

# Lives and Times

September 2006

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

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

## Time for an overview

by Sallie P. Anderson

You may or may not have seen a copy of a publication called *The Historical News*, which features several counties in North Carolina in each issue. For many years, it has appeared as free reading matter in mini-newspaper form in Courthouse offices, Chamber of Commerce and business establishments who make it available to their customers. This public service is, of course, supported by advertisements of local products. The ad for Ace Hardware (pardon me, Ace Home and Building Center, Inc.) appears on Page 3 of their March 2006 issue. Page 2 begins their historical article on the "Caswell County Area" and the subtitle reads "The home of Bedford Brown, Dr. Billy Poteat, Romulus M. Saunders, Archibald DeBow Murphey, Congressman John Kerr and many other distinguished citizens."

So far, so good, I thought - until I read on: "Reprinted from *The State* magazine... dated November 28, 1942." That was the year after Pearl Harbor in 1941! Just think of the changes in Caswell County history since World War II alone! Thank goodness we have our fine Caswell County History through the efforts of M. Q. Plumbee and others, so we can take off and cover the ground about some of the 1942 misinformation.

The Museum once had a copy of this issue of *The State*, and it appears that some of the problems may have been settled since our founding as the Caswell County Historical Association by Mr. Plumbee and others in 1954. At any rate, we assume that Publisher Carl Goerch was doing his own legwork for his articles in those days and that he came to town and contacted Tom Henderson, who had submitted articles for *The State*, to bring another local Caswellian so they could show Mr. Goerch around and enlighten him about our County. By chance, Tom got George Anderson who had experience as Clerk of Court to accompany him. And the rest is history? Not quite.

As the affable trio started out on their historical pilgrimage, Carl asks, "Where did the town of Yanceyville get its name?" We still wouldn't touch that question with a forty-foot pole (or a fifty-foot one either), because CCHA never likes to get into family rows. Some said it was named for Bartlett Yancey "of course" and others, descendants of Bartlett's elder brother James - who had made it possible for Bartlett to get his lawyer's degree and started him on his well-documented rise to glory - stoutly maintained that James had that honor.

We would like to point out that they will find two cradles made by Thomas Day in Richmond-Miles Museum on the Square in Yanceyville today, one from James Yancey's descendants and other from Bartlett Yancey's descendants, whoever "they" may be and whichever "they" may decide the town was named for. On the occasion of *The State* article, Mr. Goerch said he was glad to find out about James Yancey, as he and the rest of North Carolina had always thought it was named for Bartlett. Present day Museum policy? **YANCEYVILLE WAS NAMED FOR THE YANCEY FAMILY.**

Before leaving the Square surrounds (they had already done the Courthouse), Tom and George pointed out the old Poteat Boarding House, which stood adjacent to the rear of our Museum and has been discussed with a picture in our **NEWSLETTER** file. It was the town home of James Poteat, father of the celebrated Dr. Billy Poteat mentioned by the visitor, so they hastened down the road toward Milton and came to "Forest Home" and plantation. They were duly impressed in 1942, and we find it even more impressive that in 2006 the house and the extensive acreage have been enhanced and beautifully preserved to the delight of all beholders.

The tour continued on down the road and shortly reached "Melrose," home of "Royal" George Williamson. The enduring mystery about how he got the name "Royal" has not been solved to the knowledge of the CCHA, at least that we know of. However, the **NEWSLETTER** has endeavored to

correct a serious error still found in Person County particularly and contributed to back then in *The State* magazine. Hear ye, hear ye, once and for all - "Royal" George Williamson of Melrose plantation was the son of James Williamson of Locust Hill in Caswell County. He was NOT the son of "Scotch Jim," a prominent citizen of PERSON COUNTY.

Proof of the lineage of George Williamson, born at Locust Hill shortly after the family migrated to Caswell County ca. 1787 (see the other NEWSLETTERS for exact dates - we have them), was filed with Register of Deeds J. B. Blaylock some years after 1942. The document contained proof of the Williamson family at Jamestown and nearby with our earliest settlers. Caswell County records prove the public offices held by James Williamson of Locust Hill, his untimely death and the removal of the widow with some of the children to George in 1817. The descendants there had hired a professional genealogist to prepare the family tree. It is recorded in Blaylock's Miscellaneous Collections - tapes in Gunn Memorial Public Library in Yanceyville. "Scotch Jim" was called by that name because he was a much later emigrant from Scotland, with relation to the Jamestown Williamsons not determined.

