

# Uncoverings

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## Nine Related Quilts of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, 1800-1840

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Before the American Revolution, the Scotch-Irish, called Ulstermen, left Pennsylvania and Maryland and came down the great Wagon Road to the Piedmont area of the Carolinas. This area lies between the mountain region to the west and the coastal plain to the east. Mecklenburg County lies in the Piedmont and shares a southern border with the state of South Carolina. The county was laid out in 1775 in what was in every sense the frontier (Figure 1).

These Ulstermen had been persecuted by the English in Ireland. They believed in freedom of religion and government, along with freedom of religion *from* government. The predominant religion they brought to this area was Presbyterianism, led by the fiery preacher, Alexander Craighead. He formed the churches at Rocky River and Sugar Creek. Soon others were established at Hopewell, Centre, Poplar Tent, Providence and Steele Creek. All were in what was then Mecklenburg County.

Settlers in Charlotte, the major city of Mecklenburg County, raised a crude log cabin courthouse and the town was incorporated in 1768. On May 19, 1775, delegates from the nine militia districts of Mecklenburg County met to discuss the political crises in the colonies. The news of the battle of Lexington had reached them and in the early hours of the 20th of May, they drafted a resolution declaring Mecklenburg County free and independent of Great Britain. Twenty of the twenty-seven signers were connected with the seven Presbyterian churches. Capt. James Jack rode to Philadelphia to present the Declaration to the North Carolina delegation to the Continental Congress. The message was suppressed. The document was treasonous and the delegation was not ready for treason.

Fig. 1. Map of Mecklenburg County, 1789. Church locations marked by dots.

When John McKnitt Alexander's home burned in 1800, those original papers burned with it. Mr. Alexander, later that year, rewrote the Declaration from memory.<sup>1</sup> Other signers wrote affidavits testifying to the events of May 1775. In 1904, there was discovered in the archives of the Moravian Church a sketch of events of the period from 1775 to 1779. Translated into English it reveals:

I cannot leave unmentioned at the end of the 1775th year, that already in the summer of this year, that is in May, June or July, the County of Mecklenburg in North Carolina declared itself free and independent of England, and made such arrangements for the administration of the laws among themselves, as *later* the Continental Congress made for all. This Congress, however, considered these proceedings premature.

During the Revolutionary War, Lord Cornwallis, after suffering a bitter defeat at the battle of King's Mountain, occupied Charlotte for two weeks. His foraging parties met such resistance that the area was labeled a "veritable hornet's nest of resistance." The descendants of these "hornets" still live in Mecklenburg County and can repeat the stories of that time and their families' part in history.

I became involved in this history because in January 1981, five Broderie Perse quilts owned by the Mint Museum of History in Charlotte were shown to me by the assistant curator, Barbara Taylor. A few weeks later, four more were brought to the museum on a "Quilt Identification Day." These four had been made by one woman who died in 1835. All nine quilts had a central medallion motif, but different designs. The chintz fabrics used for the centers and embellishment were identical in two quilts made by different women. The next year, two quilts with a Tree of Life design came to my attention. One was dated 1826. I was able to trace the genealogy of the makers of three of the museum's quilts and the others as well. When all my information was put together, I realized these quiltmakers had many common bonds and if not related by marriage, had connections through business or the church. The names show up in all the local histories: Davidson, Alexander, Lee, Orr, Wilson, Monteith, Harris. As Elizabeth Davidson, donor of two of the quilts to the museum, and my guide to much of my investigation, said: "If we aren't kin, we're connected."

These nine quilts from Mecklenburg County, if not kin, are definitely connected. They were made within a period of forty years at the very most, by women who knew each other well.

By all accounts, these people were educated, refined and wealthy; their hospitality was renowned. All lived on plantations, which were self-sustaining units. About the only items purchased were salt, sugar, coffee, tea, spices, snuff and fabrics such as calico and chintz. Cotton and wool were produced and woven on the plantations for family use, as well as clothing for the slaves.

