

The Chatham Historical Journal

Volume 7, Number 3

Chatham County, North Carolina

September 1994

Mt. Pleasant Church and Pace's Mill Bridge

J. Lamont Norwood*

When Mt. Pleasant was organized back in 1779, it was the only Methodist church in the area of north Chatham County. People from west of the Haw River rode horses to the river, paddled a boat across, and walked the three miles to the church. In the late 1820s, a bridge was built across the river. On January 5, 1828, Rev. Thomas Mann wrote in his diary, "This evening I walked over the Haw River to Isaac West's and stayed all night."¹ Rev. Mann was devout in the extreme, but he did NOT walk on water.

The bridge with Pace's Mill on the east side centered on the farm of Isaac West on the west side of the river. No doubt the bridge was built with great sacrifice, for it would be a quarter of a century before the railroad came into Chatham County. Presumably, the steel used in the bridge construction was shipped up the Cape Fear River by barge and carried the rest of the distance by horse-drawn wagons. The wagons would have to have had a special arrangement, for some of the steel parts were 60 feet long.

As the density of the Chatham County population increased, other Methodist churches sprang up. The middle of the nineteenth century was a time of particularly fast growth in the number of

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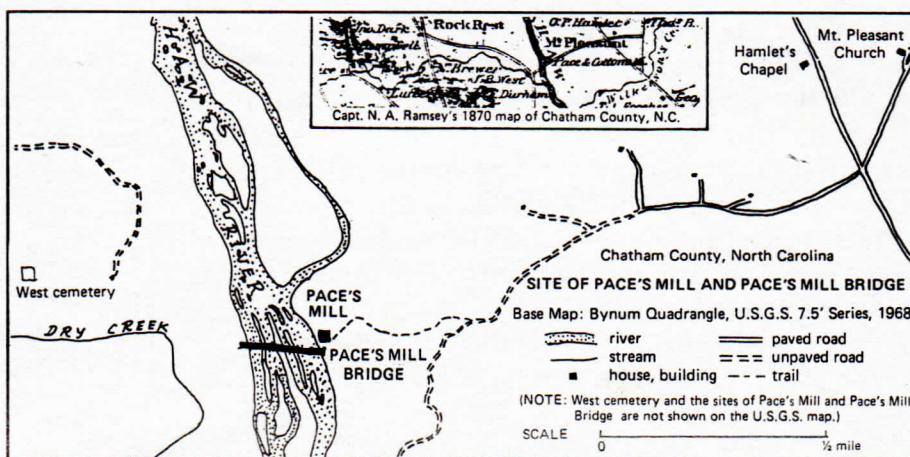
new churches. Around 1850, Brown's Chapel opened on the west side of the Haw River, and Mt. Pleasant membership from that area was severely squeezed. At about the same time Mann's School House became accepted into the conference, and Mt. Pleasant was squeezed on the east. (Mann's School House was later called Mann's Chapel.²) Although competition for members was rapidly stepped up for membership, Mt. Pleasant remained the major Methodist church in north Chatham in the nineteenth century.³

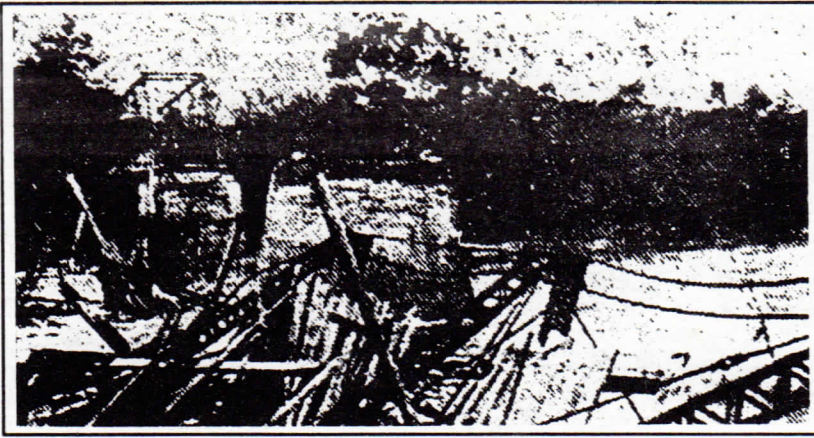
Decline and Destruction of Pace's Mill Bridge

