

Research Report
Farm Mills (aka Love Farm, Amonette Farm)

777 Kings Road, Madison Heights, Virginia 24572
VDHR # 005-0101 Tax Map # 155-A-65 62.47 Acres

28 December 2010

This report is intended to serve as a brief overview of the history of the above referenced property. A chain of title and map set has also been prepared for a nearby property at 779 River Road. As the two properties were, on occasion, part of the same tracts or owned by the same individuals, both reports should be studied to provide greater understanding. This report includes events that generally occurred between 1814 and 1978. The history of the property prior to 1814 can be determined with further research.

By 1814, William Mitchell had established a mill on Harris Creek near its confluence with the James River.¹ Two years later, he purchased a large tract of 798.75 acres on the north side of the Fluvanna River (former name of this section of the James River) for £7,658.² This tract is referred to in the attached chain of title as the “Eastern Tract.”

In December of 1819, Charles M. Mitchell and Robert Mitchell (probably sons of William) announced in the *Lynchburg Press* that they were dissolving their partnership, and that Robert Mitchell would settle their affairs. A few days later, William Mitchell announced that he had transferred all debts due to him to Robert Mitchell. Robert Mitchell then advertised that he would carry on the business at the Farm Mills previously conducted by C. & R. Mitchell until the “end of the present season.”³

In 1820, William Mitchell owned four tracts of land in the area containing 881.75 acres. His milling operation was located on a 33 acre tract, and buildings on the land were valued at \$5,000.00, a considerable amount for the time.⁴ William and Sally Mitchell apparently fell on hard times, and the deed of trust that they placed on 384 acres of their property was executed in 1820. Samuel Pannill of Green Hill in Campbell County was the trustee for the property, and advertised in February of 1820 that “Farm Mills” with 384 acres would be sold at public auction on the premises on 7 March.⁵ The sale was postponed to June, and the tract was purchased by James Bruce of Halifax County (one of the noteholders for the property) for \$13,789.00.⁶

In August of that year, Robert Mitchell advertised that he would carry on the business at Farm Mills near Lynchburg, and that he would give farmers prices for wheat and flour based

¹ Mitchell’s Mill was in existence at least as early as 1814 when William Mitchell purchased a 39.75 acre tract from Pettus Thacker “adjoining the Mitchell’s Mill Tract.” Amherst County Deed Book R, page 382. A mill under another name was likely there before 1813, according to Deed Book M, page 575.

² Amherst County Deed Book N, page 271.

³ *Lynchburg Press*, 18 February 1820.

⁴ Amherst County Land Tax Records, Book B, 1820 (note: the Virginia General Assembly only began requiring that the value of buildings on a tract of land be separated from the overall value of the land in 1820. Thus, tax records prior to 1820 were not consulted for this project).

⁵ *Lynchburg Press*, 18 February 1820.

⁶ Amherst County Deed Book O, page 512.

on the Richmond inspection, rather than Lynchburg. He also made reference to his “lumber house” (store house) in Lynchburg.⁷

In June of 1821, James Bruce advertised that the Farm Mills property was available to rent. He described the mill as being 50 by 100 feet in size, containing five burr stones. The mill was constructed of rock, and was “calculated to manufacture extensively flour of the first quality.” He invited interested parties to meet him at the Franklin Hotel in Lynchburg later that month, and noted that while the possession of the property “has been contested for a considerable time,” it had been settled by the Chancery Court in Lynchburg.⁸

Capt. William Mitchell (assumed to be the owner of Farm Mills) died intestate (without a will) in June of 1824. His obituary in the Lynchburg Virginian stated that he was “of Amherst but formerly a merchant of Lynchburg.” As was customary at the time, the Sheriff of Amherst County was ordered to conduct an inventory of the decedent’s estate. However, the Sheriff reported back that he visited Mitchell’s residence, and found nothing. It was also noted that Mitchell took an oath of insolvency before his death. William Mitchell, Jr., died just a few months later in September at age 29. His obituary reported that he was also a merchant in Lynchburg.⁹

