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A History of the Town of Bethel

By Doug MacLeod (originally printed in the newsletter of the [Amherst County Museum & Historical Society](#))

Planning the Town of Bethel

It was February 11, 1775, when the following advertisement appeared on page two of the Virginia Gazette newspaper in Williamsburg, VA:

Whereas we, the subscribers, have laid out a town on the James River, below the great mountains, in Amherst Co. Virginia, and near the upper end of navigation with small craft in said river, in a very healthy convenient place for trade and tradesman, where good wheat may yearly be bought at 2s. 6d. a bushel, and Indian corn from 1s. 6d. to 2s. a bushel, and other grain on very reasonable terms, also good fat beef from 1.5d. to 2d. a pound, and fat hogs from 2d. to 3d. a pound and being determined to do everything in our power to promote the said town, and encourage all inhabitants: We hereby give notice thereof, and likewise that we rent lots in said town (called Bethel) for lives, or any terms of years, 5s. per year the first seven years, 10s. per year the next seven years, and 15s. per year the next seven years; also rent land convenient thereto, at 2s. 6d. an acre yearly rent, and give the first settlers some timber for building.

The trades most wanting, in the said town, at this time, are a good blacksmith, a tailor, a shoemaker, a weaver, a cutler, a cabinet maker, a wheelwright, and persons that understand mines, there being a great and many signs of tin, lead and copper; and as the lands thereabouts are fertile and kind for flax, hemp or any sort of grain, we are desirous of establishing a linen factory, a rope walk, and a brewhouse; so that all persons well skilled in said trades, and who settle in said town, may expect all reasonable encouragement from:

Nicolas Davies, Henry Landon Davies

It was the invention of Anthony Rucker's bateau, after the flood on 1771, that was the promise of commercial transportation along the James River. This promise likely encouraged Nicholas and son Henry Landon Davies to lay out the town of Bethel near the grist mill on Salt Creek. Between Lynchburg and the Pedlar River, Bethel was the best access to the river to ship tobacco to Richmond. However, twenty-six years elapsed before Bethel was established by an act of Assembly.

Continuing on with the Development of Bethel

In Acts of Assembly V. II 1792-1801 – p. 343 – Chap 41 – An Act to establish a town on the lands of Nicholas C. Davies and Thomas W, Cocke in the county of Amherst [passed December 31, 1801.]

1. Be it enacted by the general assembly that thirty acres of land, the property of Nicholas C. Davies and Thomas W. Cocke, lying at Davis's lower ferry in the county of Amherst shall be and hereby vested in Thomas Moore, Reuben Pendleton, John Ellis, Nelson Crawford, Lewis Dawson, James Ware, and Richard Harrison, gentlemen trustees, to be by them, or a majority of them, laid off into lots of half an acre each, with convenient streets and alleys, and established a town to be called and known by the name of Bethel.

2. And be it further enacted, that so soon as the said land shall be laid off as aforesaid, the said trustees, or a majority of them, shall proceed to sell the same at public auction, for the best price that can be had, on twelve months credit, the time & place of such sale being previously advertised for two months successively, in some one of the newspapers within this commonwealth, taking bond & security for the same, payable to the said Nicholas C. Davis and Thomas W. Cocke, their heirs and assigns, which bonds the said trustees, or a majority of them shall cause to be delivered to the said Davis or Cocke, and to convey the lots so sold to the purchasers in fee; subject to the condition of the building on each a dwelling house at least sixteen feet square, with a brick or stone chimney, to be finished fit

for habitation within seven years from the day of such sale.

3. The said trustees, or a majority of them, are empowered to make such rules and orders for the regular building of houses in the said town, as to them shall seem best; and to settle and determine all disputes concerning the bounds of said lots. If the purchaser of any lot in the said town, should fail to build thereon within the time herein before limited, the trustees of the said town, or a majority of them, shall enter into such lot, and sell the same again, and apply the money arising from the sale towards the improvement of the streets, and other public purposes within the said town.