Early in the twentieth century, the importance of Pace's Mill declined. It would follow that the importance of Pace's Mill Bridge also declined. In 1924 a tornado struck the area. The bridge was destroyed [see illustration on next page] along with other buildings in the area. The bridge was not rebuilt. Some of the foundation stones are still in place and may be viewed by those intensely interested in history.

Well-known Native Son Connected with Pace's Mill Bridge and Mt. Pleasant

Dr. Clarence Poe is by far and away the best-known person with a Mt. Pleasant connection. He founded and developed the magazine *The Progress-*





"The ... picture shows the county bridge over Haw river at Pace's Mill, after the tornado Wednesday of last week had passed across it. The twister picked up the steel, gave it a few lusty churns and dumped the mass into the river, a bent and broken pile of debris." (Chatham Record, 8 May 1924, p. 1)

and the bridge, and took three lives in the vicinity. Excerpts from the article relate that

"The Pace old grist mill, standing nearby, a large three story frame building[,] was completely wrecked, the big building being turned over and falling in the

roadway.

"Across the river, and near where the mill stood, was a steel bridge, said to be one of the longest bridges in Chatham, and containing eight spans[,] was partly blown down, only two spans being left standing in the middle of the river.

"The bridge, when built[,] cost several thousand dollars....

"Tuesday a year ago a similar storm passed over the same section but it did not do much damage. It is said that where the bridge stood over the river, has been an unlucky place, as 32 years ago a bridge was destroyed there."¹

James Pace is identified in the 1850 U.S. census as a mechanic, 32 years old.² He is listed in the 1880 census as the owner of a mill on Haw River.³ Records in the Register of Deeds files show several transactions involving land containing a mill and millpond. A 50-acre island in the Haw River, which was sold to Thomas West in 1772, may be part of two tracts, one of which contained a mill, sold by Isaac West to Stephen Cotton in 1862, and in turn sold to James Pace in 1867.⁴ Capt. Ramsey's 1870 map calls it "Pace & Cottons Mill."

In July 1887, W. D. Bright was awarded a contract to build a bridge at Pace's Mill, for \$4,400.⁵ A "freshet" in November 1887 and heavy rains in September 1888 delayed construction of the 700-foot lattice bridge, which was finally finished in December 1888, a year behind schedule.⁶

sive Farmer and is well known not only in North Carolina but throughout the South. He regularly contributed to Mt. Pleasant as long as he lived.⁴ His mother, Susan Dismukes, was a member of Mt. Pleasant church, and to attend crossed the river on the Pace's Mill Bridge.

NOTES

1. Thomas Mann, *Journal*, Vol. 6, Jan. 1, 1828 - Jan. 27, 1829. Special Collection Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.

2. E. W. Atwater, *Raleigh Christian Advocate*, 4 Nov 1888, cited in W. L. Grissom, *History of Methodism in North Carolina from 1772 to the Present Time* (Nashville, Tennessee, and Dallas, Texas: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1905), Vol. 1, p. 209.

3. J. Lamont Norwood, "...Mann's Chapel," *Chatham Historical Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (September 1988).

4. [Editor's note: Clarence Poe (1881-1965) was born near Gulf and became assistant editor of *The Progressive Farmer* at age 16, editor two years later, and owner in 1903. For 57 years the magazine promoted improved farming and better living conditions throughout the South. See Wade Hadley et al, ed., *Chatham County, 1771-1971*, (reprinted by the Chatham County Historical Association, 1992), p. 400, and a short article by Mrs. Faye Moore of Gulf in the Association's *Newsletter* of May 1992.]

