

THE STATE

A Weekly Survey of North Carolina

NOVEMBER 28, 1942



TEN CENTS

Mr & Mrs W B Cheek 2RD
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One of the most beautiful spots in North Carolina—Grandfather Mountain, as reflected in a quiet mountain lake.

THE STATE

A Weekly Survey of North Carolina

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November 28, 1942

Caswell County

The home of Bedford Brown, Dr. Billy Poteat, Romulus M. Saunders, Archibald De Bow Murphey, Congressman John Kerr and many other distinguished citizens.

OUR two guides during our visit through Caswell County last week were Tom Henderson, whose writings you have read in *THE STATE* from time to time, and George Anderson, who for many years was clerk of the court and superintendent of schools in Caswell.

Two most interesting companions—except for the fact that they kept quarreling with each other most of the time. Tom would say: "Now that's the house where Judge Smith lived." George would immediately contradict it with: "No such thing; that's the

house where Judge Jones lived." Then they'd start arguing for about ten minutes before one or the other of them would give in.

We'll say one thing for them, though: they certainly know their Caswell County. They and their ancestors for several generations have been natives of that section of the state. Tom, incidentally, lives in the same house in which he was born, and George lives in one of the oldest houses in Yanceyville.

CASWELL COUNTY is located in the



The home of Romulus Saunders, who was minister to Spain and held other positions of high honor.



Caswell County's picturesque courthouse at Yanceyville, which recently has been completely renovated.

north-central portion of the state. It was formed in 1777 out of Orange County and was named for Richard Caswell, first Governor of North Carolina under the constitution. Yanceyville is the county seat.

Here's a question for Pete Murphy, R. C. Lawrence, and Sumner Burgwyn and others who are loaded up with North Carolina history: "For whom was Yanceyville named?"

We wish the three of them were in our office right now so we could propound that query to them personally, because we're pretty sure that each of them would give the wrong answer.

Practically everyone who knows any North Carolina history at all is of the opinion that the town was named for Bartlett Yancey, distinguished statesman and a Member of Congress from North Carolina. And we don't mind saying that we, too, also have been of that same opinion. It wasn't until we were up there last week, however, that we learned the truth about the matter.

Yanceyville was not named for Bartlett Yancey: it was named for James Yancey, Bartlett's older brother, who was a large landowner in that



Some of the beautiful old homes in Caswell. Top—Forest Home, residence of the Potcats. Center—Rose Hill, the home of U. S. Senator Bedford Brown. Bottom—The Kerr home, where Congressman John Kerr was born.

section of the state. Both Mr. Henderson and Mr. Anderson were in accord with that statement and everybody else up in Caswell seems to know about it.

Few towns in North Carolina have made as much progress as Yanceyville has in the last six or seven years. It is one of the few unincorporated county seats in the state, but it has its water and sewer systems, electric lights and power, and other civic improvements. In addition, many new and attractive homes have been built. A large hosiery mill and lumber plant are its chief industries. We ran into Mr. T. E. Steed, one of the county commissioners, and he took us over the courthouse which has recently been renovated and, despite the fact that the building was constructed about 1861, is now modern in every detail. The spiral stairway, the stately doors and the impressive courtroom are outstanding features. Judge Allen Gwyn was holding court while we were there.

"See that old house over there?" said Mr. Anderson. "That's the place where Captain Jim Potcat—Dr. Billy's father—used to run a hotel. He lived out at Forest Home, a few miles from here, where he had a beautiful house and a large farm. His mill-dam burst, causing a lot of damage, so he moved to town and ran a hotel here. We'll drive out to the Potcat home now."

Forest Home is now the residence of Mrs. Laurence Stallings, Dr. Billy Potcat's daughter and former wife of the famous co-author of "What Price Glory." It is located in a beautiful grove of ancient trees. Its pillared portico rises through two stories to the roof line: immense boxwoods surround it. The house, built in 1835 by Captain James Potcat, is unchanged except for the wings, which are a recent addition.

Let's take a look at some of the other interesting old mansions in Caswell:

A short distance beyond Forest Home is Melrose, which is a shining example of the old Southern way of life. The plantation originally comprised several thousand acres, but as the years passed they have diminished. Melrose is not one, but two houses, connected by a passageway. The original house was built in 1770 by James Williamson. "Scotch Jim," as he was familiarly known, represented Caswell County in the House of Commons and also in the Senate. His brother, Hugh Williamson, signer of the Constitution, was often a visitor at Melrose. George Williamson, known as "Royal George," built the addition in 1820. Several of the old outbuildings remain. Melrose is now the summer

home of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Williams, of Durham. Mrs. Williams is a descendant of James Williamson.

