

A PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION AS TO THE ANCESTRY OF SARAH DAVIDSON CLAYTON

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In Volume 29, Number 1, of *A Lot of Buncombe*, published in February of 2008, there appeared three articles about members of the family of Lambert Clayton and Sarah Davidson Clayton. This writer wrote the article entitled Lambert Clayton and Sarah Davidson Clayton. Lambert Clayton was one of the original nine Justices of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions for Buncombe County.

Much history of Lambert Clayton was included in that article. But it was acknowledged that the ancestry of Sarah Davidson Clayton has never been credibly established. It was further stated that perhaps someone will eventually stumble on conclusive evidence of Sarah's ancestry. This writer had begun, twenty years ago, with the tradition included in a family tree published in 1927 and found among his grandmother's effects that *Sarah Davidson . . . was the daughter of John and Nancy Brevard both of whom were killed by the Indians on the head waters of Catawba River, prior to the Revolution . . .* But, this writer learned, through communications with the late Dr. Chalmers Davidson, history professor and librarian at Davidson College, and from reading the Davidson history by Dr. Robert Hand, a descendant of Col. George Davidson, that this tradition was probably not accurate. It was reported to the North Carolina Legislature, in May of 1782, by Maj. Joseph McDowell that a couple named John and Anne Brevard and their six-month-old child had been killed by Indians in Burke County. But several Davidson researchers have concluded that this John Davidson, known as Judge John Davidson, was the son of Col. George Davidson, who had married Nancy (Anne) Brevard in Rowan County in 1779. He and his wife and young child were killed during the Indian attacks near Old Fort, NC, in 1780. But he was approximately the same age as our Sarah Davidson Clayton and, if the information herein set forth is correct, was her first cousin.

Since publishing the February 2008 article, this writer has discovered a significant amount of research performed by a Davidson family researcher named John Lisle. Mr. Lisle is a software engineer from New Hampshire. His wife is a legislator in that state. John Lisle has suggested that Sarah Davidson Clayton was likely the daughter of Thomas Davidson and the granddaughter of John Davison who immigrated to the Virginia Colony in about 1740 and on to the North Carolina Colony in the area near Davidson, North Carolina, in about 1748.

Established facts regarding Sarah Davidson Clayton are:

(1) Lambert Clayton obtained a Rowan County Marriage Bond to marry Sarah Davidson on December 14, 1782;

(2) the marker located at her grave site in Davidson River Cemetery, outside Brevard, North Carolina, indicates that her date of birth was December 25, 1759, and her date of death was March 20, 1843 (Revolutionary Pension Records of Lambert and Sarah Clayton and her death notice in the *Highland Messenger* corroborate the date of death); and

(3) She was the parent of nine children with oldest, Jane, having been born in 1783 and the youngest, Ephraim, having been born in 1805. No information has been passed down indicating that

she had siblings.

John Lisle has discovered a Will probated in South Carolina in 1764 that he believes is the Will of the father of Sarah Davidson. It is the Will of Thomas Davidson that reads as follows (paragraph breaks added):

DEAR BROTHERS, as I Apprehend that I am not Long for this world I think it Proper to Leave you this Memorandum behind me to direct you in what I think is most proper to be done after my decease, after recommending my soul to God who gave it to me, I give unto my wife Sarah Davidson, one Negroe wench Named Doll with her daughter Dinah a Child, ITEM I give unto my said wife one Bed one pair of Sheets one Blanket and one Quilt, ITEM I give unto my said Wife her choice of one horse with her saddle, Next I think it proper for you to sell one Negroe Fellow Called Prince with all my Cattle horses Cart And all my Household furniture Consisting of Beds wearing Apparel Chairs and guns.

The Plantation I now Live on it will be proper to Let it to some other person if possible as it will be a Cumbrance to the Estate, the remainder of my Estate Consisting of five Negroes Viz. Moriah, Dinah, Cate, Cleo, a Child, Doll, a child, I give unto my daughter Sarah Davidson. This I Leave as a Memorandum to George and William Davidson, Whom I Appoint my Executors of my Last Will . . .

This document was executed March 1, 1764, and was accepted for probate in Will Book 1760-1767, Page 419, on September 6, 1764, when George and William Davidson qualified to administer the estate. In the South Carolina Colony all Wills for the colony were probated in Charleston. This writer was successful in securing a copy of the Will from the South Carolina Department of Archives. The execution of the Will was witnessed by Samuel West, Andrew Neill, and Samuel Davidson. The Samuel Davidson who witnessed execution of the Will was likely the younger brother of Thomas Davidson.

