

# **The Piedmont Historical Society**

The Old Hammett Place

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House Built In 1780's Standing In Greer Sector

Old Hammett Place Erected By One Of 13 Emigres From Virginia In '84

FAMILIES SETTLED AREA

BY HENRY HAMMETT

The year 1784 was marked by a veritable influx of settlers, into what is now Greenville County, but was then a part of the newly opened Cherokee territory. Most of those who built their log cabin, the traditional abode of the pioneer, in this section, were from Virginia and other points northward.

Unlike the inhabitants of the low country, they left no mansions with ancestral estates. However, there is one house built by one of the pioneers of 1774 that, though unpretentious, still stands and is in use. This is the house built by John F. Hammett, who at the age of 23, came here bringing his young wife, Emelia for the purpose of establishing a home. He chose to settle beside an old Indian trail now roughly followed by the old Spartanburg road, on the crest of the first hill west of the Enoree river. Not so many years later, he built the house that now stands on the same site. The house, particularly the enormous chimney made of native field stones mortared with red clay, is clearly visible from the road.

Across the river, a mile and a half east is the site where Col. Issac Morgan settled near where the family of a Colonel Hite had been butchered by Indians a few years previously. This site is still known locally as "The old Morgan place" but all original structures have long since been gone.

FROM VIRGINIA

Both Colonel Morgan and his neighbor across the river were members of a party of thirteen settlers with their families who came from Culpepper county, Va. in 1784 and took up claims covering a large part of what is now Chick

Springs township. James M. Richardson, in his very interesting book, "The History of Greenville County," devotes considerable space to Colonel Morgan, who, according to the records of the Pendleton land office received 640 acres as a "bounty grant," probably something corresponding to our modern soldiers' bonus.

Mr. Richardson does not mention the group of thirteen, but other writers including Col. S. S. Crittenden mention some of the other members of the party. Incidentally, he refers to Morgan as Jesse instead of Issac. Many of the names of the families of the group sound familiar because they have descendants in this section. There were in the group two families of Greens, Their heads being brothers, one family each of Taylors, Morgans, Holtzclaws, Hudsons, Edwardses, Hammetts, McGlothlins, and two families of Bridwells or Carneys, or two of both. The name of the thirteenth family is not known for certain, unless there were really two of these.

Johnny Taylor who lives on the old Buncombe road below where it crosses the National highway west of Greer, can point out practically all of the original places of settlement of each of the families. Incidentally, this road is the original route from Columbia into Buncombe County, N.C. Mr. Taylor, himself a great-great-grandson of the pioneer by that name, furnished considerable of the information for this story, and knows enough about the old settled families to fill a book.

One of the Greene brothers built his cabin on Prince's [or Suber's] Creek, not far from Morgan's place. Perhaps he realized the danger of being a pioneer, but one could not think that he expected the stark tragedy that occurred. His home was attacked by a raiding party of Indians; he and his son were killed; His wife and daughter were taken captive, carried to a spot on Enoree river, a few hundred yards from Hammett's home, and there horribly maltreated until they died. A punitive expedition of troops from Ninety-Six was organized, but what it accomplished is not known. Jesse Taylor settled his family above Chicks Springs, but after remaining a year or so became dissatisfied and moved to Eastern Tennessee where the family became quite prominent, two of the sons serving successive terms as governor of that state. However there was one son, Thomas, who did not leave because he was head over heels in love. When Greenville County was founded, he was one of a commission to select the site of the courthouse or county seat. This commission considered besides the one selected a site a mile or so west of what is now Greer, and another near the present Double Springs Baptist church. In the meantime he had married the girl and so became the founder of the Taylor family in this section.

Strange as it seems one of the members of the party of thirteen, McGlothlin, was a mulatto . He built a cabin near where Pleasant Grove church now is, but what became of him or his family, if any, The writer does not know. It would seem likely that he was brought along because he was a skilled wheelwright, blacksmith, or something. The party came by way of Charlotte and as there was no road other than Indian trails after they reached Cowpens, They would likely need such skilled assistance even before they reached their destination.