About seven miles west of Yanceyville is Rose Hill, the home of former United States Senator Bedford Brown. The house was built in 1800 by Colonel Jethro Brown for his eldest son, Bedford, who was graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1813. A few years later, after his son's marriage to Mary Lumpkin Glenn, Colonel Brown deeded them the thousand-acre estate of Rose Hill and a hundred Negro slaves.

After a wedding trip to England, Mrs. Brown supervised the planting of a formal garden with over two thousand boxwood plants. Because of the large number of roses that were planted, the place was named Rose Hill. In front of the house is a circular driveway, lined by trees and boxwood. The family cemetery, in which Senator Brown, his wife, their son, Livingston Brown, and his wife are buried, is located close by. Many of the furnishings of this old place, now owned by Miss Mary Brown, are still in use. Two rooms contain the fine classical library of Livingston Brown; lawyer, scholar and linguist.

In the town of Milton is what is known as the Irvine-Lewis place. When the town was incorporated in 1786 (the same year that Baltimore, Md., was incorporated) Henry M. Clay bought lot number thirteen. The white clapboard house, which he built in 1820, is tall and steeply gabled; its portico is simple and well proportioned. The house was bought in 1830 by Nicholas Meriwether Lewis and his wife, Lucy Bullock, of Granville County. There was another Lucy—Nicholas' sister—and it was she who loved the large square garden with its borders of box. It is said that the garden was laid out by the garden designer of Mount Vernon. For many years it has been one of the noted gardens of North Carolina. In 1886, after the death of his wife and sister, Mr. Lewis sold the place to his nephew, John Lewis Irvine. It then came into possession of his two daughters, Miss Anne Irvine and Mrs. N. R. Claytor.

So much for some of the outstanding old homes in Caswell. There are many others in addition to the ones which we have just mentioned. As a matter of fact, we're inclined to believe that with possibly one or two exceptions, Caswell has a larger number of well-preserved old houses than any other county in the state. The people up there take an interest in things of this nature and are proud



Top—Red House Church, near Semora, one of the churches under the supervision of Rev. Hugh McAden, the first Presbyterian missionary in North Carolina. Bottom—The home of Solomon Lea, at Leasburg. He was first president of Greensboro Female College.

of the old mansions which their ancestors built.

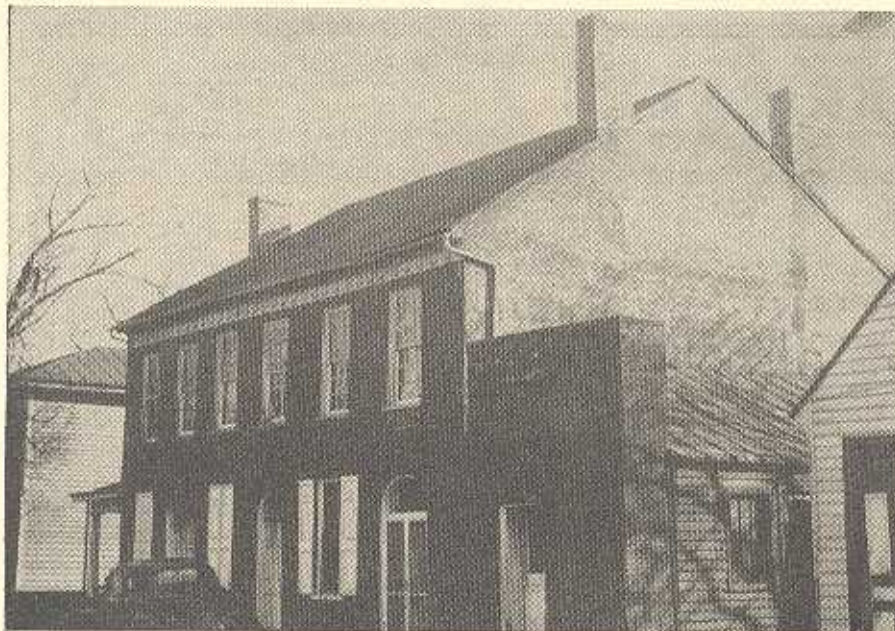
"**L**et's drive over to Milton," said Tom. "It's the oldest town in Caswell County and in its day and time was the center of social life in this section of North Carolina. It had tobacco warehouses, tobacco manufacturing plants, a large hotel, race track, and fine homes. For many years it was the head of navigation on the Dan River."