At this point in the journey, *The State* has a description of "Rose Hill" historic house and grounds in the Locust Hill community to the west of Yanceyville and we don't know when or if Mr. Goerch was privileged to go there, but he was prepared with the proper information on this historic home of our U.S. Senator Bedford Brown. However, the Revolutionary importance of Jethro Brown, father of Bedford, was not emphasized until much later in our history. By the way, Jethro's wife was Lucy Williamson of Locust Hill, a daughter of Stephen Williamson, older brother of the James who became the father of "Royal" George.

When the group finally got around to discussing Milton they mentioned its outstanding historical values and chuckled over the two anecdotes, both unsupported by proof but considered common knowledge. One concerned the surveying of the dividing line between North Carolina and Virginia, and poor George never learned that his claim of being related to Col. Wm. Byrd was completely mistaken. Mr. Anderson was descended from the Byrds but it was a completely different family of the same name that came to south Caswell with the Murrays, according to research of CCHA member Jim Florance who owns a Byrd log cabin built here in the 1700s. On second thought, we believe that's a Florence cabin but he's a Byrd, too. Anyway the thrust of the scene was that if the party hadn't succumbed to Milton hospitality and given up running the line as originally ordered, "Danville, Virginia would have been in Caswell County." Always a crowd-pleaser - in North Carolina, that is.

The other Milton feature noticed by Goerch was the Union Tavern and a story about the pews in the Milton Presbyterian Church, which was and still is located near the Tavern. The story was that "Tom" Day made all those pews for that church on the condition that the members would allow him and his family to sit downstairs with the white members. In case anyone did not know, Thomas was a free black cabinet maker coming to Milton and succeeding so well that he was able to buy the Tavern, move in and live there and make it the center of his furniture-manufacturing business. It became the largest source of fine furniture in the state in the years before the Civil War. The trio could not look into the future and see just how historically important Day and his tavern were to become. The tale from *The State* is discussed in a very recent book, *Thomas Day: African American Furniture Maker*, by Rodney D. Barfield and Patricia M. Marshall, now on sale at Richmond-Miles Museum on the Square in Yanceyville. Incidentally, the Museum is located in an historic house owned by Graves, Lea, Florance and Gatewood families over the years since before 1820.

In *The State* article, Semora is mentioned next. Mr. Goerch was told that nobody knew where the name came from except that they said Hugh McAden wrote his brother in Texas to suggest a name for his birthplace, which had always been called "Red House." The answer came back by mail and the suggestion was "Senora." Hugh, however, was reputed to have misread the communication and the little town was name "Semora" and so remains to this day. CCHA had a member named Mary McAden Satterfield who was closely related to Hugh. She always said Semora was named for Semora McAden.

Be that as it may, "Red House" was known in the state as the home of the Rev. Hugh McAden, the first Presbyterian missionary sent to this state from the north. Before she died, Mrs.

Satterfield, besides being one the founders of the Historical Association, worked on genealogical records all her life in Milton. She is the co-author with the Rev. Ben Rose of the most recent McAden family tree. Before her death, she shared her lifelong gleanings of information on Thomas Day with the Thomas Day/Union Tavern organization.

Back to 1942 – after Semora, the tour went to Leasburg, originally the county seat until Person County was cut off from Caswell in 1793 leaving Leasburg sitting on the line – some of it in Person and some in Caswell. Nevertheless, Leasburg had its Leas. Famous were the Rev. Solomon Lea, first president of Greensboro College for Women, and president of his own Somerville Institute in Leasburg. There was also the Jacob Thompson home to see.

Time was apparently running short for the visitor, so the group started gathering facts about Caswell County and Bright Leaf Tobacco. Here, Tom and George really missed the boat. They should have told Carl about how the slave of Abisha Slade, one of the Clerks of Court, grew large amounts of tobacco with his brothers. They brought the craft of fine tobacco with them when they came to the county in 1765 and settled on Rattlesnake Creek on the Dan River. Mr. Goerch didn't even find out that Benjamin was not the name of the first Bright Leaf producer.

