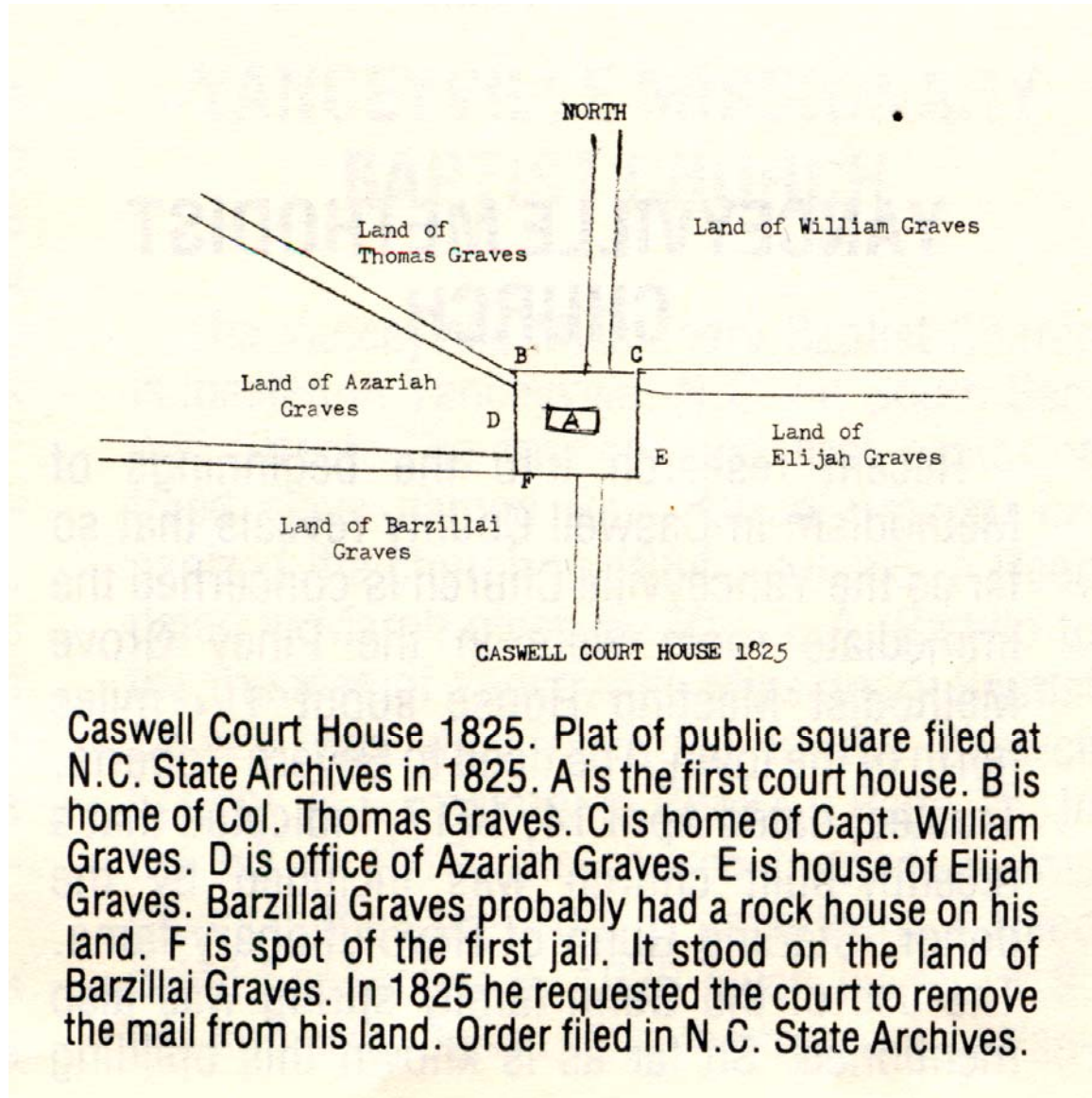


## Yanceyville, Caswell County, North Carolina

*Caswell Courthouse 1825*



In 1791 when Caswell County was divided and its seat of government moved to a central spot, the town of Caswell Courthouse was begun in a wilderness on a sloping hillside that drained into Country Line Creek via a rocky branch known now as Jail Branch. The 100 acres purchased from James and Mary Ingram was a part of a larger tract granted to his father Benjamin Ingram. Original plats are not extant, but it was described as being between Rattlesnake and Country Line Creeks. Rattlesnake rises north of the town.