4. Vacancies by death or otherwise, of any one or more of the said trustees, shall be supplied by an election to be made by the remaining trustees, or a majority of them.

5. This act shall commence and be in force from and after the passing thereof.

Nicholas C. Davies of Amherst Co. [the son of Henry Landon] & Thomas W. Cocke of Lynchburg had come into possession of the land known as Bethel Tract by paying £1200 to Arthur Landon [a brother?] and Elizabeth Whiting Davies for 403 acres on the north side of the Fluvanna or James River. This indenture was recorded on 10/2/1800 [Deed Bk. I, p. 201] and survey made by Samuel B. Davies. Boundaries began at the mouth of Crab Creek and generally ran west near McDonald's Spring...etc... crossing Green Pond Branch where the tobacco rolling road crossed the same ... to an old field ... and big double creek ... etc ... the lands encompassed "all woods, under woods, ways, waters, water causes, all houses, edifices and improvements on the tract ... also the warehouses for tobacco inspection at a place known as Bethel or Davies Lower Ferry ... and the scale weights and other apparatus to warehouses ... and also the ferry boat ... kept at said place ..."

In October 1806, several indentures were recorded at the Amherst Co. Courthouse regarding the sale of some lots at Bethel .. In Deed Book K, page 556, as listed the names of the trustees of the town of Bethel: Thomas Moore, Reuben Pendleton, John Ellis, Nelson Dawson and James Ware who conveyed to Moses Rucker three half-acre lots ...#10, #11, and #16 for \$66.25...current money of Virginia.

On the same day, October 18, 1806, Moorman Johnson of Lynchburg and Campbell Co. purchased four half-acre lots ... #21, #22, #23 [only three listed] for \$70.00.

Also on that day, a certain half-acre plot ... known in the plan of said town as #17 sold to Charles Johnson of Lynchburg and Campbell Co. for \$45.00.

And John Rucker, the same day, paid \$50 for an half-acre lot ... #8.

Two months later, in December 1806, [Deed Bo. K, p. 539], Thomas W. and Sally [Crawford of Lexington Parish] Cocke ... sold their share of the 403 acre Bethel Tract to Nelson Crawford for £600 ... a part of the other share of the tract would pass to Beverly Davies, a daughter of Nicholas C. Davies at a later time. Yet the Davies dynasty was letting go of its holdings in Bethel and Crawfords would take over in the next two decades.

[Editors Note: The Davis and Davies names are often confused in this historic setting. All references to Davis in the original legislation actually refer to Nicholas Davies.]

An Outline History of Bethel – Part III The Crawfords in Bethel

Nelson Crawford's name is listed among gentleman trustees of the town of Bethel established by an Act of Assembly in 1801 [See August newsletter]. This Nelson Crawford [1762-18??], says Dr. James Boyle in his extensive genealogy *The Davies Family of Virginia*, was the grandson of David Crawford III who occupied Tusculum in Amherst Co. Among Nelson's nine other siblings was a sister named Sarah (Sally) who married Thomas W. Cocke, another trustee of Bethel . Their father was David Crawford IV who died in Jefferson Co., KY.

However, there was also another Nelson Crawford Jr., who married Nancy Liggon 3/6/1806 . It appears that this man later became sheriff of Amherst Co. and is found in the 1840 census. He is too young a man to be the son of Nelson Crawford who married Lucy Crawford, the daughter of Nathan, April 15, 1799 [p. 84 Marriage Reg]. It is believed that the elder Crawford served as sheriff in the early 1800s and the younger served in the 1840s.

Nelson Crawford's name appears with Nicholas Clayton Davies [grandson of Nicholas Davies] as proprietors of Bethel in 1820, who both petitioned to have rates of the ferry raised to 6 1/4¢ for a man and the same for a horse [Bedford Court order Book 15, p. 252]. This same Nicholas C. Davies [1769-1814] the oldest son of Henry Landon Davies inherited a part of his father's land in Bedford County and another part twice as large in Amherst County . He made his home at Vault Hill, a name that still remains attached to the old cemetery overlooking Bethel from the bluff above it and just down river. Another connection between the Davies and Crawford families was the marriage of Nicholas C. Davies to Elizabeth Crawford, a daughter of David Crawford IV, the father of Nelson and Sarah.

