

Lives and Times

December 2006

Quarterly **NEWSLETTER** of the
Caswell County Historical Association, Incorporated
P.O. Box 278, Yanceyville, N.C. 27379

VOLUME XXIX, Number Four
Sallie P. Anderson and
Lauren Chesnut Eakin, Editors



WHO IS SANTA CLAUS?

Santa's one who is always thinking of precious gifts given freely to all of us, one who's wholly devoted to the good of the people no matter if some will accept the gift joyfully and forget the giver no less joyfully.

At least one Caswellian of the 1900s, when asked to write a summary of Caswell County's history, included the name of Dr. N. M. Roan as one of the leaders in the building of what is now called the Old Courthouse on the Square in Yanceyville. The author of the summary was Miss Mary Brown, herself the direct descendant of Senator Bedford Brown, whose historic home "Rose Mill" has a State marker. Miss Mary was a life-long teacher in Caswell County

schools; she had always heard that if it hadn't been for Doctor Roan, we wouldn't have our admired precious Courthouse.

Now, at the time of Miss Mary's writing, it had not been discovered that the architect and planner was actually William Percival, an Englishman who had come to America around the mid-1800s and by 1857 had a fine reputation in Raleigh based on his fine reputation in several northern points. Not to stray too far from our subject, however, we must state that the hiring of Percival instead of Cosby of Virginia was an incredibly fortunate gift of Providence and there's something never yet explained about where Percival went or what he did after receiving his final payment, according the County Minutes in the middle of the War Between the States. These Minutes also have previously stated that Dr. N. M. Roan was certainly on the Building Committee of 1857.

What sort of man was this Roan? It was absolutely true because the preacher wrote in his Diary that the Doctor called on him and spread out his plots and they together planned the structure which is on tour this Dec. 10, by the way! And so well did contractor A. A. Mitchell work with those plans that the structure was completed in 1857.

The church incident lodged in Miss Mary's mind, no doubt, when she even entertained the thought that Dr. Roan might have laid the plans for the Courthouse! The We-know-better generation may well smirk at Miss Mary now that we know about Percival, but we really should know more about Dr. Roan. Book, anyone? There's plenty of material in our County Records both in the raw and digested and indexed by the late Katharine Kerr Kendall.

Miss Mary had heard in her time that Dr. Roan was not only on the Building Committee but he spent hours on whatever construction job was going on. She understood that he kept a record of his hours and allowed himself what we would consider an extremely modest wage, particularly when we know what some folks earn for practicing medicine today. We don't believe this is in the public record but we don't doubt it either. He was willing to do his utmost to see that the job was done and done correctly. We know he brought workmen off his farms, that he baked the bricks there and that he no doubt stuck around until the last slap of a mortar trowel on a Courthouse wall.

Without a doubt Dr. Roan was a gentleman of many parts, and we must realize that in our formative days a man often had too many different jobs even in order to survive. When we were searching for answers to a fascinating enigma, we turned to Powell's (and our) *History of Caswell County* (and we still have copies for sale at the Museum). There are several more entries of the name Nathaniel Moore Roan and its several variations than of some of his contemporaries in the government of the County. On page 269, we are told that the sons of John Herndon Graves after his death in 1829 sold large acreages of land near the Courthouse to Dr. N. M. Roan, while page 253

recounts the incident with the Reverend John S. Grasty from Grast's Diary. On page 387 we find the information; Dr. Roan's son Felix shot his cousin, Nathaniel Lea Johnston, in 1882 in Yanceyville. The History also records that N. M. Roan was born in 1803 and died in 1879. This note is found under the picture of page 501. At one point Felix had been candidate for Register of Deeds.

At this point we reveal that the NEWSLETTER ran a school report of Master Whitefield of Person County, whose one-room building has been preserved and moved to Roxboro near the Museum. We presented this document to the Person County people and remember that Nathaniel Roan and his brother were named as scholars and that were of Person County. The date was 1816.

We then switched to others sources and found that the family farm was so near the line that some of the land lay in both counties. Other independent information abounds on the role of Dr. Roan in the murder of "Chicken" Stephens in the Courthouse in 1871. It is said that the imprisonment of Doctor Roan by Kirk was a factor in the impeachment of Gov. W. W. Holden.

In other notes from the HISTORY, on page 345 Roan had been one of the founders of the Bank of Yanceyville in 1852. Page 355 has him at meetings of the Sons of Temperance in 1860. In 1847, Dr. Roan had been on the local school board (page 369). Page 425 has N. M. Roan as member of Milton's Masonic Lodge and of the Yanceyville Lodge in 1842. He was active in the Caswell County Agricultural Society in 1853 and, according to page 482, this was the first such society in the County, also sponsoring an agricultural fair. On page 493,

Dr. Roan is as a commissioner of an early Plank Road Company.

