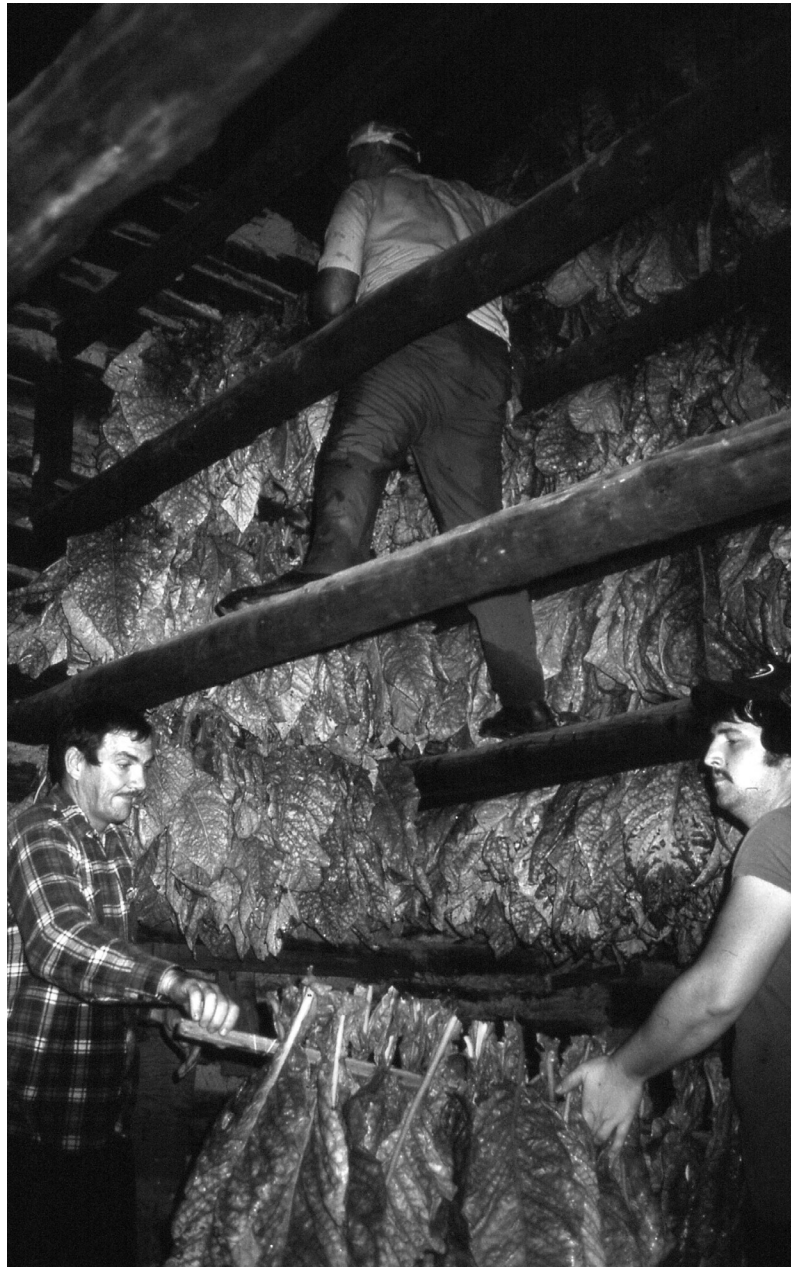
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*Carter Farm, hanging tobacco. Photo: Michael Southern, 1985.*