## MANY DESCENDANTS

Five of the thirteen families have descendants that still own parts of the original claims taken up by their families in 1784. Mr. Fred H. Hudson, well known Greenville business man, owns a considerable portion of his great- great-grandfather's claim including the site where that forebear is buried. His cousins hold most of the rest of the original claim. The Edwards family owns land off the highway west of Taylors that was the original claim of their ancestor. Mr. A. G. Taylor, genial treasurer of Furman University lives on land the Taylors bought for 40 cents an acre in 1784, and the Holtzclaw families living near Brushy Creek church live on what their forbear paid a like price to obtain. The Hammetts have a part of their familie's original claim but the site of the old house has long since passed from their possession. The old family graveyard back of the house was excepted in the deeds when the land was transferred, so it, theoretically, at least, still belongs to them. On a rather rough headstone in the old graveyard, one may plainly see the deep cut letters that make the words " In memory of John F. Hammett, Born in Va., Feb 27, 1761, Died Dec. 29 1834. "

Because these families had known each other in Virginia, and had migrated together, They for a long time made a group more or less distinct from the many other settlers coming to this section about the same time. There are three families that were not among the thirteen that the writer desires to mention because they are unusually interesting and settled among the thirteen. Two of these were the McClimon and Bailey families, who were supposed to be Irish Immigrants in spite of the Scotch sounding name. The heads of these families were iron puddlers and they entered into partnership and set up operations at Gibb's shoals above what is now Pelham, around 1795. It seems they found ore scarce but they found some and smelted with charcoal, puddling their iron by hand. The third non-member of the group to be mentioned is George King. He was a Connecticut Yankee who made and sold or perhaps only sold clocks. He married the daughter of a customer or prospective customer and settled down. Mr. Charlie King a descendant now lives near where the P. & N. railway has a flagstop labeled "Kings" just west of Greer. Not so long ago at an estate

settlement auction sale, there was an old clock sold for a song that had the legend "sold by George King [date]". The writer does not remember the exact date tho it was around 1800. I think before.

Among the descendants of these twelve white families, there have been and now are many prominent citizens of county and city. Some have entered politics serving in the state legislature. Others have been prominent in business. Among those who might be mentioned besides those already named are the Morgans, B. A. Morgan, city attorney, and his kinsmen the cotton mill executives. The career of Col Henry Hammett, a grandson of John F., the builder of the old house is well known. He married the daughter of William Bates, the Yankee cotton spinner, himself became a pioneer cotton manufacturer, Cotton mill builder, and railroad builder. Most of the families had at least one son who fought for the grey in the war between the states. Capt. George Holtzclaw, grandson of the migrant of 1784, captained a volunteer company and led them to the scene of battle. He was a fearless leader, and was characterized by his habit of getting out in front of his men during the battle, his hat in one hand, his sword in the other, and shouting "Come on Boys". This company was organized and drilled on the old muster ground, near where T. M. Hudson now operates the Silverleaf dairy.

## THE OLD HOUSE

To get back to the old house. It is undoubtedly one of the oldest structures in the county and is conceded to be the only one standing that was built by the hands of any of the thirteen pioneers of 1784. Its exact age is unknown. All the older residents with whom the writer has talked, and who recall their parents or grandparents mentioning it agree that it was built before 1800. The writer has always been skeptical as there was no record of a saw mill in this section before that date and the house is built of sawn lumber. Recently however, he has learned that Edwards, the one who came with the thirteen, built a saw mill on Mountain creek west of Taylors in the 1790's. So I hereby admit to those with whom I have argued, perhaps disrespectfully about the age of the house that they are probably right. Edwards did not have a circle saw as is of course now always used but he used a slasher saw something like an enlarged version of a carpenter's handsaw, and operating in a similar manner though it was arranged to operate by waterpower.

One of the most interesting things about the old house is the two gnarled mulberrys that stand in front. They are not the common native mulberry and the writer has never seen them except around old settled places. That they are not native to this climate is quite evident because each fall they make no

preparation for winter, their leaves remaining green, swinging merrily in the breeze, perhaps thinking they are still in a sunny land of no frosts until the first killing frost sears them. The writer distinctly remembers as a child of having read in a school history book that the inhabitants of South Carolina once undertook the culture of silk worms on a small scale, and imported some special mulberrys from Southern France or Italy. I have often wondered if these trees might not be of the same species as that imported stock, but have never found out.

The builder of the old house also built and operated a waterpower grist mill on Brushy creek a mile or so south of the home. Two large millrocks lie on the site alternately covered and uncovered by the shifting sands of the creek. One of these rocks is quite peculiar not appearing at all like those usually used for grinding corn. One of the older residents of this section told this writer that he had been informed that such a stone was arranged to run in a wooden trough so as to be used for custom crushing of berries, crabapples, and other fruits preparatory to making brandy. The writer has for years intended to remove these old stones, but just has never gotten started; Now spurred by renewed interest, he resolves again to do so...