Perhaps Roan's most cherished dream of progress in Caswell County by means of the railroad began with the end of the Civil War in 1865. Page 503 documents efforts for a railway between Yanceyville and Milton; the measure passed the General Assembly in 1866 but failed for lack of required capital. Page 504 documents other efforts to get rails, but it was not until 1870 that N. M. Roan and other prominent citizens secured a charter (Danville and Coalfield Railroad) but to quote, "They hoped to build a railroad from some point on the state line near Danville down to Yanceyville and then to intersect with the North Carolina Railroad between Hillsborough and Company Shops, and on to the coal fields of Chatham County. It was directed that construction begin near Danville, but there is no evidence that even the first shovel full of dirt was turned for that purpose." Dr. Roan was never to realize this dream for his County, reliable rail not being a reality until many years after the Doctor's death.

Dr. and Mrs. Roan had their pictures painted by Carl Brown ca. 1850, according to the invaluable Preacher Grasty Diary on page 416 of our also invaluable Powell's *History*.

There really should be a good biography of Dr. Nathaniel Roan. Other research not included in this sketch shows our subject's earliest business dealings witness to papers of the Lea and Van Hook, ca. 1821. His presence in papers of Dr. John Comer of Milton for some years is revealed in the Deed Books, as is his acquisition of the plot of land in Yanceyville where his house still stands from William Graves (son of John Herndon) in 1834.

Message Board Post (<http://boards.ancestry.com/mbexec/msg/rw/RSB.2ACE/2006.1>)

Regarding Surnames: Walker, Blaylock:

Dear Mary:

Did you mean Pelham, North Carolina? If so, the following from *The Heritage of Caswell County, North Carolina*, Jeannine D. Whitlow, Editor (1985) at 50 ("Pelham" by Louise Carter) should be of interest:

"During these early days [late 19th century] Pelham became famous as the place where many were married. A Rev. Thomas Walker lived with his wife, Ginny, and family on the present old 29 South of the Pryor farm. Preacher Walker (as he was known) was a Circuit Rider minister who traveled from place to place in northern North Carolina and southern Virginia. Couples came from far and near by wagon, buggy and train to be married. When train connections couldn't be made, they were given overnight accommodations. It is said the Walker home had the figure 18 in the parlor floor over which brides who were under age stood so they could get married.... Preacher Walker kept a journal of the marriages performed. These have been recorded in the County [Caswell], and the journal is owned by J. B. Blaylock."

Burch Blaylock was the Caswell County Register of Deeds for many years, and his papers are still available at the Register of Deeds office in Yanceyville, Caswell County, North Carolina. (cont. page 7)

Historic Homes Tour to be held Dec. 10

The Caswell County Historical Association will present a medley of private homes and public buildings in its Sunday, December 10, 2006 tour 1:00 - 6:00. Except for the Holderness House all are in the Yanceyville Historic District. The tour will end with a program of traditional Christmas Carols presented by the new community group, Singers of Hope, in the sanctuary of the Yanceyville Presbyterian Church and refreshments will be served afterward.



The Holderness Home on US 158 West is a handsome Boom Era Greek Revival style house with hip roof, exterior end brick chimneys, and pedimented Doric entrance porch. It is an unusually distinguished example due to the flanking one-story wings, each with a smaller version of the central entrance porch. The voluptuous mantels and stair rail are stylistically attributed to famed local cabinetmaker Thomas Day. The unknown architect who built this house is said to have also built the front block of the nearby Bartlett Yancey House. This stately residence represents the ancestral roots of the prominent Greensboro Holderness family and over the years with other old Caswell County families. For much of the 20th century it has been home to members of Page family which also has deep roots in the county.



Dongola, located on west Main Street, is the "manor house" of the Jeremiah Graves plantation which bordered the west side of Yanceyville. The prosperous Graves family owned most of the land that is now Yanceyville beginning in the 1700s. Jeremiah Graves was greatly influenced by the Virginia homes on his market visits and in 1832 he built what has been termed "the most pretentious farmhouse of the Piedmont." He is said to have found a name from a map in his Bible showing "Dongola" as a place on the Nile River. The project took many bricks from his kilns and trees from his forests, but his woodwork seems to have been imported from Virginia. The grand scale of the double porticos, windows and doors prepare the viewer for the six or seven huge rooms and the halls. The last Graves family to live in the house donated the home and plantation lands to the NC Baptist Association for development into an assisted living facility and served the community well for many years. Since the early 1990s this property has been owned by various investors in the film industry who have added sound studios which have been used for film production, social events, community ministry et al. The present owner is Caswell native Faiger Blackwell, owner of Carolina Pinnacle Film Studios, who resides in Dongola. Dongola has been carefully restored and decorated to reflect its elegant history and the present owner's love of Caswell history.