By November 2, 1821 , Bennet A. Crawford advertised in a Lynchburg Newspaper that the Bethel Ferry was for

rent. [The ferry keeper at that time was probably Thomas Laine, who, as ferry keeper, applied for a license to keep a house of private entertainment in July 1882, Court Order Book p. 95]. Bennett, an Amherst attorney, and of some relation to Nelson, appears to have handled, if not taken over his business matters regarding Bethel properties. Bennett is found to be the grandson of Ann (Anderson) Crawford, wife of David Crawford III [W.B. 4, p. 130], son of Joel Crawford ded'd State of GA.

An instance, in July 1827, Bennet Crawford entered into an agreement with Christopher and William E. Isbell to lease a tract of land, adjoining the town of Bethel and known as the Bethel tract, for a ten year term at an annual rent of \$350 [Deed Book R, p. 461]. The Bethel tract contained between 370 and 403 acres and was "lately owned by N.C. Davies, deceased and Nelson Crawford." The Davies share transferred to Beverly Davies, daughter of Nicholas Clayton Davies. The agreement allowed the Isbells to clear the land as they chose and dispose of wood any way they thought proper except between the fence . . . and through lands of Richard S. Ellis and the road leading from Pedlar Mills to Bethel . . .

A deed of sale for the Bethel tract was recorded November of 1827, Nelson Crawford and wife Beverly Davies sold the land to Bennett Crawford. Nelson receives \$1.00 in consideration of the transaction and Miss Davies \$3,000 . . . which raises questions as to why Nelson and Miss Davies decided to be free of the Bethel tract property.

Bennet A. Crawford, [not found in marriage register] may have been Nelson's son. He continued on with another article of Agreement [Deed Book S, p. 427] dated 12/8/1828, with Henry P. and Isaac Rucker for the entire village of Bethel! This was a nine year lease to begin the first day in 1829 for "the tavern establishment at Bethel, the warehouse, storehouse, a small house near the storehouse, a small clover lot below the warehouse, the ferry boat together with all lots in the town of Bethel that lie below the street of road that leads up to Salt Creek." The Ruckers bound themselves to do all necessary repairs and keep a good sufficient ferry boat . . . at the cost of themselves.

The existence of these two agreements may suggest that Bennett Crawford served as a trustee of Nelson Crawford. It is possible that Nelson relocated to Kentucky as his father had and had a number of other local residents. Or perhaps, he had become incapacitated with poor health. The fact is, Bennett Crawford pursued managing the development of Bethel by leasing the town and land near it and also petitioning the Bedford court to view a way from the Bethel road to the county line between Bedford and Campbell Co.

Another Crawford crops up in the history of Bethel when the first post office was established there in February 1826. Edmund Crawford served as the first postmaster of the small town until Francis A. K. Davies relieved him of duties in May 1828. The post office was discontinued in September 1830 and later re-established as Salt Creek.

An Outline History of Bethel Part III The Crawfords in Bethel (A Continuation)

From court records and plats, a clearer image of how Bethel developed begins to emerge. It appears that the town proper consisted of twenty-four lots separated by a public road that came down the mill road to Salt Creek [present day Crab Creek Rd.] After passing the old Davies Mill, the road crossed a bridge over Salt Creek running parallel to the river with sixteen lots above the road and eight lots closest to the river. The main street, known as Pedlar Road, passed through the town and junctioned with the public road to Elon just above the 24 by 36 foot tavern, of which two chimneys remain to this day. The riverside road continued downriver, further east, across a bridge at Bethel branch, passing the quarry . . . next ferry landing and finally terminating at the mansion house later known as the Scott home place. This is the present day site of Monacan Park and very possibly was the same house site of Edward Tinsley.