Hezekiah Rice opened an ordinary near the center of the 100 acres and the county officials met at his inn. Although four or five persons purchased a part of the 100 acres

selected to form a new town, by 1808 John Herndon Graves had purchased the entire acreage except for the one-acre public lot, now square. Graves lived southwest of the town between Meeting House and Fuller's Branches. He and his brothers had purchased land up and down Country Line and John Graves finally purchased from the Ingrams the land between the 100 acres and the Creek running south of town.

By 1815 John Herndon Graves had given the acreage to his five sons. He divided it so each son owned land abutting the public square – hence there were five major streets into the square instead of four as is usually found in a county seat built around a courthouse. North of the 100 acres purchased from Ingram was the land of Starling Gunn, his brothers, and father. The Gunn land ran to present day Wall Street.

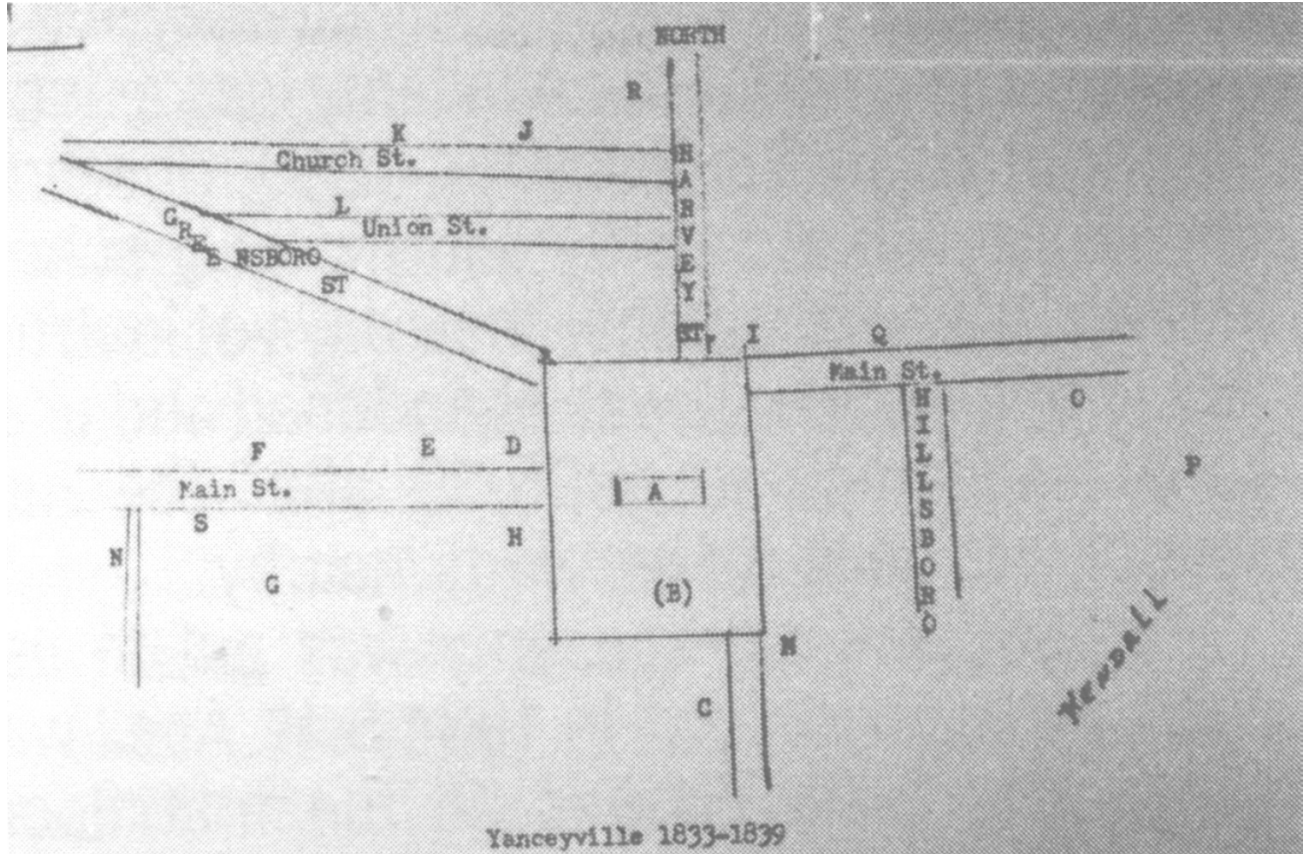
The only early description of the town was written by Bartlett Yancey in 1810. Other notes from the court minutes reveal that Hezekiah Rice had a tavern although he owned no land. John Graves was named standard bearer to keep the weights and measures. Henry Williamson in July 1793 was licensed to run an ordinary at the new courthouse. John Williams and Howard Cash were paid three pounds each to run the chain to locate the center of the county. The first courthouse built by John Adam Wolf was begun in 1793 and stood on the public square. It was of frame construction, having more than one door and several windows. By July 1794 it was completed with James Williamson serving as superintendent for the county. Henry Atkinson was paid four pounds annually to look after the courthouse. He was ordered to keep doors shut and windows closed.