Walter Harrelson House on West Main St. was built c.1885, by a granddaughter of Jeremiah Graves who married Walter Harrelson, a well-to-do Yanceyville merchant whose department store later became Watlington's on the Square. They built their Victorian home with the front door facing Dongola. Just to be on the safe side in the event streets were changed, they built another hall at right angles to the first and had another door and porch put in facing the present street. It remained in the Harrelson family until the late 70s. This home is now the residence of local Realtor Barry Smith who with his late wife lovingly restored the home as warm hospitable dwelling to enjoy with their 3 children, family and friends.



The typically Gay 90s town house of Barzillai and Ms. Malli Graves also on West Main Street is set on a generous lot with many old trees. It is a stunning site in autumn. The large public rooms retain high ceilings with some original wallpaper and woodwork. This lovely residence remained in the Graves family until the later part of the 20th century. It is currently being restored by Mike and Lucindy Willis, who restored the Federal/Greek Revival/Victorian home of the Bartlett Yancey House and created the popular Yancey House Restaurant. The Barzillai Graves Home will open as a bed and breakfast in the near future.



The Scarborough Law Office ca. 1835 is a 1-1/2 story frame house, Federal in style, with exterior end stone and brick chimneys. It is located on the north side of West Main Street next door to the Kerr Hotel. Substantial alterations have been made over the years. Josiah Rucks, coach maker, innkeeper and possible architect-builder of several houses in the district is believed to have lived here in 1850s. This building served for decades as the law office of the father of the present owner, Dr. Emerson Scarborough who is currently restoring it. The structure is a "work in progress" and will provide an opportunity to view some details of historic preservation.



The brick Kerr Hotel was probably built under the supervision of architect-builder John Rucks. Ibsan Rice obtained a tavern license in 1838. Upon Rice's death in 1848, Rucks took over the tavern. He was not able to pay for it and in 1858 joined with the Rice heirs to convey the title to Dr. Bedford Brown, Jr., son of U.S. Senator Bedford Brown who practiced medicine here until he became a surgeon in the Confederate Army, and relocated in Alexandria, VA after the war. The Rucks continued to operate the Tavern when CSA veteran, John Kerr, obtained the property and operated the Kerr Hotel from ca. 1890 into the 20th Century. One can easily imagine guests arriving via stage coach and gathering before the double fireplaces in the lobby after dinner in the sunken dining room. The house is on the National Register as birthplace of Congressman John Kerr, and has entertained many distinguished guests. For most of the 20th century the Kerr Hotel was the private residence of children and grandchildren of John Kerr. It is currently the Real Estate Office of Barry Smith, Realtor.



Clarendon Hall on West Main Street was built in 1842. Described by historian Katherine Kendall as "a rich man's house," Clarendon Hall was built by T. D. Johnston, Yanceyville banker. It has many remarkable architectural features typical of Federal and Greek Revival architecture. Interior woodwork includes mantels, molding and doors, which are attributed to Thomas Day, as is the grand staircase in the spacious hall. Current owners, Ben and Margaret Williams, have meticulously restored this elegant home which was used as a storage building by former owners. Ben is a former curator of the NC Museum of Art, and Margaret taught art at St. Mary's College. The magnificent public rooms are a perfect setting for their superb collection of art and antiques and are frequently the site of gracious entertaining.



The Historic Courthouse c. 1857-61 on Court Square is an imposing Romanesque structure designed by the famous architect Sir William Percival. In 1860 Sir William received the first place award for the best building plan displayed at the NC State Fair. It has been called by many people "the most beautiful courthouse in North Carolina." The courthouse is notable for hosting the "Trial of Henrietta Jeffries," a mid-wife who defending herself after being charge with practicing medicine illegally in the county. As she gave her testimony the judge left the bench, removed his robe, and after presenting additional defense, returned to the bench, and declared her innocent. It is probably more famous as the site of the murder of State Sen. John Walter "Chicken" Stephens who was a carpet bagger in the area during Reconstruction. He was murdered in his office during a political rally in the courtroom upstairs. Following this murder, Caswell was occupied by Kirk's Raiders, troops sent by NC Gov. W. W. Holden to discover and arrest those responsible for the political assassination. Kirk's Raiders were a group of fearless western North Carolina confederate veterans who sought to undermine the work of carpet baggers, robbed banks, and are thought to have connections to the outlaw Jesse James. In the aftermath of this "war" Governor Holden was impeached. He is the first and only NC Governor to be impeached. In 1935 a deathbed confession by one of the murderers revealed that the Ku Klux Klan, led by Capt. John G. Lea, had seized and stabbed the Radical Republican leader in his former office. The revolver owned by "Chicken" Stephens and removed from his body when he was murdered is on display in the Richmond-Miles Museum. The main floor of the Historic Courthouse contains the county offices. The courtroom is used by the county commissioners and for other public and private functions.