John Lisle has an extensive data base entitled ADavidson Family Research@ that can be located at <http://davidson.lislefamily.org/> that documents over 20,000 individuals allied to this Davidson family. Mr. Lisle states, in his article on the web site about Sarah Davidson Clayton, that he has a transcript from a March 1775 document - part of a series of actions that were being made at the time to sort out land that was changing colonies as a result of the new boundary between NC and SC: from George Davidson that identifies the source of the land patent from Matthew Rowan to Thomas Davidson, deceased. It identifies George Davidson as the current owner. The original can be found at *Memorials, Vol. B p. 363#2, 640 ac George Davidson, 6 March 1775.*

Additionally, Lisle says that he has located a copy of an indenture made June 3, 1778, regarding the sale of the land. It states:

This indenture made this the 3d day of June in the year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Seventy eight. Between Sarah Davidson of the County of Rowan and State of North Carolina of the One part and Thomas Carson and Samuel Carson of Camden District Craven County and the State of South Carolina on the other part. . . . (York Co. Deeds, Vol. F p. 274-276 #C1469 No. 178).

Execution of the instrument was witnessed by Wm Davidson, James Kerr, and James Carson. The indenture was not filed until 8 June 1799.

Lisle states in his article I believe that this Thomas Davidson is the son of Old John Davidson, and that he and his wife are very likely to be the parents of the Sarah Davidson who married Lambert Clayton.@ The land involved in these matters was located on Fishing Creek and was conveyed to Thomas Davidson from Matthew Rowan in 1754. For serious researchers, there are further references to the administration of the estate of Thomas Davidson at *Charleston Inventories, Bk. W. p. 176* in the form of an inventory taken by James Strater, Samuel West and John Tilbin and an entry at *SC Judgment Rolls. Box 65A #28A, George and William Davidson, executors for Thomas Davidson, Deceased, Roll #ST23, 1766*.

Fishing Creek is today located in York and Chester Counties of South Carolina. But, prior to an agreement between the North Carolina and South Carolina Colonies in 1772, this area was claimed by both colonies. It took several years for surveys to be completed establishing the colonial boundaries.

Family tradition has been that Sarah Davidson Clayton was orphaned as a child. Sarah Davidson Clayton named her third son, born on July 26, 1790, Thomas Davidson Clayton. She had three grandchildren, Thomas Davidson Clayton, Thomas Davidson Orr and Thomas Davidson Brittain. It appears that when the name Davidson is used in the early generations of her descendants that the name Thomas is also used. If Mr. Lisle=s theory is correct, then Sarah Davidson Clayton was born on her father=s Fishing Creek Plantation in 1759. Sarah Davidson was orphaned by her father at the age of four. She may have been taken by her mother, also named Sarah Davidson, or by her Uncle George Davidson, back to the area that is today Iredell County, NC, then part of Rowan County, NC. This is consistent with a marriage in Rowan County in 1782. George would have been listed as the owner of the Fishing Creek Plantation when the land shifted colonies during the early 1770's because he was her guardian. She sold the Fishing Creek Plantation in 1778, four years before her marriage to Lambert Clayton.

Who was Thomas Davidson? This writer published an article in August 2003, in Volume 24, Number 3, of *A Lot of Buncombe* entitled AReply to the Rhetorical Question: "Will the Real John Davidson Please Stand Up?" That article included a history of the John Davison who emigrated from Northern Ireland to the Manor of Beverly located in the Virginia Colony in about 1740. John Davison appeared before the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions of Orange County, Virginia, on July 24, 1740, to prove his importation to the Virginia Colony so he could own land there. The marginal entry in the Orange County, Order Book 2, 1739-1741, Reel 30, page 209, reads *Davison proved his rights to land*. Based upon the testimony of John Davison, the Court entered a handwritten order that reads as follows:

John Davison came into Court and made oath that he imported himself, Jane, George, Thomas, William & Samuel Davison as his own charge from Ireland to Philadelphia & from there into this Colony and that this is the first time of his proving his and their rights to obtain land. This order to be certified. John Davidson initially acquired land in the Colony of Virginia and almost a decade later in the Colony of North Carolina.

