

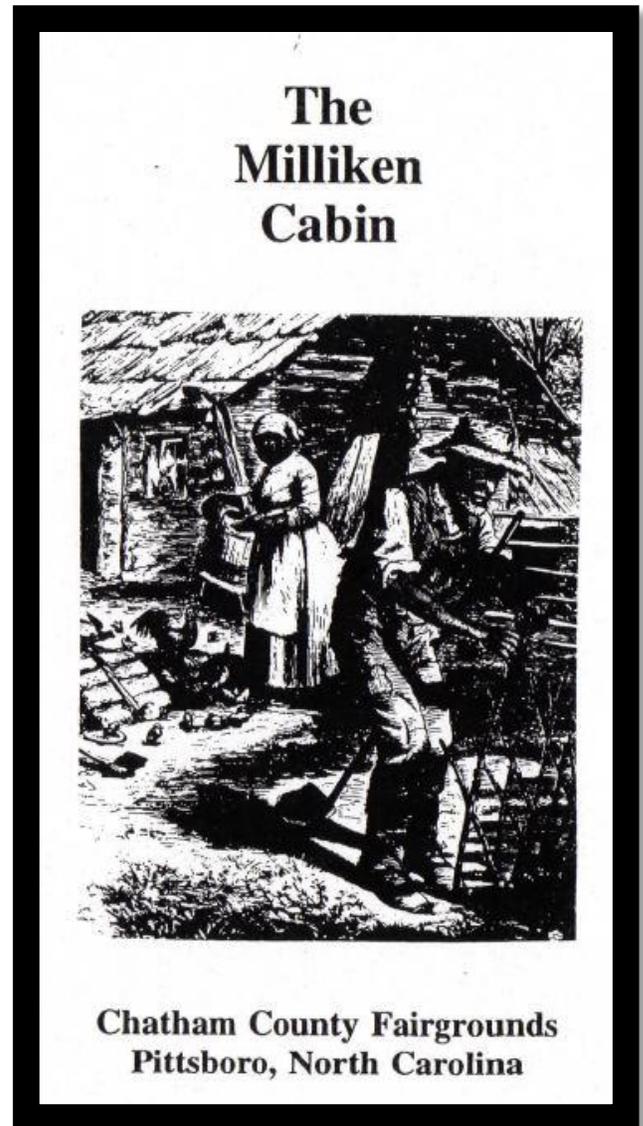
# History of the Milliken Cabin

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The Milliken cabin was built after the Civil War by a former slave named Bob, who had been purchased from the Fayetteville slave market. Families over three generations used the cabin, beginning with Bob and his wife Sallie and their three children, Isaac or Ike, Laura, and Dena. Laura reared her family of eight in the cabin, and Laura's youngest daughter, Annie Bell, reared her family of four in the cabin before moving to a modern home.

Originally located about seven miles northwest of Pittsboro, the one-room cabin was donated to Charlie W. Baldwin by Willis Wrenn of Siler City and moved to the Chatham County Fairgrounds in 1977, where it was renovated under the supervision of the Black History Museum Committee chairman, C.W. Bryant. Among those involved in the renovation of the cabin and landscaping around were Mr. and Mrs. George Julian Jones, Mildred B. Payton, Gladys Simmons, Rachel Rogers, and J.E. Ramsey.

By 1996 the cabin had disappeared in the woods and Hurricane Fran dropped a large oak over it. The Chatham County Agricultural and Industrial Fair Association, Inc., with financial assistance from the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the North Carolina State Fair, began in 1998 to relocate and reconstruct the cabin, expecting to use it for education, especially in the demonstration of pioneer and other crafts.



## **Reminiscences of Saul Milliken, Hattie Milliken Headen and Annie Bell Milliken Dark**

As a young slave, Bob built his cabin with great care. He took his bride, Sallie, there and raised his family of three children. Not much is remembered of Grandpa Bob except that as a freedman he continued to live on the Milliken plantation and regarded his young ex-master John Milliken with affection. "Mister Johnny" was sixteen years old at the end of the Civil War and told Bob that as long as he or his heirs desired to live in the cabin, it was theirs and would not be sold.

Cabin-builder Bob was a man of skill. He developed a cooling system for his meat by digging a hole and installing certain insulation around a box lowered into it. He made leggings out of cowhide that he had tanned himself, conditioning the hide with mutton fat. He whittled and whistled. Musically inclined, he carved whistles from sourwood and developed a band. Daughter Dena blew the jug, granddaughter Laura blew the harp, and son Isaac played the bones.