Poteat School ca. 1900 is located behind the Historic Courthouse This relic of the past is typical of the one-room schools of the early 1900's at least 40 of which were used as late as 1940 in Caswell County. Albert Lindsey Poteat and his neighbors built the schoolhouse on the corner of County Home and Slade roads. One teacher was hired by the county and patrons to teach grades 1-7 until general consolidation began around 1923. The building was moved to its present location in 1982.



The Old Caswell County Jail, located behind the Historic Courthouse, is a late 19th century, 2-story brick building of Romanesque Revival design which served as the county jail until 1973. This is two-story structure, with the cell block in the upper floor. The walls are covered with years of graffiti from countless prisoners. An indoor hanging cell is one of the most interesting aspects, with a trap-door in the upper -floor cell. The lower floor served as quarters for the jailer and his family and consists of a foyer, three rooms and a kitchen where meals for the jailer and his prisoners were prepared. No one was ever hung in the jail for, shortly after the jail was completed, the NC Legislature passed a law making death by hanging an illegal punishment for crime



The Richmond-Miles Museum located in the Graves-Florence-Gatewood House ca. 1810 at 15 Main St. on Court Square. This early 19th century, 2-story frame house with four exterior end brick chimneys, was apparently built in the early 19th century with additions and remodeling during both Greek Revival and late Victorian periods. Built by a member of the prominent Graves family, it served the community as a school in its early years. In the mid-19th century it is said to have been a hotel run by the Jones brothers. About 1880 it was purchased by the Florence family and remained a private residence until 1999. The late Maud Gatewood, nationally known artist, and daughter of Sheriff John Yancey and Mary Lea Florence Gatewood was born here. The studio in her early years was located in the outbuilding behind the house. Some of her early work is on display in the museum.

In 1999 the Caswell County Historical Association purchased the property through the generosity of Caswell County natives who cherish the county's history. The extensive collection of Caswell County artifacts and genealogy records are housed here.

The museum gift shop offers a variety of books and gifts related to the county history.



Yanceyville Presbyterian Church ca. 1849-50 on the corner of North Av. and Church Street is a simple, handsome Greek Revival brick church, with a pedimented façade, wide frieze, and a single front opening – a double door with a cosseted architrave. The architect for the church was Felix Roan, M.D. who was Clerk of Session for the church. The settle on the pulpit is believed to be by Thomas Day. Original pews located in the church vestibule are very similar to the pews in the Milton Presbyterian Church, which were made by Thomas Day. Founding pastor Nehemiah H. Harding was pastor of Milton Presbyterian and would have influenced the choice of builder for the pews. The interior has beautiful Doric galleries on three sides. The steeple and portico were added in the late 20th century. The congregation, established in the 1830's, is the oldest congregation in Yanceyville.

TICKETS are \$12.00 in advance and may be purchased at the Richmond-Miles Museum or the Chamber of Commerce office in the Gatewood House on Court Square. They may be ordered from CCHA, Box 278, Yanceyville, NC 27379 by sending a check or Postal Money Order, or online from the CCHA website www.ncccha.org and charged to Pay Pal. Tickets will be mailed until December 3. After that they may be picked up at the Richmond-Miles Museum. Ticket will be available the day of the tour for \$15.00 at the Museum, Yanceyville Presbyterian Church and the Holderness House on Hwy. 158 west of Yanceyville.

NOTE: Bag lunches will be available at the Presbyterian Church for \$5.00 starting at 12:30 - while they last. Lunches include sandwich, chips, cookies and a drink.

At 5:30PM there will be a concert of traditional carols by the Singers of Hope at the Presbyterian Church after which refreshments being served.