This writer attended the Davidson-Alexander Reunion held at Warren Wilson College in 1992. One of the speakers was George Spears Reynolds. Mr. Reynolds reported that John Davison was in North Carolina in 1748 in the area of Davidson Creek in Awhat is now Iredell and Mecklenburg Counties. His survey of 650 acres purchased from Lord Granville was surveyed in 1748.@ In 1748, this land would have been a part of Bladen County. Anson County was carved from Bladen County in 1749-50. Mr. Reynolds included in his materials probate records for John Davison from both Anson County, North Carolina, (Rowan was not created until 1753) and Augusta County, Virginia, which showed that he died in 1749. His North Carolina estate was initially administered by his widow, Jane, and later by her new spouse, William Morrison. John Lisle says that the widow married William Morrison in 1751 near Rockbridge, Virginia.

In the August 2003, article this writer also included a letter written in 1840 to a relative in Tennessee by George F. Davidson, a child of Gen. Ephraim Davidson (a War of 1812 militia rank) of Iredell County. George F. Davidson, the author of the letter, was living with his father who was of advanced age and infirm by 1840. The letter was an answer to questions posed to Gen. Ephraim Davidson about the family history and included the following:

The oldest members of the family who came to this country were John and George Davidson. George married a widow Simmerl and was the father of General Wm. Davidson, killed in the Revolution, and another son who died a young man before that time. John was the father of George D. and also four other sons, viz: Thomas who lived and died near Charleston, SC; William and Samuel (twins) who both lived and died in Buncombe. The latter was killed by Indians. The first was the father of Col. Samuel D. who now lives in Buncombe on the same plantation. The fourth brother was the one-eyed John D. who lived in Murry Co. TN. A half-brother William Morrison, whose family went to Kentucky. Great grandfather John had three daughters, Rachel and Peggy who married John and David Alexander, some of whose descendants are now living in Buncombe and Tennessee; and Betty who married Ephraim McLean and lived in Kentucky.

The Thomas Davidson who died in 1764 in South Carolina names as his executors two brothers. They were George and William Davidson. This is consistent with the names of the siblings of the Thomas Davison who was included in the Order of Importation of John Davison and in the letter of Gen. Ephraim Davidson (a child of George Davidson). George Davidson, the oldest son of John Davison who was known as Col. George Davidson (revolutionary militia rank) is buried at Centre Church in Mooresville, North Carolina. There is a marker for Maj. William Davidson at the First Presbyterian Church of Swannanoa.

The other son named in the Order of Importation, Samuel, (born in 1736 - the twin bros of Maj. William Davidson) is credited by Dr. Foster Sondly as having been the first white settler of Buncombe County. He was killed by Indians at Christian Creek. Samuel Davidson is also believed to be the namesake of Davidson=s Fort (now known as Old Fort), NC. The Fort was constructed on Samuel=s land in about 1776 as a place of protection from the Indians. Sam Davidson served there as a Captain in the local militia during the revolution. There is currently a plan to construct a replica of the Fort.

Dr. Sondley's assertion that Samuel Davidson was the first white settler of Buncombe County is supported by a primary source that appears on the Davidson's Fort web site. It is the pension application of Lieutenant Samuel Patton (Patton refers at one point to "my niece's husband Davy Crocket"). Samuel Patton testified before a Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions in 1832 and again in 1836. Excerpts from his testimony are:

Sir, in 1781 I enlisted under Captain Daniel Smith that was in the upper part of Burke County on the Catawba River at Old Fort After the surrender of the British at Yorktown (October 19, 1781), Gen. McDowell who was in command of "Old Fort" . . . hopin' to end the hostilities between the frontiersmen and the Cherokees decided to send a letter to the chiefs of the Cherokee, who at that time were encamped at the Coosawatte Towns on the Coosawatte River in Georgia. Patten then recites that the letter was sent by a civilian courier named Sam Smith, an Indian Guide named Yellow Bear, and a negro feller who went along as their cook. When they come back it was said that we was finally at peace with the Cherokee. Considerin' we was at peace with the Cherokee, Samuel Davidson a settler from them parts dared to be the first white settler to strike out from the westernmost outpost at Old Fort and settle his family west of the Blue Ridge. Well them Cherokee considered he was trespassin' on their lands and they come in and killed Sam. His wife, child, and slave woman escaped and made a long difficult trip back to Old Fort and told their story. Well things was stirred up terrible as a result. Volunteers armed with muskets marched into the Valley under the cover of night. They found Sam Davidson scalped and killed near a trail where he had been hunting. The men buried him on the spot. His body lies beneath a granite slab on the side of Jones Mountain, by Christian Creek just by the spot where he was killed. There was much fightin' with the Indians for a good spell after that . . .

This writer is a descendant of Mary Davidson Smith, the oldest child of Maj. William Davidson, through his paternal grandfather and is a descendant of Sarah Davidson Clayton, apparently the only child of Thomas Davidson, through his paternal grandmother.