Believe it or not, *The State* magazine article gives scant space to the “Chicken” Stephens murder by the Ku Klux Klan in the Courthouse in 1870. It did state that one of the Klansmen responsible for the murder of Governor Holden's political boss in a County under the sway of Reconstruction had died and left a signed confession of a crime for which the Klan was not convicted, although members were tried.

Goerch said, “The people of Caswell are sort of fed up with the story.” They may have been in 1942, but people still ask about “Chicken” when we are showing the Courthouse to a group, and the Museum has the Navy Colt carried by the victim when

he was trussed up and stabbed by about a dozen Klansmen in the last room on the ground floor's southeast side. Today, most of the space in the murder chamber which for years thereafter was the office of the County Supt. of Schools, is occupied by the elevator taking people upstairs to the Courtroom, where perhaps 250 men suspected of doing the deed as members of the Ku Klux Klan were tried and not one found guilty.

As a matter of final update, rest in peace, Carl. There is a state historical marker to Abisha Slade, but what would you recommend (if you could) as a fitting TOMBSTONE FOR THE TOBACC INDUSTRY?



### **Somebody did something good**

by Sallie P. Anderson

Beside our HISTORY, ARCHITECTURAL INVENTORY and other books that we sell at the Museum, we are proud to have the opportunity to recommend it because it represents a superb attempt to arrive at and present the truth about Thomas Day.

Is it possible that you never heard of him? Let these earnest researchers and candid experts on the subject tell you about him in lines that should be written on a monument: African American master cabinetmaker Thomas Day (1801-1861), of Caswell County, North Carolina, had an outstanding career and achieved remarkable social standing during the state antebellum period.

Day, a free black who lived in the Dan River Town of Milton, was educated, owned property and slaves, ran a successful business that made furniture for some of the state's most prosperous citizens and was a member of the Presbyterian Church of Milton. *Thomas Day: African American Furniture Maker* examines several aspects of Day's notable life and career.

**Question:** Do they know what he looked like?

**Answer:** No, not yet, but there's a picture of his brother, John Day, Jr., on page 8.

**Question:** Are there many pictures?



- Answer:** I counted 26 or 27.
- Question:** How many pages in the book?
- Answer:** I counted 72.
- Question:** Is it easy reading?
- Answer:** Couldn't put it down!
- Question:** Does it tell about his family?
- Answer:** Yes, indeed. I remember when the thinking in Milton was that his mother's name was "Morning Star" and that was one reason why some thought he was part Indian. These people have found out that her name was Mourning Stewart and she was a daughter of a free black doctor Stewart. We have then remembered that "mourning" was the name given a baby girl whose mother died shortly before, during or after childbirth.
- Question:** Hush! That's so sad, but didn't they think Thomas Day was a West Indies Indian?
- Answer:** Yes, because he was so fond of working with Santo Domingo mahogany. It's an island in the West Indies.
- Question:** I knew that - what kinda dummy do you think I am? Don't answer that.
- Answer:** READ THE BOOK!



### Update on Slade and Allied Families - Major Lea and his four wives (Part I)

by Betty Fitzgerald

Several families arrived in Caswell Co., about 1765 from Baltimore, Maryland, who were settled on Rattlesnake Cr., by 1783. Some their descendants still own the land. They were: MILES, CARBON, SLADES, MC COMAS & SIMMONS. (Source: Nathaniel SLADES Revolution affidavit.) These were powerful families around the Danville, VA and NC area. Inez TALBERT wrote stories about their families. Ex: "How Thomas MILES d. in Caswell Co. Dau. m. a POTEAT."

The following is a listing of some of the family relations surrounding Major LEA and the LEA's family compound on "Country Link Ck., in Caswell Co., NC. Major's father, James LEA, m. Ann TOLBERT. Migrated from Wales. Died 1792, (or 1788), about 110 years of age in a small house close to his "old" family home, which was taken by his son, Major and family. Major LEA had four wives, lived to be 102 yrs., dying 19 Nov. 1843, testate, in Powell's Valley near Cumberland Gap, Claiborne Co., TN. His 1st. was Elizabeth HERNDON. 2nd. "Betsy" SLADE, d. by 1791. 3rd. Salley FARLEY, "widow" with unborn child, m. 1791. 4th, -?-JARNIGAN in KY. All four wives were of families with standing in the community.