So we drove to Milton, which today is a quiet and peaceful town, reflecting on all sides its many years of existence as a community center. The old brick tavern, approximately 175 years old, is still standing on Main Street. Lafayette stayed here, and so did two or three Presidents of the United States, although we couldn't

find out exactly who they were. Early citizens refused for a time to let a railroad run through the town lest the noise demoralize the slaves and frighten the horses. Many of the public records were destroyed during the Revolution when Cornwallis and his troops were pursuing General Greene.

In the Presbyterian Church are pews which were made by Tom Day, a Negro, who was widely known in his day and time for his fine hand-wrought mahogany furniture. He came to Milton from the West Indies and he chafed at not being allowed to sit in the main auditorium of the church. One day there came to him an idea which, he hoped, would solve his problem. He made an offer to the Presbyterians to the effect that he would make a new set of mahogany

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The old tavern in Milton, where Lafayette spent the night and where several presidents of the United States also are said to have been guests.

CASWELL COUNTY

(Continued from page three)

pews for the church. The officials of the church were delighted. The old pews were showing signs of wear: mahogany pews would set off the structure in fine fashion.

But Tom had something else to tell them. He informed the churchmen that in exchange for his gift, he desired the privilege of sitting with the elect on the main floor of the edifice.

They pondered over that request

for a while. There was some opposition, but eventually the officials agreed. If Tom Day would make their pews of mahogany, they told him he would be permitted to sit in their midst: in fact, they'd let him sit in a front pew on the left of the church. So that's how it was worked out.

Messrs. Henderson and Anderson told us an interesting story about Col. William E. Byrd, who ran the dividing line between North Carolina and

Virginia. Inasmuch as the Colonel was a great-granduncle of Mr. Anderson's, the facts ought to be pretty accurate. Incidentally, both Tom and George are related to a large number of the old-timers.

But, to go back to our story about Colonel Byrd: He was given instructions by the Government about surveying the line. They told him that when he got to County Line Creek (in Caswell) he should follow the creek to where it comes into the Dan River. Then he should follow the meanderings of the Dan for a considerable distance, until he reached a certain degree of latitude. From that point he should head straight west.

Colonel Byrd arrived at Milton. The people were most hospitable. They furnished him with plenty of good liquor and also arranged several poker games for him. All in all, he stayed at Milton for about six weeks. When he finally sobered up, he realized that he was considerably behind schedule. He also realized that it would take a lot of time to follow the crooked trail of the County Line Creek and the Dan. So he said to his fellow-workers: "To hell with it, boys: let's run the line due west from where we left off."

And that's what they did. If they had followed instructions, Danville, Va., would have been in North Carolina today.

While we were at Milton we also saw the building in which the North Carolina State Bank was located. Our two guides couldn't give us the exact date of the establishment of the bank, but it was back in the 1840's. In that same period, Milton also had a newspaper—the *Milton Chronicle*—so you can see it really was quite a place in those days.

East of Milton is the community of Semora. Funny sounding name, isn't it? But there's an explanation for it.

One of the descendants of the Rev. Hugh McAden lived in that section. When the railroad started building to Milton, Mr. McAden found out that they were going to put up a station near his home and that they wanted a name for the place. Mr. McAden couldn't think of an appropriate name, so he wrote to his brother who lived in Texas, close to the Mexican border. The brother wrote back that he thought "Senora" would make a very nice name. The brother didn't write a very good hand, however, and the one up in Caswell County thought that the word was "Semora." "Semora" sounded just as good to him as "Senora" would have, so he told the railroad people to go ahead and paint

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YANCEYVILLE, N. C.

"Semora" on their little station, and they did.

At Semora we turned to the right and came to Red House Church, which was served by the Rev. Hugh McAden, whom we have just mentioned. Several other churches — Upper Hyeo, Middle Hyeo, Lower Hyeo and Rattlesnake were also under his jurisdiction. There's an historical marker on the main highway which has this legend on it:

"Rev. Hugh McAden, pioneer missionary to North Carolina in 1755 and first Presbyterian missionary to settle in the state. Pastor in Duplin County, 1757-1768. Pastor of Red House and other churches from 1768 to the day of his death, Jan. 20, 1781."

To our way of thinking, Hugh McAden was one of the greatest men that ever lived in North Carolina. His service to the scattered people of the state represents one of the most unselfish pieces of work ever done by any man at any time. Pity that more people aren't acquainted with his labors.

The present Red House Church is an attractive brick structure. Services are held there regularly.

We kept on along a dirt road, heading

for Leasburg. A short distance after we left the church, we arrived at a fork in the road.

"Right!" said Tom.

"Left!" said George.

We stopped the car.

"The right road is the shorter of the two," insisted Tom.

"Maybe it's a little shorter," said George, "but the oldest house in Cas-

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YANCEYVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

well County is located on the road to the left."