John Lisle believes that there were originally three immigrants from Northern Ireland who came to the colonies who he believes were brothers (1) John Davison (2) George Davison and (3) Samuel Davison. The original immigrants spelled the name ADavison@. Later generations adopted a spelling of ADavidson@. Lisle is a descendant of John Davison through his oldest son, George Davidson. Mr. Lisle has used Y-chromosome DNA testing of descendants of each of these men to verify that these men were related. The results of his DNA testing can be found at his web site <http://www.davidsonsongenes.org> He has established that each of these lines carries a unique DNA haplotype. The DNA research establishes conclusively that the three immigrants had a common male ancestor. It does not establish conclusively that they were brothers. The common male ancestor could be a grandparent rather than a parent.

The George Davison of the immigrant generation initially settled in the Pennsylvania Colony. That George Davison was the father of General William Lee Davidson of Revolutionary War fame who was killed at Cowan's Ford, a ford of the Catawba River, in 1781 trying to protect the Continental Army as it retreated, being pursued by the Army of Gen. Cornwallis, from the Battle of Cowpens to South Boston, Va. Gen. Davidson had been named as Brigadier General of the Salisbury District Militia after the capture of Gen. Rutherford at the Battle of Camden in August of 1780. Davidson College, a county in North Carolina, and a county in Tennessee are name for Gen.

William Lee Davidson.

Samuel and John Davison of the immigrant generation both acquired land in Beverly Manor, Orange County (actually a part of Augusta County which had been established in 1738, but did not maintain land records until 1745), Virginia. Both men's deeds were recorded on June 5, 1739. John's deed was recorded at Orange Co. Va Deed Bk #3, Pages 237-242 (785 acres), and Samuel's deed was recorded on the immediately succeeding pages at Orange Co. Va Deed Bk #3, Pages 242-247 (353 acres). The deeds were from William Beverly, Gent. George Reynolds, in his presentation, reported that John Davison's 785-acre tract had been surveyed by George Hume on May 4, 1738. John Lisle's current hypothesis is that, since John Davison did not appear before the Court for his Order of Importation until 1740, he may still have been in Ireland settling family properties when his land was acquired and Samuel made the arrangements here in the colonies for him.

The Samuel Davison of the immigrant generation later migrated south to the area that is today York County, SC, where he is believed to have died after 1766. His children included Col. William Davidson, the legislator who introduced the bill to form Buncombe County, James Davidson who served on the first Court of Buncombe County, and Benjamin Davidson for whom Davidson River, located in Transylvania County, is named. John Davison migrated south in the late 1740's to the North Carolina Colony (his lands are today part of Iredell County, North Carolina). John Davison's North Carolina land was on Davidson's Creek which is now in an area under Lake Norman. George Davison migrated to the same area in about 1750-51. George Davison's North Carolina land was probably where Davidson College is located today.

Lisle indicates that the oldest son of each of the immigrant Davisons was named George. He suggests that, based upon the Scottish naming convention used by the early generations of the Davidson family in America, their father would have been named George. **Some historians, including Dr. Sondley, have asserted that there was another brother named Robert. Robert is said to have died as a young man. His widow, Isabella, is said to have migrated to Mecklenburg County and later married Henry Hendrey. She was the mother of Maj. John Davidson who was a signer of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence and lived at Rural Hill where Scottish Games are now held annually. But, Lisle has been unable to locate a descendant of the line of Maj. John Davidson with a totally male lineage for Y-chromosome DNA testing to determine whether the family of Maj John Davidson has a male ancestor in common with the descendants of the immigrants George, John, and Samuel Davison. The families of Robert Davidson and John Davison used the same given names. John Davison had a son named Robert who was baptized at Tinkling Springs, Va., and apparently died as a child. Robert Davidson named his son John. Oral tradition in the family of Maj. John Davidson was that, when Elizabeth (Betsy) Davidson d/o Maj. John Davidson married William Lee Davidson, II, s/o Gen. Davidson, she married her cousin. William Lee Davidson, II, and Betsy Davidson conveyed their farm to the Presbytery in 1835 for a school. It is the location of Davidson College.**

These early Davison settlers appear to have come to the colonies with funds that enabled them to pay for their passage, to purchase land, and to establish farms. After they arrived in the Carolina colonies, they were involved in the cattle trade. Dr. Kenneth Israel of Candler, who is a

descendant of Sarah Davidson Clayton, reports that he wrote a doctoral thesis on the cattle industry of the Carolina colonies. He says that the first cattle industry was in Piedmont NC and SC and it later moved west to Alabama and Mississippi and then further west to Texas. Dr. Israel says that, in addition to the markets as food to the coastal plantations that produced rice, indigo and commodities other than food, cattle hides were needed in the West Indies as implements to draw water out of the mines and that, in that heat, the hides did not last long, so a great supply was needed. He also relates that some meat was pickled and used on ships as food. The markets were in Charleston and other port areas. The early Davidson settlers drove their herds to market. The move by Thomas Davidson to Fishing Creek would have been along the drover trail. The only commodity mentioned in Thomas Davidson's Will was his Cattle.