Major's second wife, "Betsy" SLADE was the dau of Thomas SLADE. Thomas' will names

gr-dau. "Nicey" (Eunice) HIGHTOWER, m. 1800 in Caswell Co., to Joshua HIGHTOWER as his 2nd wife. His 1st. was Delilah SLADE, dau., of Thomas. About 1780 Betsy had the misfortune to suffer in childbirth a "wounding" which confined her to bed for the rest of her life. Her crippling may have been a dislocated hip caused by a "breach-birth." Her "ailment is referred to in a letter of 1783 by a relative, Thomas SLADE. In 1789 her sister, Catherine SLADE, with her own tragic story, will come to live in the house.

Catherine's story is one of the fate of women who fall victim to the "ideas" of the time about the necessity for a new "bride" to be pure. One who was known to have "been spoiled," circumstances notwithstanding, was not expected to find a proper husband. Judgement was more lenient for those who were innocent of wrongdoing. In 1789 Catherine SLADE "indicted" (sp), a neighbor for "TRESPASS," (read: rape). The case was never settled. There would be no shotgun wedding in this instance. The other family moved. Next Catherine shows up living with her sister in Major LEA's household. There she cares for her sister, who will die in about two years, and a small child, "Nicey," who Major claims as his own. [To be continued next issue....]

### THANK YOU!

At the July General Meeting a new board was installed. As the new president of the Caswell County Historical Association, I would like to thank you for your past generous support of the Association, the Richmond-Miles Museum and to ask for your continued support.

We want to assure you that we are still dedicated to preserving and promoting Caswell County's rich history. In addition to operating the Richmond-Miles Museum, the Historical Association promotes the study of local history and genealogy, collects and interprets historical artifacts, and works to preserve local historical structures.

We would not be able to do this without the dedication and steadfast support of volunteers like Forrest Altman, who has served as our past secretary [our new secretary is Eva Crisp] and also as a dedicated volunteer. Forrest has been instrumental in drafting the new constitution, in volunteering his time at the museum and being the rock that I depended on to keep things going during my family's recent bereavement. Thank you, Forrest, for being such a stalwart supporter of the Historical Association.

I'd also like to thank our past president, Lib McPherson. Lib has been unstinting in her support and in giving her wonderful perspective on where the Association has been and where we hope to go in the future. It is through her tremendous efforts that we have the museum. Thanks, Lib.

A special thanks goes to those faithful volunteers who keep the museum doors open. Without you we would not be able to continue to keep the museum open. Anyone interested in volunteering can call me at 336-562-5083. We always need volunteers!

Last but not least is a very special thanks to Sally Anderson. Mrs. Anderson is our go-to person when we don't know what something is. She is also our main genealogy researcher. I love listening to Sally relate our past. We also appreciate her many years as newsletter editor.

Our new board is hard at work promoting new programs and fundraisers for the Association. I'd like to thank them all for

their willingness to take on the challenges that face our Association. The largest challenge being financing. If you'd like to help us please send a donation to the Caswell County Historical Association, P.O. Box 278, Yanceyville, NC 27379.

**Karen Oestreicher**  
**President**  
**Caswell County Historical Association**



### October CCHA Meeting

*The next general meeting of the Caswell County Historical Association will be held **October 15, 2006 at 4:30PM** (after the Historic Homes tour) at the home of Leon and Mary Jane Richmond. Bring a covered dish.*

*There will be a concert of traditional Christmas carols performed by the Singers of Hope at the Presbyterian Church at 5:30PM with refreshments served.*



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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      \$ \_\_\_\_\_



**Recent CCHA Correspondence -- Slade and Miles Connection**

Hello,

My name is Cheryle Crockett and I've discovered with the help of Sir Benjamin Slade of England that my family ancestral line which is Slade is connected to Yanceyville, Caswell, North Carolina. My ancestor was born here in Yanceyville the year of 1813 as a slave is the son of I believe a William Slade married to Martha Kerr and whose parents are Thomas Slade married to Hannah Miles. My ancestors name who is my great-great-grandfather Andrew Slade was born a slave here in Yanceyville.

Currently I'm doing more in depth study of this family and will tell you I have a picture of a William Slade taken off the internet regarding the Slade castle in Somerset England and my mother is the spitting image of him as well as my great grandfather Lincoln Slade.

I'm interested in learning who my great-great-great-grandmother was and if she had other children by William Slade. I believe Sir Benjamin Slade stated on the Today program aired earlier this year that he heard a black family is stating the ancestor or ancestors he may be looking for are coming out of Caswell North Carolina. I await a reply from your association on this matter and thank you.