"All right," said Tom.

So we took the road to the left and, after a few minutes, came to the oldest house in the county.

"How old is it?" we inquired.

"I don't know," said George.

"Who built it?" we asked next.

"I don't know that either," was the answer.

"What's the historical association connected with it?"

"None, so far as I know," said George.

Tom laughed, and we continued on our way to Leasburg.

LEASBURG is another old place. Person County used to be a part of Caswell,

and it was at Leasburg that the original county seat was located. When Person was cut off from Caswell, the people of the latter county decided that the location of Leasburg was not central enough, so they moved it to its present site—Yanceyville.

It was at Leasburg that Solomon Lea operated the Sommerville Female Seminary, which our two guides informed us was one of the oldest academies for women — if not the oldest—in North Carolina. Mr. Lea was instrumental in helping establish Greensboro Female College and was its first president.

TAKING the paved road westward from Leasburg, we drove on to Yanceyville for lunch. In the afternoon

we visited some of the other old homes, mentioned in the first part of this article, and also traveled through the northwestern part of the county — "Gentleman's Ridge," as it is known — where some exceptionally fine farms are located.

Caswell County raises a lot of high-grade tobacco.

"How many warehouses in Yanceyville?" we asked Mr. Henderson.

"Not a one," he replied.

"How many in Milton?"

Same answer.

"Well, how many are there in the county?"

"Nary one," said Tom.

And that's a fact. There isn't another county in the state that raises as much tobacco as Caswell does and doesn't have any place within its borders to market it. The tobacco raised in the county goes to Danville, South Hill, Mebane, Reidsville and other markets.

UNTIL 1810, the county seat of Caswell was known as Caswell County Courthouse. Sometime later, the town was named Yanceyville. It used to be a flourishing place in the old days, but lack of railroad facilities held it back. Today, however, it looks as though the town were coming back into its own again. The people up there take life easy and they know how to enjoy it to the fullest extent. In the shade of the trees on the courthouse lawn, you'll generally find a bridge game in progress during the summer months. A good many of the store-keepers still close their establishments at noon while they go home for lunch. They're an extremely friendly people and are proud of the history of their county.

Caswell, like Alamance and Orange, with a population predominantly Negro, was visited by carpetbaggers and was the scene of considerable Ku-Klux Klan activity during the Reconstruction period. The slaying of carpet-bagger John W. Stephens at Yanceyville in 1870 by members of the Klan resulted in a reign of terror and finally resulted in the impeachment of Governor Holden. When Captain John G. Lea, former Klan leader, died in 1935, he left a sworn statement relating that "Chicken" Stephens was tried *in absentia* by a Klansmen's jury and sentenced to die for the burning of buildings and the destruction of crops. Lured to a purported conference in the courthouse, Stephens was disarmed and was stabbed to death. Holland McSwain, county superintendent of education, has his office now in the room where Stephens is said to have been murdered.

However, the people of Caswell are

NORTH CAROLINA FACTS !

WILMINGTON CLAIMS "WORLD'S LARGEST CHRISTMAS TREE"—A MOSS-FESTOONED LIVE OAK DECORATED FOR THE CHRISTMAS SEASON—70 FEET HIGH, 15 FEET IN CIRCUMFERENCE.



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Encourage the good dealer, shun the law-breaker. That's how you can help!

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sort of fed up with the Stephens story. There have been so many garbled versions of the affair that the average citizen up there dismisses the whole business with a disdainful shrug of the shoulders.

ROMULUS M. SAUNDERS, minister to Spain, Congressman, Judge and Legislator, was a native of Caswell County. His home is located just a couple of miles west of Milton.

Archibald De Bow Murphey also was a native of Caswell. He was an early champion of public schools, canals and roads. His work for the establishment of public schools was of a particularly outstanding nature. In his early manhood he moved to Hillsboro, where his grave is located.

Governor Holden was likewise a native of Caswell.

Two vice presidents of the American Tobacco Company—R. K. Smith and John Cobb—were born in Caswell.

And so was the present Congressman of the Second District; Hon. John H. Kerr, of Warrenton. Not only that but many generations of his ancestors were born and spent their lives there. The Congressman told us on several occasions that when we got ready to visit Caswell, he wanted to go with us. It so happened, however, that we had to make our trip at a time when it wasn't convenient for him to join us. The folks of his native county think a lot of him.

Altogether, there have been three "John Kerrs" from Caswell County who have been members of Congress. Maybe the son of the present Congressman is heading in the same direction. At any rate, he has made good progress thus far, because he is practically certain to be the Speaker of the House during the next session of the General Assembly.