The story is told that when a summer shower came up one day, the grandchildren stopped their hoeing and shouted, "It's raining, Grandpa!" Knowing that "Mr. Johnny" was within earshot, Grandpa quipped, "More rain, more rest."

"What's that?" ex-master John inquired, with mock severity.

"More rain, more grass, boss," rang the hasty reply from Grandpa Bob, delighted with his own quick wit.

Grandmother Sallie lived until the 1920s. Prior to coming to the Milliken plantation, her life had been tragic. She remembered nothing of her parents, only that she and her sister were bought when she was about sixteen by a man whose name she thought was Shaw. Sallie was old enough to be a

house slave, but her sister, Katherine, was sent to the fields. One morning Katherine said that she was sick and could not eat her cornbread and peas for breakfast. Sallie saw her sister taken out and tied to the pole for whipping.

“Please, Missy,” she begged, “please make Massa quit beating my sister.” The mistress answered, “Get back in the house or he’ll beat you. Katherine must learn to obey her master.”

Katherine died at the pole. A hole was dug in the woods, and she was thrown into it and covered up.

One of the older slaves on the plantation was Brother Goosegrease, who built “Willow’s Nest” of brush in a secret place for the slaves to pray. He warned them that they must not cry out if they might be heard by the master. One of the songs that they sang softly was

“Watch out the sun,  
And see how it run;  
Jesus might catch you  
With your work undone.  
I’m goin’ to join the army.”

Sallie was grateful for the kindness of the Milliken family, but the horror of her early slave days could never be completely erased from her mind.

Grandmother Sallie stayed with her daughter Laura in the Milliken cabin and helped to raise her eight grandchildren: Hayes, Beatrice, Patsy, Hattie, Jake, Saul, Willie, and Annie Bell. Of the five who were living in 1977, Hattie, Saul, and Annie Bell lived in Chatham County, and Beatrice and Jake resided in Greensboro.

Little Saul used to stand in the chimney corner and listen to his grandmother pray for her daughter and grandchildren. She had a special praying ground to which she retreated each morning upon arising. Later she prepared breakfast for the children while daughter Laura cooked at the “big house.” Among the goodies were ash cake, crackling bread cooked in the skillet, and sweet potatoes roasted in the ashes.

When Grandma Sallie became ill with “heart dropsy,” little Hattie would crawl under her bed to sleep in order to be near her. When her condition worsened, Grandma Sallie was moved into a house nearer the “big house” to enable Laura to watch her mother closely and still do her chores. One day the former slave called her grandchildren to her beside and told them, “Be good children, be good to Laura, and meet me in heaven.”

Mr. Johnny, then sheriff of Chatham County, bought a casket for her burial at Mitchell Chapel. Later he went out and looked at her grave. When he returned home, he walked down to the cabin and said, “Henry, go right ahead and put up that kitchen that your folks have been asking for.”

## **Reminiscences of Elizabeth Milliken Makepeace**

I was in the cabin many times when I was a child. It was on my father’s land and he owned it. Uncle Bob and Aunt Sallie were slaves bought at the slave market in Fayetteville. There were there many years before I arrived in 1885. I loved them both very much. Aunt Sallie, her daughter Laura, and granddaughter Beatrice were in my mother’s kitchen until I left home in 1920. Aunt Sallie was too old to work, but she was still around. Laura and Beatrice were wonderful cooks.

Laura was the shining star in my very young life. Getting to eat with her in the kitchen was heavenly. She let me help her in making biscuits and all kinds of cooking, and she never got impatient with me. All the time we were cooking I was asking questions. My favorite was “Where do babies come from?”

Finally, she told me they came out of stumps in the woods. Since I was the youngest in the family and wanted a baby brother or sister so much, I persuaded her to take me baby hunting. Many afternoons we spent walking in the woods looking for a baby. She would hit an old stump with a stick, lean over and listen and say, “There ain’t one here.”

It was almost as bad as finding out who Santa Clause was to find out that babies didn’t come out of a tree stump.

*\*The text of this article is copied verbatim from a 1998 brochure that was, in turn, adapted from a pamphlet published in 1977 by Mildren B. Payton, former Chatham County Home Demonstration Agent. It was published in 1998 and here on this website by courtesy of the Chatham County Historical Association. [More recent history](#) of the cabin can be found on the Chatham County Historical Association website.*