Sincerely,  
Cheryle Crockett

Cheryle,

You have an exciting and interesting piece of information about your history. There are many Slades and Miles in Caswell County, but there is very little information about the genealogy of slaves in the genealogy room of the Caswell County Historical Association museum. We are an all volunteer group and we have an extensive collection of data and have visitors to come to come for research.

I can recommend a couple of sources that might yield info or clues for you: Dr. Barnetta White McGhee, history professor at NC Central University in Durham, NC (retired, I think) has published a 2-vol. book of the marriage records of slaves just after the Civil War. (There are very few Caswell County records in it, for Caswell official records could not be found). There is another book by a NC Central professor that has a lot of Caswell County information (the author has roots here), but I don't know the name of the book and can't remember his last name.

All of our information has come from the donation of family history from individuals with roots in the county. So, I urge you as you continue your search to consider the possibility of contributing copies of your findings to our museum in a 3-ring binder that can be available to other researchers. We've seen many people make connections this way.

Both the Slade and the Miles families are prominent Caswell County names. There are roads named for both families. Slade Road is about 3 miles from where I live and the plantation ante-bellum home still stands. A slave owned by Abisha Slade is the true discoverer of the Bright Leaf process of curing tobacco which brought great wealth to this area before the Civil War. This slave went to sleep while tending a barn of tobacco being cured and the resulting variation in heat was determined to be the cause of the superior quality of tobacco cured in this curing batch. Many of Plantation owner Abisha Slade are still living in this area.

The Miles family came from Maryland and settled in the southwestern part of the county. There are many Miles descendants including our oldest son's wife. Another Miles descendant donated a spinning wheel brought by the Miles family to Caswell County to our association's Richmond-Miles museum collection.

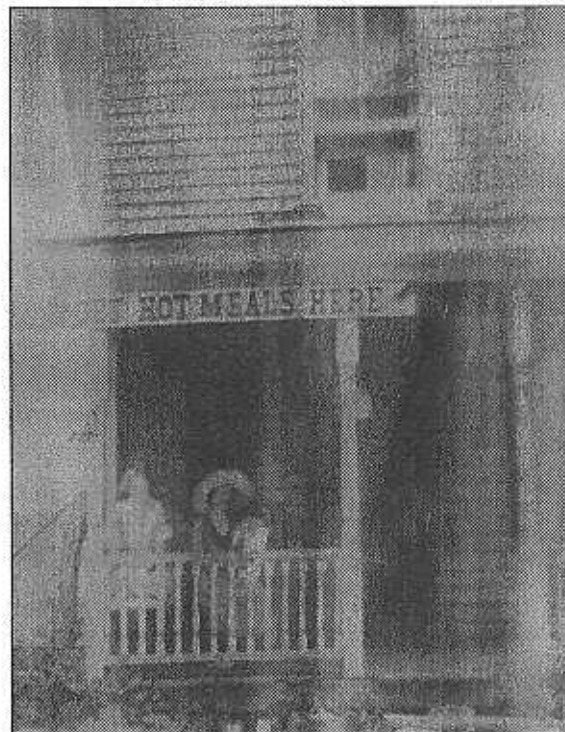
It was not unusual for the plantation owner's to sire children and the evidence is in the

community in the form of facial features typical of white descendants, too, blue eyes, lighter shades of brown, and many families do know this genealogy. So, you may be able to find a lot of information.

You may or may not be aware of the book, *An American Family in Black and White*, which is about the Hairston family, one of the largest land and slave owning families in that era. They owned large plantations in Virginia, Mississippi and North Carolina, including Caswell County. We have many descendants of Hairston slaves in this area including the owner of a car dealership in Danville, VA. I sat at the table with this gentleman at a Book and Author Luncheon in Danville a few years ago at which the author of the book spoke. There was a lot of discussion about how much information is out there that should be recorded by this generation or it would be lost.

I commend you for your search and wish you well.

Lib McPherson, Past President  
Caswell County Historical Assn.



**Caswell County Historical Association**  
**P.O. Box 278**  
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[www.rootsweb.com/~ncccha/](http://www.rootsweb.com/~ncccha/)



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**Wed. - Fri. 12 noon to 4 p.m.**

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