[Editor's Note: Curiosity piqued by Mr. Norwood's article, I examined documents in the Chatham County Register of Deeds office and sought additional information from newspaper accounts of the tornado of 1924, and earlier newspaper references to the building of Pace's Mill Bridge. Although little of substance can be added to Mr. Lamont's article, some of the information I found is summarized here to relieve future investigators some of the effort of research.

The halftone engraving shown above was printed in the *Raleigh Times* of 3 May 1924 and reprinted in the *Chatham Record* of 8 May 1924 to accompany an account of the tornado that destroyed Pace's Mill

NOTES

1. *Chatham Record*, 8 May 1924, p. 1.

2. John F. Schunk, ed., *1850 U.S. Census, Chatham County, North Carolina*, (Wichita, Kansas: S-K Publications, 1986).

3. Wade Hadley, "Water-Powered Grist Mills in Chatham County, North Carolina, as of 1880," *Chatham Historical Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 1, January 1991, [p. 2].

4. Deed Books A, p. 134; A-M, p. 198; and B-R, p. 306.

5. Deed Book B-W, p. 269-270; original filed with loose papers "Chatham County: Roads and Bridges," in the North Carolina Archives, Raleigh.

6. *Chatham Record*, 10 November 1887; 13 September 1888; 6 December 1888.

Passenger Automobiles and Trucks Registered in Chatham County in 1923

Wade H. Hadley, Jr.

In the year 1923 there were 1202 passenger cars registered in Chatham County. This number was made up of 43 different brands of automobiles. Approximately 75% of the total were 904 Fords.

The total number of trucks registered was 103, with 17 brand names represented.

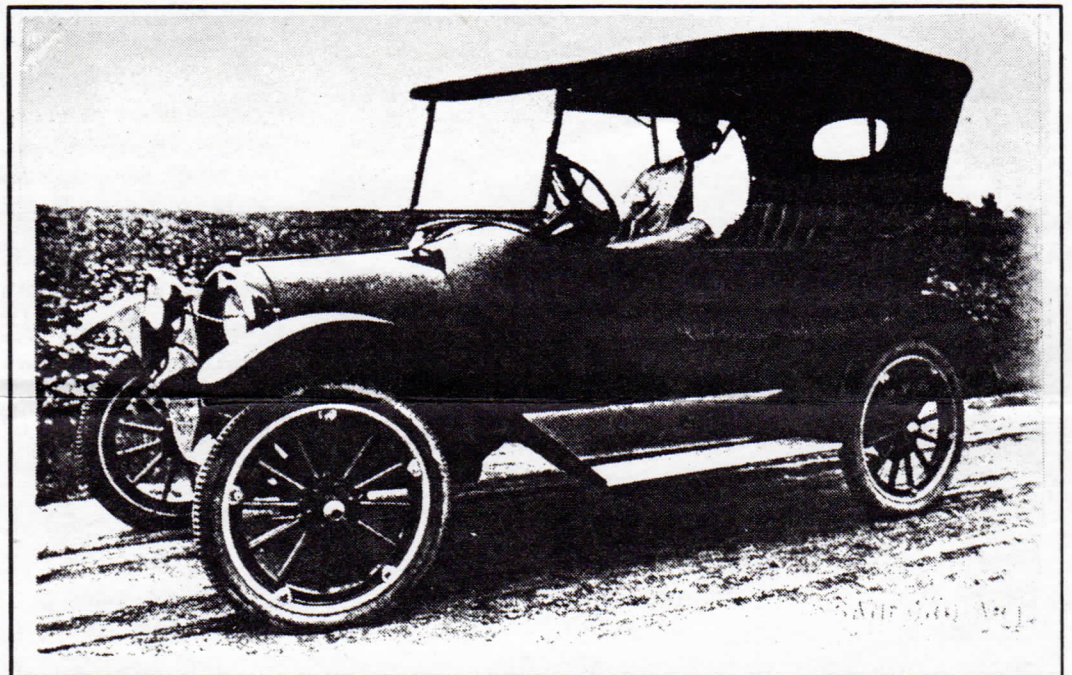
Most of the brands of automobiles on the roads of Chatham County in 1923 are now extinct.