Also in 1824, the Virginia General Assembly considered an act authorizing the completion of a bridge over the James River above the present toll bridge (located at Ninth Street). It was noted that “Capt. William Mitchell began the bridge but met with disaster.” The outcome of this matter is not known, but it is assumed that the bridge was never completed.¹⁰

1828, it was reported that Bruce’s partner in Lynchburg, Cornelius Crow, had rented the property to William Terry. In 1829, Bruce wrote to Crow, asking about the status of the suit against Mr. Simmons in Amherst for the mill stones for \$200.00. By 1830, Bruce was ready to divest himself of Farm Mills, and efforts to survey the property began. Members of the Ward family objected to Reuben Norvell, the Amherst County Surveyor, conducting the survey. Crow suggested employing Samuel Moses, surveyor of Charlotte County (also of Buckingham), and Bruce agreed. In December of 1830, Crow wrote to Bruce announcing that he had sold the Farm Mills tract to George Pettyjohn.¹¹

During this time, the two primary sections of William Mitchell’s former property were sold out of the Ward/Bruce holdings, with the western portion that included the mill being sold to George W. Pettyjohn as mentioned above. Also in April of 1831, 795 acres (the eastern portion) was given by John and Tabitha Ward to their son Henry C. Ward (see Map #4).

These transactions shed some light on the complicated situation regarding the possession of the property as referenced by James Bruce in his 1821 advertisement. The deeds for both sections of the land make reference to the brick house that was occupied by William Mitchell

⁷ Lynchburg Press, 2 August 1820.

⁸ Lynchburg Virginian, 8 June 1821. Bruce is probably referring to Lynchburg Chancery Court Case #1821-006, Bruce vs. Mitchell. The deed to Pettyjohn was dated 4 April 1831, Amherst County Deed Book T, page 453.

⁹ Lynchburg Virginian, 6/12/1824, 6/18/1824, page 3, col. 5, 9/21/1824. Amherst County Will Book 6, page 596.

¹⁰ Report of the Virginia State Library, Volume 5, 1908, page 221.

¹¹ Bruce-Randolph Collection, Library of Virginia. Letters dated 3/21/1828, 3/13/1829, 1/22/1830, 12/18/1830, 1/21/1831.

as well as outbuildings, including a smokehouse. Furthermore, ownership of the house was split, with approximately three-quarters of the house, along with its door, being on the Ward tract of 798 (or 795) acres, and one quarter of the house being on the Farm Mills tract owned by Bruce and Crow.

The house that is described in these deeds is the one that rested on the stone foundations of the current dwelling at 777 Kings Road. It was likely built after 1816 when William Mitchell acquired the 798 acre tract from John Ward...only at this point would Mitchell have owned the entire hilltop where the house was to be located.¹² Based on descriptions in the deeds and a later rendering on a plat, the house was constructed of brick, and was probably one and a half stories in height with a chimney on its southern end, if not both ends.

In 1834, Henry & Sally Ward sold 180 acres of their 795 acre tract to Thomas Love, a tobacconist from Lynchburg. For more information on Thomas Love and his family, please see the attached “Descendants of Thomas Love of Lynchburg and Amherst County, Virginia” by Phillip Wayne Rhodes.

Thomas Love died in 1868, leaving a will that directed his estate to go to his wife, Julia. It appears that she died within a few weeks of her husband, and the children proceeded to sell their parents’ estate, both real and personal. Thomas’ youngest son, John Marion Love, purchased the “Mansion House Tract” (78 acres) and the “Still House Tract” (100 acres) for just over \$3,500.¹³ It should be noted that during this period, use of the term “mansion” does not imply that the house was larger than average; it simply means that it was the primary residence of an individual.