Cattle were important to the Old Fort area from which eastern Buncombe was settled. Lyman Draper in his history of The Battle of Kings Mountain, published in October of 1880, includes (on page 150) an incident leading up to the Battle which occurred while Maj. Ferguson was threatening to move into the area of Davidson's Fort with his Tory units. It gives an incite into the importance of the cattle trade to that area. *A Colonel McDowell called the leading men of the Upper Catawba valley together, and suggested, simply to meet the present emergency, that they should repair to Gilbert Town, take British protection, and thereby save the Whig stock, so necessary for the support of the country, from being appropriated by the enemy; that no man would thereby become a Tory at heart, but would merely exercise a wise stroke of public policy-the end would justify the means and render the country a good service. Daniel Smith, afterward Colonel, Captains Thomas Lytle and Thomas Hemphill, Robert Patton, and John McDowell, of Pleasant Garden absolutely refused to engage in any such course, and stated that they would drive all the stock they could collect into the deep coves at the base of the Black Mountain. . . A*

If John Lisle's theory about the ancestry of Sarah Davidson Clayton is correct, it answers another question posed by this writer in his article about Lambert and Sarah Clayton published in the February 2008, edition of *A Lot of Buncombe*. This writer pointed out that Lambert Clayton was appointed as a Justice of the first Court for Buncombe County in 1791 even though he had been a resident of Iredell County only one year earlier when the census of 1790 was taken. He was also named by the legislature, in the Act creating Buncombe, to the committee to locate the courthouse for Buncombe. He must have had significant political connections to have been named to those positions as a new settler in Buncombe County.

His political connections may have been through his wife's family. If John Lisle's theories are correct, Col. William Davidson, the Rutherford County legislator who was a sponsor of the bill to create Buncombe County, was a first cousin of Lambert's deceased father in law. On the initial Court serving Buncombe there were nine Justices. Three Justices, in addition to Lambert Clayton, had Davidson family connections - Col. William Davidson, James Davidson and James Alexander. Maj. William Davidson appeared before the Court at its first session and was granted permission to build a grist mill on his land. It now appears that Maj. Davidson may have been making his request to be allowed to build a grist mill to a panel of Justices that included Colonel William and James Davidson (sons of Maj. Davidson's uncle Samuel), to James Alexander (son of Maj. Davidson's sister, Rachel Davidson Alexander) and to Lambert Clayton (spouse of the only child of Maj. Davidson's deceased brother, Thomas). Maj. Davidson would have known that, if he could get the votes of his family, he only needed one additional vote.

Another item of business for the first session of Court for Buncombe was the qualification of the officer to take entries for state land grants. Thomas Davidson, who is believed to be a child of Col. George Davidson, qualified as entry officer. This position involved the handling of public funds. So, two individuals of sufficient net worth had to post bonds for the new entry officer=s service. The men who agreed to serve as bondsmen for Thomas Davidson were Lambert Clayton and Daniel Smith. One does not agree to serve as a bondsman for someone to hold a public office, involving the handling of public money, without being very familiar with the principal. Both of these bondsmen are ancestors of this writer and, until finding John Lisle=s material, this writer was unaware of any connection between these two men. Lambert Clayton lived in what is today northern Transylvania County and Daniel Smith lived where the railroad roundhouse is in Asheville. Their migration patterns before coming to Buncombe were not similar. But, if John Lisle=s theories are correct, there is a connection. Lambert Clayton=s spouse, Sarah Davidson Clayton, was a first cousin of Thomas Davidson and Daniel Smith=s spouse, Mary Davidson Smith (daughter of Maj. William Davidson), was also a first cousin of the Thomas Davidson who qualified as entry taker.

There are many factors that lead this writer to conclude that John Lisle=s hypothesis that Sarah Davidson Clayton was the child of the Thomas Davidson who came from Ireland to the port of Philadelphia and then to the Virginia Colony with his father John Davison may be correct.