The two groups below represent a total of 1305 motor vehicles in 1923. By the year 1992 the number of motor vehicles registered in Chatham County was around 37,000, including all types (passenger cars, trucks, motorcycles, etc.).

Trucks, 1923

Acme, 1	Kissel, 3
Apex, 2	Overland, 1
Bennett, 1	Packard, 2
Brockway, 2	Reo, 3
Diamond, 1	Republic, 2
Dodge, 2	Traffic, 1
Ford, 78	V.I.M., 1
Hudson, 1	Wintha, 1
International, 2	

[Author's Note: Source of 1923 information is from a list compiled by an agency in Raleigh. This list was lent to the writer in 1975 through the courtesy of Archie M. Ellis of Siler City.]



Herman E. Kennedy, Siler City photographer, about 1923

(Photograph courtesy of Billy D. Holt)

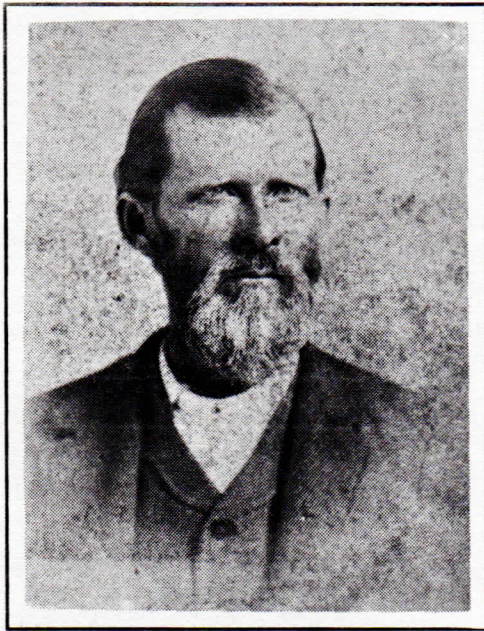
Passenger Cars, 1923

Allen, 1	Monitor, 1
American, 3	Monroe, 1
Auburn, 2	Moon, 2
Briscoe, 17	Moore, 2
Buick, 28	Nash, 1
Cadillac, 1	Oakland, 5
Chalmers, 1	Oldsmobile, 3
Chandler, 6	Overland, 50
Chevrolet, 34	Paige, 2
Cleveland, 1	Piedmont, 2
Crow Elkhart, 2	Reo, 2
Dodge, 50	Saxon, 7
Dort, 11	Stearns Knight, 1
Durant, 3	Studebaker, 11
Earl, 1	Willys Knight, 4
Essex, 6	
Ford, 904	
Franklin, 6	
Gardner, 4	
Grant, 4	
Haynes, 1	
Hudson, 4	
Hupmobile, 4	
Lexington, 3	
Liberty, 2	
Marmon, 1	
Maxwell, 7	
Mitchell, 1	

Chatham Soldiers: Chatham Masons

Ernest A. Dollar, Jr.

Since its foundation, the American South has been incorporated with groups of men forming fraternal orders. The most popular and enduring of these organizations are the Masons. The first lodge in North Carolina was created in the early 1700s in Wilmington, and the first lodge in Chatham County was organized in Pittsboro in 1788.¹ By 1861 Masons were spread across the Tarheel state and the entire South. These brothers in Masonic lodges would become brothers in arms by May of that year, fighting for their beliefs and rights during the War Between the States.