In July 1810 the court ordered improvement and repairing of the building by painting the outside entirely, by repairing locks, to elevate the clerk's table so he could get more light, to provide a seat and desk for the sheriff, and to repair the underpinnings.

On October 1795 Robert Boman had a tavern at the Courthouse. For the first thirty years the Graves family dominated the town. In 1809 Elijah Graves, Barzillai Graves, and Captain Thomas Graves were granted right to have ordinaries in their homes at the Courthouse. It seems certain that the Graves family held the land until son Barzillai left Caswell in 1824 to relocate to Halifax County, Virginia. He sold his large acreage to Thomas Donoho Johnston. In 1832 Azariah Graves sold an acre west of the square to Ibzan Rice who also had a tavern. Elijah Graves gave up part of his acres for the second and third courthouse; Thomas Graves drew a plat for his acres in 1839 and moved to Georgia. The home of William Graves still stands and houses the Richmond-Miles History Museum, but his land east of his home was sold in lots after his death in 1845. A plat of the square in 1825 (see above) shows the Graves brothers all living around the square.

The courthouse on the square was sold in 1833 to Ibzan Rice and he was ordered to remove it. It is possible that this structure (or part of it) was used to build the Josiah Rucks house.

*Yanceyville, North Carolina 1833-1839*



By 1833 the public lot had been doubled in size with Elijah,<sup>1</sup> Azariah,<sup>2</sup> Barzillai Graves,<sup>3</sup> and Paul A. Haralson<sup>4</sup> giving small portions to the south and west of the first lot. **(B)** indicates the third courthouse built on the same land and completed about 1800. **(C)** is the second jail; **(D)** the brick office of Azariah Graves; **(E)** the storehouse of Azariah Graves, later Kerr Printing office; **(F)** is the tavern of Ibzán Rice.<sup>5</sup> **(G)** was land of General Barzillai Graves who sold it about 1825 to Thomas Donoho Johnston.<sup>6</sup> **(H)** is the store of Paul Harralson who married Leanna Graves<sup>7</sup> daughter of Thomas Graves. Store later owned by Thomas D. Johnston.

<sup>1</sup> This most likely was Elijah Graves (1778-1855), a son of John Herndon Graves and Nancy Slade Graves.

<sup>2</sup> This most likely was Azariah Graves (1776-1837), a son of John Herndon Graves and Nancy Slade Graves.

<sup>3</sup> This most likely was General Barzillai Graves (1782-1854), a son of John Herndon Graves and Nancy Slade Graves.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Anderson Haralson (1798-1852) was a brother-in-law of Elijah, Azariah, and Barzillai Graves.

<sup>5</sup> Ibzán Rice is known to have obtained a tavern license in 1838 on the premises of what came to be known as the Kerr Hotel on West Main Street in Yanceyville, North Carolina.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Donoho Johnston (1800-1883).

<sup>7</sup> Leannah Herndon Graves (1803-1848), daughter of Colonel Thomas Slade Graves (1775-1847) and Mary Bennett Graves (1779-1850).

**I** is the land of William Graves,<sup>8</sup> which remained intact as he lived there. After his death in 1845 lots to the east were divided and sold with George Williamson<sup>9</sup> buying several. **J** was the first Presbyterian Church, the land being purchased from Allen Gunn.<sup>10</sup> **K** is the land purchased by Alexander McAlpin.<sup>11</sup> In 1839 the land north of Church Street is referred to in deeds as being in the new part of Yanceyville. **L** is the lot that Thomas Graves gave for the Baptist Church in 1839 on Union Street; and **M** to the south is the home built by Paul A. Haralson.