John M. Love was also a tobacconist, and married Anna Catherine Roper of Petersburg in 1872. It is likely that he lived on the Love Farm during the 1870s. In April of 1880, he purchased a house at Ninth and Monroe Streets in Lynchburg, but died of consumption less than a month later. The farm remained in the possession of Catherine, who moved back to Petersburg and remarried. In 1899, she divided John M. Love’s estate with two sons, John, Jr. and Leroy.¹⁴

As a side note, another son of Thomas Love, Thomas H. Love, purchased 5 acres along the James River near the farm from John and Ellen Holt in 1882 and constructed a tobacco factory, a storehouse, and several houses. This area, upriver from Scott’s Mill (probably around the current Red & Dots Store) came to be known as “Love’s Town.” Into the 20th century, its name morphed into “Lovingston,” and a church and school carrying that name were built on Kings Road.¹⁵

The original house is said to have burned around the turn of the century, and the house that occupies the site today was constructed (the current Amherst County land tax database

¹² The near-right angle boundary that literally divided the house existed as early as 1800. This makes the presence of a house that straddled the boundary unlikely since it is not mentioned until Mitchell’s ownership.

¹³ Amherst County Will Book 17, page 444. *Lynchburg Daily News*, 8/30/1869, 9/6/1869. Amherst County Deed Book GG, page 457.

¹⁴ Rhodes, Phillip Wayne. “Descendants of Thomas Love of Lynchburg and Amherst County, Virginia” *The Virginia Genealogist*. Falmouth, Virginia: John Frederick Dorman. Volume 35, page 280-281.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, page 273. The Lovingston School was partially constructed with monies from the Rosenwald Fund in the 1920s, and was intended for African American students. The school is now in ruins.

suggests that the house was built in 1903). If this date is correct, the house was probably built by Leroy Love, as a 1903 passport application indicates that John M. Love, Jr. was living in Baltimore, where he was a medical student. Leroy Love's whereabouts in 1903 are not known; he was in Petersburg three years earlier, according to the Census. It is also very possible that the house was built after the property's sale in 1905.

In 1905, Leroy and John Love sold the 78 acre "mansion house tract" to Wilbur F. (sometimes also referred to as William) and Fannie Amonette.¹⁶ John and Leroy reserved the mineral rights on the land (a smaller parcel mentioned in 1869 was called the "Copper Mine Tract" and ran along Buck Branch) as well as the family burial plot enclosed by a stone wall. This cemetery is located just south of the house, and contains either two or four marked graves (depending on whether the marble markers are all headstones, or two pairs of headstones and footstones). The cemetery likely contains the graves of Thomas and Julia Love. While John M. Love died in Amherst (presumably at the farm) in 1880, it appears that he was buried at Blandford Church in Petersburg with his wife, who died in 1900.¹⁷

Wilbur F. Amonette, Jr. and Henry Louis Amonette, sons of W.F. Amonette, Sr., served in the U.S. Army under Pershing in World War I and were reported as being "slightly wounded" in a June 1918 casualty report. Their place of residence at the time was "Randolph-Macon Heights, Lynchburg, Va.," which agrees with Junior's his street address of 241 Cleveland Avenue listed on his draft registration card and in the 1920 Census.¹⁸ W.F. Amonette, Jr. worked for the John H. Heald Company in Lynchburg and then for the Mead Corporation in Radford, and died in 1962. His son, Wilbur F. Amonette, III, is a practicing physician in Radford today. Henry Louis Amonette was a teacher in Madison Heights and then New York City.

W.F. Amonette, a farmer, died in March of 1929, and his wife, Fannie Jane Ogden, died that October.¹⁹ In 1945, his heirs sold the property to John C. Jones, who retained it until his death in 1957. Jones' will conveyed the farm to M.K. and Grace Taher in 1962, and they sold it to Ella Boyer in 1978. The property was eventually purchased by Lynchburg Jefferson Street, LLC, which owns it at the present time.

¹⁶ Amherst Deed Boof 55, page 496.

¹⁷ Survey Report, Blandford Cemetery: 1937 <http://files.usgwarchives.org/va/petersburg/cemeteries/blandford09.txt>

¹⁸ <http://distantcousin.com/Military/WWI/NYTCasualties/1918/Jun/01.html>

¹⁹ Obituary Database, Jones Memorial Library, Lynchburg, Virginia.