Harmon Sears was born in 1836 in Chatham County, North Carolina. Prior to his enlistment in Company I of the 6th Regiment, he was a mechanic in Chatham County. During the first battle of Manassas, 21 July 1861, he was wounded in the anus and spine. He was later discharged at Camp Fisher, Virginia, on 26 or 27 January 1862, because of his wounds.²

After the war, Sears returned to Chatham County and married into the prosperous Williams family. This family owned and operated a large mill in eastern Chatham County. Serving as a post office from 1859-1903, the mill was torn down in 1912.

Harmon Sears' grandson, Thomas Harmon Sears, lives in McLeansville, North Carolina.

(Photograph courtesy of Thomas Harmon Sears)

One Mason who joined the Confederate cause was Richard Watts York, principal of the Cedar Fork Academy in the Nelson area of southern Durham County. Commissioned as a captain of Company I, 6th Regiment, North Carolina State Troops, York led Company I in service under Gen. Robert E. Lee. While camping near Petersburg, Virginia, with the Army of Northern Virginia, York organized the I. E. Avery Military Lodge No. 1.³ After the war York became first master of Manuel Fetter Lodge No. 275, in the community of Moringsville,⁴ which was formed in December 1867. Some of the soldiers from Company I followed York to Lodge 275: S. Barbee was Senior Warden, Matthew Barbee was Junior Warden, Charles E. Beavers was Junior Deacon, and W. H. Weatherspoon was Tiler.⁵ At least three of these soldiers had been with York since the formation of the "Cedar Creek Rifles" in 1861, and in years to come more old comrades in arms joined: Rufus H. Barbee and R. D. Stone. Other veterans of Company I joined the George Washington Lodge No. 174 at Lassiter's Crossroads: D. F. Parrish, Harmon Sears, and J. F. Williams.

In December 1868, the Richard Watt York Lodge No. 281 was chartered at Hanks Chapel, continuing until 1878.

The last return on file for the Manuel Fetter Lodge, 14 November 1874, lists 10 officers and 14 members, many of whom joined the Mount Pisgah Lodge, which was chartered in December 1876. Those who were from the ranks in Virginia signing the petition were the old first sergeant of Company I, C. L. Williams, John F. Williams, L. B. Yates, Harmon Sears, J. H. Williams, S. F. Barbee, C. E. Beavers, and D. F. Parrish.⁶

The South has always been steeped in Masonic tradition. This tradition was important for those Southern soldiers in the trenches of Petersburg as well as those coming home after the war. The lodge served as a place for men to meet and discuss what had happened to their homes in their absence, as well as the events of the past four years. The Mount Pisgah lodge faded away in 1901, and with it went most of the men who had fought under the colors of North Carolina and in the bonds of Masonic brotherhood.

NOTES

1. Wade H. Hadley, Doris G. Horton, and Nell C. Strowd, *Chatham County, 1771-1971* (Pittsboro, N.C.: Chatham County Historical Association, 1992), p. 305.
2. Weymouth T. Jordan, Jr., comp., *North Carolina Troops, 1861-1865* (Raleigh: Office of Archives and History, 1973), Vol. 4, p. 377.
3. I. E. Avery Lodge No. 1, Returns, 1864 (Richmond: Grand Lodge of Virginia Archives).
4. Ernest A. Dollar, Jr., "Moringsville: An Early Chatham Community," *Chatham Historical Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2, May 1994, [p. 2-4].
5. Manuel Fetter Lodge No. 275, Returns, 1868 (Raleigh: Grand Lodge of North Carolina Archives).
6. Mount Pisgah Lodge No. 368, Returns, Petition, and Charter Files, 1876 (Raleigh: Grand Lodge of North Carolina Archives).

The **Chatham Historical Journal** is an occasional publication of the Chatham County Historical Association. Its purpose is to disseminate items of historical interest about Chatham County. To be considered for publication, articles or photographs should be previously unpublished, of reasonable length, and include detailed sources of information.

Back issues, beginning in 1988, are available while they last. Correspondence should be addressed to the Secretary, CCHA, Box 913, Pittsboro, N.C. 27312.