Their parties were most fashionable. Quiltings were common. The ladies arrived in the afternoon and quilted until dark. Then the candles were lit and the fiddlers started. Margaret Wilson's father, Maj. Tommy Alexander, a Revolutionary veteran, was noted for his fiddle playing at the dances. Guests remained all night, sleeping on pallets or trundle beds stored beneath the massive poster beds. The quilts in my study are all huge, made to cover the beds and drop to the floor, hiding the trundle beds.

Cotton had been important when the 19th century was under-way, but the production of gold became the sustaining force in Charlotte's economy until the Civil War. Sam McCombs had a gold mine

near what is now uptown Charlotte, in 1825. Other mines were located on Harris and Springs properties. Finally, on March 3, 1835, Congress authorized the erection of a branch of the United States Mint in Charlotte. It was a time of prosperity for those fortunate enough to own land and business establishments.

#### 1. THE SALLY ROXANA WILSON CALDWELL QUILT

When the Rev. Craighead's daughter, Rachel, married David Caldwell in 1766, an outstanding family was produced. There were eight sons and a daughter; three sons became ministers and one a physician. One son, David Caldwell, opened his "Log College" in Guilford County in 1767, a school known as one of the best in the history of North Carolina. David had been taught by the Rev. Craighead, and was also a graduate of Princeton. His students studied the classics and became eminent statesmen, lawyers, judges, physicians and ministers. Some were Congressmen, and five became Governors of states.<sup>2</sup>

One of David's students was Joseph Wilson, father of Sally Roxana Wilson Caldwell. David and Rachel's grandson, D.T. Caldwell, would later practice medicine with Sally Roxana's husband, Pinkney C. Caldwell.

In the year of Sally Roxana's birth, 1810, her father was elected to the legislature. Soon after this he made his home in Charlotte. The next years must have been exciting ones for the Wilson family. In 1812 Joseph was elected "Solicitor to the Mountain Circuit." He fearlessly prosecuted the lawless mountain men.<sup>3</sup> According to legend, he wore a white hat on his rounds and was frequently ambushed.<sup>4</sup> Joseph Wilson died in 1829, two years before Sally Roxana married Pinkney C. Caldwell on December 15, 1831.

All the quiltmakers in my study were Presbyterians except for Sally Roxana. She and her husband were of Quaker parentage. Persons of all religious denominations in Charlotte worshipped at one church until 1832, when the Presbyterians bought the property. St. Peter's Episcopal Church was begun when the founding members, including Sally Roxana, met at the home of her brother-in-law, William Julius Alexander, on December 20, 1844.

Little more is known about Sally Roxana. She and Pinkney had three children who lived to maturity. Pinkney became known as the most distinguished physician in Mecklenburg County, practicing

*Fig. 2. Sally Roxana Caldwell quilt, 1833. Mint Museum of History, #H62.10.*

with D.T. Caldwell, grandson of the famous Rev. Craighead.

Sally Roxana Wilson Caldwell died March 12, 1863 and is buried beside Pinkney and their son, Dr. Joseph Caldwell, in the old settlers' cemetery behind the First Presbyterian Church. This quiet oasis is a block away from the skyscrapers of present-day Charlotte.

Sally Roxana's quilt<sup>5</sup> is a central medallion motif, with a center diamond and two wide borders. A piece of fabric like that used in the outer border has been cut into triangles and seamed to make the center diamond. The four large white triangles sewn to the center have bouquets of pink roses appliqued in the center of each, with tiny buttonhole stitches. The border surrounding this is chintz, with

flowers printed in a square motif. This type of fabric usually was cut apart to make pillows,<sup>6</sup> but she has used it in strips. The colors are pinks, yellow, greens. The outer border is dark brown on the edge with madder red roses printed in a scallop design on white. The overall impression is that of three fabrics pieced together instead of one (Figure 2). The center diamond and the outer border are quilted in small squares with double lines about 1/8 inch apart. The first border has been quilted in parallel diagonal lines. On the back, written in ink with fine handwriting, typical of the time, is "Sally Roxana Caldwell, 1833."

In 1962, Dr. Annie Parks McCombs donated Sally Roxana's quilt to the Mint Museum. It had come down to her through Sally Roxana's daughter, Catherine Guion, who left it to her daughter, Ferebe (Effie) McCombs, Dr. McComb's mother. At the time of the donation an insurance value of fifty dollars was placed on it.