Over on the other side of the river in Bedford County , Nathaniel J. Manson and wife Sarah Davies [who resided in Nicholas Davies Sr.'s old house Pebbleton] sold 500 acres of land opposite the town of Bethel to William Steen of Lynchburg . In the year 1823, Steen paid \$6,000 for the land on which the Bethel ferry landing existed on the south side of the river and included a small island known as Salt Creek Island, no longer in existence.

Prosperity floated on the James River during these times in the form of bateaux. Many small riverside towns came into being and disappeared, unlike Bethel . Upriver, the 7.5 mile Blue Ridge Canal [built 1824-1828] bypassed treacherous Balcony Falls and increased the flow of trade to Rockbridge and Botetourt and points west. According to Alfred Percy's Amherst County Story , by 1830, more than five hundred bateaux were navigating up and down the James River . Riverside land grew in demand for its fertility to raise crops easily loaded on bateaux and shipped to market. Tobacco was king on the upper James as farm land in the Piedmont had been depleted of its nutrients.

In the early 1800s barrels of flour and cornmeal became regular cargo shipped to large commercial mills at Richmond and Norfolk . Grist mills, saw mills, boat yards, stores, smithys, ordinaries and taverns all experienced increased activity and growth alongside or near the river.

Those who owned land and lots in Bethel are found in Amherst County tax books of 1818:

- Nelson Crawford one acre lot Bethel & 202 acres

- Beverly Davies 202 acres Bethel
- Thomas N. Eubank 2-one acre lots Bethel
- Henry Farnsworth 6 lots in Bethel
- Reuben Pendleton 1 lot in Bethel & 440 acres
- James Warrener [?] 1 lot Bethel
- Merrit M. White 1 lot Bethel

In comparison is another listing from Amherst County land tax books for 1834:

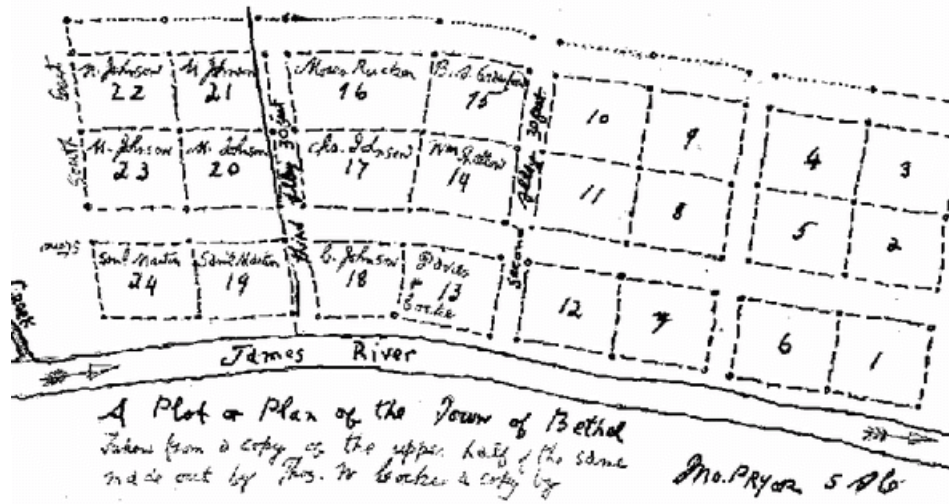
- Jesse Anderson (Bedford) 1 lot Bethel Value \$200
- Lunsford Carter estate 1 lot Bethel Value \$300
- T.W. Eubank 2 lots Value \$40
- Reuben Pendleton 1 lot Bethel Value \$20
- Ambrose Rucker 1 lot Bethel Value \$20
- Merrit M. White 7 lots Bethel Value bldg \$1900 – lots and bldg \$3180

By 1850, times had changed considerably with very few names listed owning lots in Bethel . Thomas Eubank still had his same two lots; Ambrose Rucker's estate owned one; Edward Tinsley owned a lot and Henry W. Martin of Lynchburg owned two. The Crawford name was no longer as prevalent as it once was and in its place surfaced the name of Edward Tinsley.