The tobacco farmers, tobacco warehousemen and manufacturers of tobacco products in North Carolina ought to get together and chip in enough money to erect a monument to the memory of Benjamin Slade, for it was he—a native of Caswell County—who is generally accredited with having started the growing of bright-leaf tobacco.

It was nice to meet so many old friends up in Caswell: Sam Bason, former member of the State Highway Commission and cashier of the Bank of Yanceyville; Dr. Steve Malloy, that grand old man of medicine in Caswell; Holland McSwain, superintendent of schools; W. B. Horton, lawyer and brother to our former Lieutenant Governor, and many others. On our way back home, we stopped at that fine community of Prospect Hill to

see Dr. Robert Warren, but Doc was out somewhere and couldn't be found.

"He's a hard man to keep up with," the young man at the store informed us.

Other communities in the county are Pelham, up in the northwestern corner and surrounded by fine farms; Hightowers, between Yanceyville and Prospect Hill, and Purley.

We were told before we went up to Caswell that we'd find plenty of interesting things up there and, come to think of it, we believe we did.

DAVIS OF THE COAST LINE

(Continued from page five)

presidency in October 1942. At that time the ablest of the Coast Line presidents, George B. Elliott, voluntarily retired to become Chairman of the Executive Committee, and when he did, the thoughts of the directors concerned one man only—Mr. Davis. Today with the wealth of experience gained through the long years of his service, he brings to the guidance of his great system, a touch as sensitive as the fingers of a physician upon the pulse of his patient; and he is something of a physician himself, for he knows the proper remedy to administer when revenues have a sinking spell, and he knows the proper diet to prescribe so that such revenues will wax as full as does the harvest moon in the month he was elected as president.

He is president or vice president of so many short lines, union stations, bridge companies, terminal companies and the like, that it requires almost as much time to list them as it does to peruse one of Thomas Wolfe's novels.

Some of these short lines have imposing titles too. One of the subsidiaries of the Southern had the imposing designation of the Atlantic, Tennessee and Ohio. Not to be outdone, another of the subsidiaries is known as the South Carolina Pacific, which is going just about as far as it can go until Mr. Davis finds the time to organize a new bridge company to bridge the Pacific!

These short lines remind me of the time when the president of one of them applied to the head of a transcontinental system for an annual pass, a request which the head of the large system denied upon the ground that the short line was too short to justify an exchange of such railroad courtesies. The indignant president of the short line wrote a reply which simply scorched the paper, and reminded the president of the big system that if his little line was shorter than that of his

compeer, it was at least just as wide as the rails of the larger system!

Do you know what is the best part of this Coast Line system? The Southern blankets the Carolina West, but it keeps its General Headquarters in Washington; the Seaboard has a slice from the center, but its ranking officials live in Norfolk; but the Coast Line keeps its official headquarters in our city by the sea, and is completely Carolina.

Just how many directorates are held by this magnate of railroads and revenues? So many that if he gets the usual fee of ten dollars (he probably gets more) for attending a meeting, he will become as wealthy as James Buchanan Duke, and possibly Davis University will yet arise from the plains of Cape Fear, endowed with the directorate fees earned by its founder. And these directorships are not in obscure corporations, but include some of the largest in the South.

What manner of man is this new executive of our great system? The Packard people have an advertising slogan, "Ask the man who owns one," and to ascertain what manner of man Mr. Davis really is, the best way to find the truth is to ask the men who have served under him. Someone has said that no one is a hero to his valet, but Mr. Davis is as much a hero to those who have toiled under him as was the "Little Corporal" to his legions. His subordinates will tell you that he has not spurned the ladder by which he rose, but that he is a patient, kindly and considerate gentleman—a man to whose private car even the humblest employee may have access and be accorded a patient hearing if he have aught to say worthy of communication, or a grievance of which to complain. He has a sympathetic and humane disposition which has rendered him a popular figure among all who have come under the spell of his magnetic influence.

He is generous-hearted and public-spirited, giving to the cause of the public service every moment which can be spared from the cares of his multitudinous duties. And never was man called upon to face problems more perplexing than those which confront the transportation executive of today, when the entire world is in chaos, and when the country's needs are so imperative that even the iron grill work which graced the balconies of the General Headquarters at Wilmington has been torn out and donated to the Government. But I confidently predict that this new president will successfully confront and confound every of all the troubles which confront him—for he is truly a "Champion."

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NEW INDUSTRY: We take a great deal of pride in the progress our county has made and is still making and we would like to have New Industry grow with us. Every reasonable consideration will be given. Our transportation facilities are excellent. The Southern Railroad and many State and two Federal Highways traverse our county.



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