## 2. THE SARAH A. HARRIS QUILT

To the east of Charlotte, on the way to Raleigh, lies a community called Harrisburg, named for the Harris families who had vast land holdings in that area. This is now part of Carrabus County, but until 1792 was part of Mecklenburg County.

Sarah A. Harris was the granddaughter of Samuel Harris, who died in 1825. His will mentions his granddaughter Sarah A. Harris, and grandson Isaac Harris. The Sarah A. Harris whose quilt we are interested in was also the granddaughter of Adam Alexander, a signer of the Mecklenburg Declaration.<sup>7</sup> One of the problems in pinpointing genealogy in this case is the profliference of similar names. These early families were large; first cousins frequently had the same names. Sarah and Isaac were Alexander family names. Sarah was the daughter of Mary Shelby Alexander and Dr. Cunningham Harris who died January 10, 1814. In Samuel Harris' will,<sup>8</sup> he requested that Sarah and Isaac be allowed to live at the mansion house if they chose, and also provided for their education and clothing. In addition, Sarah was to receive \$250, a bureau, one bed and furniture, one-half of the dresser furniture to her forever, also a saddle and bridle.

Sarah's birthdate is given as 1806; she married Dr. James Gilmer on March 3, 1830. Dr. Gilmer had a large medical practice about six

miles northeast of Charlotte. Sarah died in 1832, childless. Dr. Gilmer married two more times, and the quilt Sarah made has been kept in the family of his third wife, Lizzie Alexander. Sarah's aunt, Sarah Shelby Alexander, married Capt. John Springs in 1777 and thus Sarah was a first cousin to Mary Springs, of whom we shall hear later.

Dr. Gilmer's granddaughter, Burwell Parrish, has the quilt now. Mrs. Parrish is ninety-two and remembers the story of the brown stain on the quilt. It seems a young man was visiting her family home in her mother's time. He was sleeping in a room which had Sarah's quilt on the bed. During the night a bad storm came up and a window was broken. Rain and sleet poured in, so he put the quilt against the window, where it froze. Mrs. Parrish says, "Mama couldn't get it down for three weeks."

Sarah Harris' quilt is a Tree of Life design. The tree, with six branches, covers an area equal to the size of a double bed mattress. The tree has been cut of blue and rosy red plaid fabric. There are palm leaves at the top and at the end of some branches, with flowers and trailing vines carefully appliqued with buttonhole stitches. At the base is a strip of flowers appliqued, with a bluebird in the center. Under this, quilted and corded, is the legend, "Sarah A. Harris July 14, 1826." She was twenty that year. This tree is surrounded by a trailing vine border of appliqued flowers on white, with an outer border of flowered chintz. The background fabric is homespun linen and the thread is linen, with hardly a break in it. It is quilted in parallel diagonal lines about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch apart, all over. The colors of the chintz flowers are rosy red, with some blue and brown, plus green leaves.

Mrs. Parrish cherishes the quilt, as does her niece, Mary Lacy Bost. Mary Lacy's mother had the quilt at the family home for many years. It will be passed down in the family.

### 3. THE NANCY LEE QUILT

Another quilt, similar to Sarah's, was given to the Mint Museum of History last spring as the result of some publicity about these Mecklenburg quilts. This quilt was in the trousseau of Nancy (Mrs. David) Lee. It was donated by Mrs. Virginia Lee Bell Rhodes, Mrs. Lee's granddaughter. Nancy lived to the end of the 19th century.



Mrs. Rhodes has a picture of her. She couldn't give any details about her grandmother, except that she was very hardy and "never lifted a hand."<sup>9</sup>

Nancy Lee's quilt is also a Tree of Life design. It has three borders. The outer border and the first border are of a medium blue chintz with pink roses. The middle border is white with 18 bouquets of flowers evenly spaced and appliqued. The tree in the center has been cut freehand from the blue chintz used in the outer border. There are seven branches on the tree, with a profusion of flowers here, there and everywhere. The quilt is very worn, with the bindings gone and the edges ragged.