For more information, contact:

Cy Vernon, VP and Tour Chair, 336-421-9493
Email: cyveron@hotmail.com

Karen Oestreicher, Pres., 562-5083
Email: Karen@ncccha.org
Lib McPherson, Tour Publicity, 336-694-4450
Email: lib@clanmcperson.com

(continued from page 2) For more on Caswell County I refer you to the following sites:

Caswell County Historical Association: <http://www.rootsweb.com/~ncccha>

Caswell County NC GenWeb: <http://www.rootsweb.com/~nccaswel>

CCHA/CCGW Weblog: <http://ncccha.blogspot.com/>

Caswell County Photograph Collection: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ncccha/>

Caswell County Family Tree: <http://wc.rootsweb.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=caswellcounty>

Notes & Queries

One of the most valued references in our Museum is a copy of the Diary of Herndon Harralson. Questions had been raised as to the Revolutionary service of Clerk Archibald Murphey:

I was presented a few days ago your letter of the 20th March last directed to your Brother William. I learn by that letter your principle object was, from me to obtain the information I possessed respecting your Grand Father (Archibald Murphy) Revolutionary services in that War as an officer, under the belief that his Heirs are entitled at this time to a Pension, either under an Act of Congress or that Congress has the power to pass that law, provided he died before the law was passed (in this I allude to the act passed in the 1832 for the payment of a Pension to the Revolutionary officers and Soldiers who had served six months commencing on the 4th March 1831. I also received a letter dated the 1st Feby from your Brother Jonathan on the same Subject, and gave him the same information which I now give you. Vizt about the last of July or the first of Augt 1780 and while I was acting as his deputy in the Clerks office of Caswell County North Caro. Genl Cornwallace in South Carolina began to consider that the State as a Conquered province and he issued his Proclamation accordingly about this time (the 1st of Augt 1780) Troops of the Militia were collected in North Caro and Marched immediately to South Carol to undeceive and Check his Lordship. accordingly a Regiment of Volunteer Militia, was formed in Caswell County and Archibald Murphy (your Grand Father) was commissioned first Major of the Regiment. (I am not positive at this time but believe that Col. William Moore was Col. Commandant) he (Maj Murphy) Marched to South Caro, joined Genl Greene's Army until Lord Cornwallace took possession of Charlotte in September 1780. - I do not now recollect the Battles in which Major Murphy fought in the South, except the one in which Lord Cornwallace attempted to fource a passage over the Catawba River; at which time and place Genl. Davidson was killed. this was about the 1st Feby 1781. - About this time the Americans took the road to Salisbury and Lord Cornwallace in pursuit. about the 15th Feby Genl Greene and his Army retreated ___ office in Caswell where I then was but I had removed the records of the office to where they were Safely preserved. at this ___ Murphy was in Command in the Army. Col. Wm Moore offered me a Captains Commission if I would beat up for volunteers. I acc___ Commission and in a few days had a Compleat Company with ___ipt___ and joined Genl Greene but being sent off immediately under Genl Pickens to attack Doct Piles the Tory Col. Near Hillsboro. from this time I never saw Col. Murphy until after the battle of Guilford Court House in which we both were in. on the 15th of March 1781. - The above facts comes within my recollection and ___ and can send you Authenticated certificates. - On receipt of this you consult some Legal Council, and if there is a probability of success write immediately and I will send you the certificates. - before I conclude however permit me to suggest that I know of no law granting Pensions to ___ officers and Soldiers of the Militia in the Revolutionary War except the Act passed in the year 1832. and that is a Pension only for those living, so that if a Pension is Granted in this case it must be by a Special law of Congress which can & ought to be done in next Congress. I have observed hundreds of cases when Special Laws are passed for Pensions, not half as strong as this and where the the Special Acts do not provide for. - William will write you in a few days.

Very affectionately
Your father
H Haralson

(Used by permission of Carol J. Murphey Garner)

CCHA annual dues of \$20 for individuals and \$30 for family memberships are payable by January of each year for the calendar year. To renew your membership, please complete this form and mail to the **Caswell County Historical Association**, Attn: Treasurer Mary Jo Henderson, Box 278, Yanceyville, NC 27379 with your check or money order.

All members receive the Association newsletter 4 times a year with information about Caswell County families, news of historic preservation in the county and information about Historical Association events. Volunteers are needed in the museum, on committees and other projects. Tell us how you will help.

Membership for 2007

New Renewal (circle one)

Name _____ Home Phone _____

Address _____ Work Phone: _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____ Fax _____

Payment: _____ Email _____

Here are my dues for 2007 \$ _____ I would like to be a volunteer. I would like to

Here's a gift for the Association \$ _____ help with: _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ _____

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P.O. Box 278
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