Recorded in Deed Book of July 1839 is a plat Thomas Graves had drawn for his land north of the square that he put into lots and sold upon his moving to Georgia. **N** was the location of the Female Academy on land given by Thomas D. Johnston.<sup>12</sup> **O** was the site of the Caswell Academy<sup>13</sup> chartered 1802 and built on land on Solomon Graves.<sup>14</sup> It was not in use after about 1835. The home of Solomon Graves is marked **P** and is about one-half mile from the square. After he left for Georgia the home was bought in 1820 by his nephew Azariah Graves, Esq., a bachelor, who willed it to his beloved brother Elijah Graves in 1837 and later it went to Elijah's namesake Elijah Graves, a nephew. The house still stands. **Q** was the spot Elijah Graves gave for the Male Academy.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> William Graves (1780-1845), a son of John Herndon Graves and Nancy Slade Graves.

<sup>9</sup> This probably was George (Royal George) Williamson (1788-1856), whose daughter Adaline Hannah Williamson married Thomas Donoho Johnston.

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Allen Gunn, M.D. (1807-1884).

<sup>11</sup> Alexander McAlpin (c.1798-1867) served as Public Register (Register of Deeds) for Caswell County from 1840 until his death in 1867. He was postmaster of Yanceyville just before his death and for some time kept the post office at his office in the Courthouse. In 1833 he was county coroner. He was married three times.

<sup>12</sup> The Female Academy was organized in the late 1830s on land near the Yanceyville United Methodist Church cemetery. There were two buildings, one called a music hall where Eliza Gould in 1850 gave her music concerts. Her husband Benjamin Gould was the schoolmaster who came from New Hampshire. From 1880-1910 this school was used for boys and girls. Miss Lizzie Lowns was its most famous teacher.

<sup>13</sup> "There will be opened in the County of Caswell, near the Courthouse, on the first day of January next, an Academy, known by the Name of the Caswell Academy, for the Reception of Students, to be taught the different Branches of Literature; to wit, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, the Latin and Greek Languages, Geography, Natural and Moral Philosophy, Astronomy, etc., etc., under the direction of the Rev. Hugh Shaw. The Terms for teaching the Latin and Greek Languages, together with the Sciences, will be 14 Dollars per Annum; Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic, 7 Dollars per Annum. Boarding may be procured convenient to the said Academy in good Houses, at the low Price of 33% Dollars, and from that to 40 dollars per annum." Raleigh Register, November 22, 1802. The Caswell Academy stood near the present day Civic Center, just east of the Bartlett Yancey High School campus. Initially for males, females were attending by the late 1820s.

<sup>14</sup> Solomon Graves 1766-1830) was a son of John Graves (1715-1792) and Isabella Lea Graves (born 1738).

<sup>15</sup> This generally is the location of the original Bartlett Yancey High School, which was destroyed by fire in 1970. In the 1840s the Yanceyville Male Academy was chartered with the popular and effective professor Archibald Campbell Lindsey as its master. After 1910 it became the Yanceyville Academy, and the only school in town. The building was used as a teacherage 1925-1930 after the new Bartlett Yancey School was built nearby. By 1932 the old academy building was used for overflow students. In 1834 S. H. Abel was teaching Latin on the first floor. Mrs. E. P. Mendenhall taught seventh grade on the second floor, while in the kitchen soup was being cooked for the first lunches served at the school. Students sat in class in the seventh grade and smelled soup all day. The building was demolished in the 1950s.

**A** in the center was the second courthouse for Caswell County built by John Berry. When it was torn down and courthouse **(B)** in use, the Main Street extended across the public lot. Yanceyville was incorporated in December 1833 and the streets were named at that time. It was unincorporated for a second time in 1915.

And lastly to the north marked **R** was the home of Griffin Gunn<sup>16</sup> whose widow Dorothy married John C. Harvey,<sup>17</sup> one of the town's first commissioners. The other commissioners were Col. Thomas Graves,<sup>18</sup> Thomas D. Johnston, Paul A. Haralson, and Dr. Allen Gunn. Dr. Gunn had purchased land marked S above to build his home. It was purchased from Thomas D. Johnston.

Sources: *The Heritage of Caswell County, North Carolina*, Jeannine D. Whitlow, Editor (1985) at 74 ("Yanceyville" by Katharine Kerr Kendall) and 76 ("Yanceyville 1833-1839" by Katharine Kerr Kendall).

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Today (2009), Church Street is named Wall Street, and Union Street is named Church Street. Harvey Street is North Avenue which becomes Firetower Road after crossing Highway 86. Greensboro Street now is named Main Street. Main Street now is named West Main Street. The Hillsboro Road is Highway 62 South.

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<sup>16</sup> Griffin Gunn (1775-1826).

<sup>17</sup> John C. Harvey (b.1798).

<sup>18</sup> Colonel Thomas Slade Graves (1775-1847).