Mrs. Rhodes says the Lees were founding members of Sharon Presbyterian Church and may have donated some of the land where the church now stands. Sharon Church was organized for a group of landowners in that area who formerly worshipped at Providence or Steele Creek. The first minister was the Rev. Samuel Williamson, the uncle of Adeline Orr Parks, another of our quiltmakers. The Lees reportedly owned 3,700 acres between Carmel and Park Roads. This area is now a suburb of Charlotte, with Sharon Church still attended by the descendants of the original founders.

#### QUILTS 4, 5, 6 and 7, THE ANN ADELINE ORR PARKS QUILTS

The Dalton Collection of four quilts are attributed to Ann Adeline Orr Parks, daughter of Mary (Polly) Williamson and John Hanna Orr, who were married in 1801, a few years after John had built a brick plantation house at Mallard Creek. This house still stands and is on the Historical Properties List. Adeline was born in 1803.

A cross-stitch sampler made by Adeline provides the clues to her family ties.<sup>10</sup> It lists two brothers for Adeline: James H. (later known as Harvey) and Samuel. When Adeline was small, her mother died, and her father remarried. On the sampler, four children of that marriage are listed: Martha A., Moses M., Emily Hannah and Elizabeth A.

The *Catawba Journal* of Tuesday, February 6, 1827, states, "Married in this town by the Rev. John Williamson, Mr. D. Parks of this town to Adeline Orr, daughter of Mr. John H. Orr." David Parks was a merchant and a farmer, with land in North and South

Carolina and Tennessee. His store is mentioned in Dr. J.B. Alexander's book about Mecklenburg County and Charlotte, but there is no clue as to the nature of the enterprise.

Charlotte was starting to grow about this time. The gold rush was on. More stores were opened. The townspeople had been worshipping at a church for all denominations from 1815, when it had begun, until the First Presbyterian Church was dedicated in 1823. Church records show Adeline and David were members of the First Presbyterian Church in 1832. That year David was elected a First Elder.

Adeline's daughter, Mary Adeline, was born in February 1835 and in September, Adeline died. The quilts apparently were preserved for Adeline's descendants by David's second wife. In 1837, David married Ann C. Byers in Iredell County. Ann raised Mary Adeline as her own.

About the time Mary Adeline was growing up, a teacher from New York State arrived in Charlotte to start a school. There had been private schools in Charlotte earlier. The New York teacher, Susan Davis Nye Hutchinson, left several interesting diaries in which she wrote of her travels and her teaching days. She mentions tea in Charlotte with Mr. and Mrs. Parks.<sup>11</sup> When Mary Adeline was seventeen, she married Mrs. Hutchinson's son, Ebenezer Nye Hutchinson. During the next six years, Mary Adeline had three infants who died, and one who survived her, David Parks Hutchinson. Mary Adeline died in 1858 at the age of twenty-three, and once again Ann Parks took over. She lived to be ninety years old, dying in 1890. In her will, she left her estate to her stepgrandson, David Parks Hutchinson, whom she had raised from infancy and whom she held in tenderest affection.

The four quilts Adeline made before her early death are in mint condition, except for one which has sustained some water damage, causing the brown dye in one of the chintzes to run. Quilt 4 is that quilt. It is a square center medallion, with a large bouquet of flowers cut from chintz, enclosed in a flower ring in the middle. Surrounding this ring are 8 smaller bouquets and in the corners of the square, four triangular shaped bouquets. All are appliqued on a field of white. This square is bounded by a narrow floral stripe, another slightly wider floral chintz border is pieced to that. It is the brown in this

piece that has run. The next to outer border is white with 8 palm tree tops evenly spaced, with pheasants atop the leaves, with small flowers interspersed at even intervals. The outer border is a wide light flowered chintz with a dark brown scalloped edge. The scallops are encased with a narrow linen tape. It is diagonally quilted with three narrow lines spaced with one an inch wide.

Quilt 5 has a center diamond format in the medallion style. This center has a panel of chintz applied, the same fruit basket found in the quilt attributed to Achsah Goodwin Wilkins, circa 1830 in Dena Katzenberg's book on Baltimore quilts.<sup>12</sup> This center diamond is framed with a rich red and brown chintz used in the same width in the first and third borders. In the four corner triangles surrounding the center diamond are applied bouquets also exactly like ones in Mrs. Wilkins' quilt. In the white border between the two chintz ones, Adeline has put four pheasants where the diamond points meet the first border. This quilt has fine clamshell quilting in the center diamond, "rope" quilting; i.e., five narrow lines followed by a space about  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch wide, repeated. The outer borders have parallel diagonal quilting at  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch intervals.

Quilt 6 is also a medallion with a diamond center format. Inside the diamond is a floral bouquet surrounded by a ring of flowers. This particular chintz has been documented as circa 1815 and possibly printed for use as a center in a quilt. A picture of it is in Florence M. Montgomery's book *PRINTED TEXTILES*.<sup>13</sup> From that picture, I can see how Adeline cut away the ring of flowers and pieced the corner arrangements, to enlarge the design. The diamond is edged with a floral stripe. The corner triangles have sprays of pink and blue flowers applied. This is enclosed by a floral border, then another floral applique on white border with a wide flowered chintz border at the edge. The quilt has clamshell stitching fanning out from the center to the triangles. Small squares are quilted on the borders.

Quilt 7 is the most beautiful, in my opinion. Adeline has used the same type center floral panel in this medallion quilt as in Quilt 6. But she has taken the circle of flowers that encloses the center bouquet and arranged the pieces with concave edges toward the center, and the triangular bouquets turned point inward, to create an entirely different appearance. This is again enclosed in a floral stripe to delineate the diamond. The corner triangles have a bouquet cen-

tered in each. A white border is pieced to this with eight groups of identical flowers placed evenly around the quilt. Finally there is a white background floral chintz border with a dark floral stripe at the edge. The diamond and triangles have been quilted in a small clamshell design, and the outer borders quilted with the diagonal parallel lines. The quilting is superb on all these quilts. The colors, rose, pink, green, yellow, are still vibrant. Family members say they were used early in this century for company and special occasions. These quilts remain with their present owner, May Orr Dalton, the widow of Adeline Orr's great-great grandson.

#### 8, 9. THE ROCINDA WILSON AND SOPHINA ALEXANDER QUILTS

The last two quilts were donated to the Mint Museum by Elizabeth Davidson. One was known to Elizabeth as the Rocinda Wilson quilt and the other as the Jane Sophina Monteith quilt. It was the search for those women that led me to Elizabeth and the plantation world she has known and heard of all her life. This area of Mecklenburg County centers around Hopewell Church. Much of the land today lies under Lake Norman, a lake made by the Duke Power Company when it dammed the Catawba River. But rolling hills and open fields and woods must look much the same as they did when Rocinda and Sophina were young. The roads then were dirt. Every woman rode horseback. The fields were planted in cotton.

Rocinda Winslow Wilson was born probably between 1775 and 1785. Her father, Moses Winslow, had a plantation near Centre Church, to the north of Hopewell. He had married Jean Osborne, the sister of Col. Adlai Osborne. When the soldiers of Lord Cornwallis, heading towards Salisbury, reached Moses Winslow's home, they tried to burn it, knowing the owner to be a man of prominence and a member of the Provincial Congress. As the soldiers were offering indignities to Mrs. Winslow, Lord Cornwallis himself rode up and order his men to desist and put out the fire.<sup>14</sup>

When Rocinda married William Jack Wilson around the turn of the 19th century, she entered one of the most distinguished families in Mecklenburg County. Her father-in-law was Sam Wilson, Sr., a tremendously wealthy man of aristocratic lineage, who owned large plantations. The Wilsons lived on lands close to Hopewell Church.

Hopewell not only is remembered for its religious history; it has the graves of the earliest patriots in its graveyard.

Rocinda Wilson and her husband lived as neighbors with Robert (called Robin) and Margaret Alexander Wilson, Elizabeth Davidson's great-grandparents. They were jointly famous for their hospitality and magnificent parties. A relative writing in the 1920s said that they would be known as "sports" in his day. The Wilson houses are gone, stripped by scavengers for the woodwork and old locks. Elizabeth Davidson's mother managed to save some of the molding from Robin's home and it is now in Elizabeth's living room at Rural Hill.

Rocinda and William had three sons and a daughter who lived to adulthood. A baby son, Moses Winslow Wilson, who was born in 1804 and died in 1805 is buried in Baker graveyard at Centre Church. This is the main clue we have to Rocinda's age. Her will was recorded in 1845. When it was written her sons, Robert, James and Lafayette and daughter Dovey were grown. Dovey Dougherty had a daughter who was Rocinda's namesake at the time.

Her quilts were important to Rocinda. She mentions them in her will, along with slaves, furniture, silver, linen and, of course, money and lands. Her son James was to receive three quilts, one fine, two common. To Lafayette she left two calico quilts, one fine, one common; to granddaughter Rocinda Dougherty, one calico quilt, one white Marseilles quilt.

The quilt Rocinda's great-grandniece, Elizabeth Davidson, gave to the museum is also a large medallion style with a center diamond (Figure 3), but it is quite different from the previously described quilts.<sup>15</sup> The center diamond has a fruit basket applique identical to Adeline Orr Parks' Quilt 5, and the diamond is outlined with a narrow floral chintz stripe. But the large triangles attached to this each contain nine brown and white pieced stars. These are unique. Each star has an octagon center, with a point pieced to each side of the octagon. This large square is framed with a pieced border of squares and triangles, all brown and white. A wide white border encloses the whole field, with sixteen bouquets of flowers evenly spaced. The fabric is very faded and worn, and the original colors are hard to determine.

Jane Sophina Monteith was the granddaughter of Richard Barry,

*Fig. 3. Rocinda Winslow Wilson quilt, circa 1830-1840. Mint Museum of History, #77.102.*

a signer of the Mecklenburg Declaration. Richard Barry was a neighbor of Moses Winslow at Centre Church. When the first Presbyterian services were held in that vicinity, they took place under a tree in his yard. According to tradition, the noted Dr. John Thomson preached "in the blacksmiths grove, now the grounds of the Presbyterian Church."

Sophina's mother, Violet, was Richard's daughter. Sophina was born in 1809 and married Andrew A. Alexander on March 24, 1840. They had two daughters and three sons. William Abner married

Rocinda Wilson's niece, Margaret Elizabeth Hampton. Sophina died in 1895 and is buried at Hopewell.

Sophina's quilt (Figure 4) is a medallion with a center square containing a basket of flowers appliqued, with a small bunch of flowers in each corner of the square.<sup>16</sup> This is enclosed in a chintz border followed by a white border with sixteen bouquets of flowers evenly spaced. A floral chintz border finishes it off. The applique work is done with tiny buttonhole stitches. This quilt has elaborate quilting in the white parts—stuffed grapes and leaves, with meandering background quilting. Sophina stitched her initials JSM in an oval of stuffed “grapes.”

While Rocinda and Sophina were living in the Hopewell area, their neighbors were the Davidsons and the Brevards. Major John Davidson was a signer of the Mecklenburg Declaration. He had a thriving blacksmith business there, supplying the necessary iron tools for the plantations. He owned thousands of acres in the vicinity and built his home Rural Hill in 1787. Rural Hill is described in *THE SQUIRES OF SPRINGFIELD* by Katherine Wooten Springs.

It was an imposing two-story house of dark pressed brick, with massive Corinthian columns supporting the roof, which extended over wide piazzas, front and rear. On the main floor, the partitions between the spacious parlors could be raised from the floor and fastened to the ceiling with immense hooks, thereby throwing the rooms together for balls and important occasions.

The mansion was the scene for many parties. In a letter to Mary Springs, Elizabeth Davidson's great-grandmother, from Mary Warren in 1800, written at the Davidson plantation, Mary Warren says: “I am so engaged in frolicking, for there is nothing here among us but quiltings and weddings . . .” A month later she wrote: “I have just returned from another wedding. Young Mr. Davidson is married to Sally Brevard in Centre.”<sup>17</sup>

The story of that courtship has survived for generations:

One morning after a hard rain, Major John Davidson called his son, Jacky, and said, “While the ground is too wet to plow, go and get your horse saddled and get yourself dressed. Go over to Adam Brevard's and court Sally. I think she will make you a good wife. Now you have no time to fool about it,

*Fig. 4. Jane Sophina Montieth quilt, circa 1830–1840. Mint Museum of History, #77.67.*

the ground will be dry enough to plow tomorrow.”<sup>18</sup>

Jacky went like a dutiful son and Sally accepted his proposal. They had ten children. One son, Brevard, would marry Mary Laura, the daughter of Mary Springs, in 1832.

The Springs family saved their letters, and I am indebted to them for many of the descriptions of social life then. Mary Springs heard from her sister, Ginny Alexander, in 1803.

My Dear Mary,

I am still in the land of the living, thank the Lord. I have



been at (indecipherable) Ford since the first of September until last Monday. I came home. The people there is so hide bound between religion and the thoughts of high life, that you may know, I did not have much satisfaction. I was to four quiltings, but not any dancing at one of them. There is a Miss Smith living in the City that was educated at the boarding school. She played on the forty pieneau that was the greatest curiosity I ever saw. Are you done you quilts? I was just going to begin mine. If the weather holds good and warm, if wishing won't get you here, I would have you for the great meeting comes on next week, and then busy quilting.<sup>19</sup>

When Mary Laura Springs married Brevard Davidson, the wedding took place at Springfield, the Springs plantation just over the border in South Carolina. As was the custom in the early years of the century, weddings were gala home events. The wedding ceremony was by candlelight, performed by the Rev. John Williamson, the minister at Hopewell.

Jacky Davidson gave Rural Hill to Mary and Brevard, who eventually had sixteen children. John Springs also provided for them generously. He gave Mary Laura another plantation of 959 acres, household items of furniture, linens, silver, livestock, horses, a wagon and harnesses, twenty slaves and cash to furnish the plantation, about \$14,000 altogether. Brevard prospered, and by the Civil War was the wealthiest man in the county. Rural Hill burned in 1886. All that remains today are the stone pillars from the front. Today, Elizabeth Davidson and her brother John Springs live in what was the original kitchen house, greatly expanded. Across the road, about a quarter mile away, is the Davidson private "burying ground." Major John and Violet Wilson Davidson are here, and most of their descendants. Mary Laura and Brevard's son, Baxter, restored it, and Elizabeth sees that it is well kept.

When Elizabeth Davidson graciously loaned me books and papers from her family, she helped me to link together these names from the past. We tramped through the old graveyards and she introduced me to the owners of Cedar Grove and Holly Bend. The history of Mecklenburg County took on a personal meaning for me. I like to think the quilts have served a far greater purpose than their original one. Sarah Harris didn't know, when she signed her quilt in

1826, that she would die, childless, just a few years later. But the quilt's existence caused someone to ask, "Who was Sarah A. Harris?"

The men of Mecklenburg County have torn down all the old landmarks except for a few. However, these quilts remain as testimonials to a time long ago, a different kind of life. It was easy and it was hard. There were slaves to take care of mundane household tasks, and money to buy what they wanted. But wealth couldn't protect them or their loved ones from sudden death. This thread of fear about sickness runs through all their letters.

Still there was time to enjoy family and friends and to express their artistic talents and sewing abilities in their quilts. Their quilts show that a common style, the medallion, was prevalent at that time, made by the leisure class who had the time to make them and the money to buy the expensive chintzes. The applique quilts were cherished in particular, as they survive after so many years when others which were sturdier were used until they disintegrated.

The connection with the Presbyterian churches is paramount in joining the lives of these women. Their husbands were doctors, merchants, farmers, but all staunch supporters of the Presbyterian Church with the exception of Sally Roxana and Pinkney Caldwell.

Mecklenburg County grew slowly until recent years, thereby preserving the nature of the society. Descendants of the early families live in the county, frequently in the old homes. They do not need to search for identity; they know exactly who they are. They live with the history of Mecklenburg. And every May 20, they gather to celebrate Mecklenburg Declaration Day and to remember the exciting years when our quiltmakers were helping lay the groundwork for what was to come.

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