A major reason attributed to the decrease of lot owners in Bethel was the coming of the James River & Kanawha Canal which reached Lynchburg in 1840. Its continuance upriver on the Bedford County side of the river was hampered by want of funds and floods. In 1851 the second division of the canal had finally reached Buchanan.

Although bateaux still operated on the river and canal, their numbers had drastically dwindled. And with the disappearance of Anthony Rucker's patented boats, so went the lifeblood of Bethel . But instead of the town dying out, it somehow adapted to changing time and in so doing assumed another identity to be known as Salt Creek.

AN OUTLINE HISTORY OF BETHEL – SALT CREEK



Plat of Bethel Community

In 1840 the lock and dam system of navigation known as the first division of the James River & Kanawha Canal reached Lynchburg from Richmond. Mules towed freight boats 92' long by 14" wide supplanted bateaux and carried six times their cargo weight. Work on the canal extension above Lynchburg entailed rebuilding and enlarging the seven and a half mile Blue Ridge Canal and necessitated stopping all boat traffic using the old canal. Above Lynchburg , bateaux reverted to using the dangerous river passage through the Balcony Falls gorge as they had prior to 1824. Then came freshets in 1841 and 1842, prior to work stoppage because funds dried up. Bateaux continued transporting cargo down river to Lynchburg , as they had for sixty-five years, but now it proved more dangerous than ever.

Claudius Crozet, the French civil engineer who had been fired as Principal Engineer for the state of Virginia and had surveyed the old Blue Ridge Canal, reported to the canal company:

"The canal has for 15 years been used by the trade of the upper country; and not only the present boatmen are no

longer skilled in the navigation of this dangerous section of the river, but the former sluice, at its most perilous pass, close to the Big Balcony Rock, has been blocked up by the encroachment of the canal, a circumstance which now renders this cascade so dangerous that it is said a great portion of the boats are stove there, and lives as well as property are exposed to even greater risks than in 1824, when the legislature thought them sufficient to authorize the appropriation of a large amount for canalling these seven miles.”

“Should the work be abandoned, the people over the Blue Ridge, rather than hazard life and property, would resort to wagoning...” (Col. William Couper’s *Southern Sketches* #8. Claudius Crozet, Soldier-Scholar-Educator-Engineer)

Many disgruntled Amherst and Rockbridge County merchants and farmers did wagon their goods to Lynchburg and as far away as Scottsville! When, at last, the canal company resumed work again in 1847 another flood stalled work further. The second division was finally completed to Buchanan in 1851. The year before, high water damaged the Judith Dam before it was finished. This dam, which created the river level at Bethel, is the base for the present day Reusen’s dam. The stone for this dam appears to have been cut from the quarry in Bethel as well as for the Joshua Fall Dam below Lynchburg. (Canal Annual Reports). When these canal company dams were constructed during the late 1840s, the face and livelihood of the James River became changed forever. Much of the canal labor and burgeoning railroad development in Virginia was performed by annually hired slave labor and Irish workers who had worked on canals in the North.

With the canal in operation above Lynchburg, hundreds of men worked as agents for the company whose names and faces became familiar to residents of Bethel, Pedlar Mills, Waugh’s Ferry and the Big Island area. Men of importance like James M. Harris, the Superintendent of the Second Division who lived in Holcomb Rock, and William G. Mathews, the master carpenter, whose shops, tools and houseboats were quartered just above Pedlar Dam. Washington Bill, brother to Edward Gill (the principal engineer of the canal in 1846) also came to work on the canal from Ohio. Washington married Elizabeth Davies, the daughter of Mayo Davies, and the couple lived for a time at Bethel.

On the Bedford Shore, Richard Woody, previously a miller, was employed as a lockkeeper in 1852 at lock #3 – known as the Bethel Lock. (Locks were numbered 1-26 from Lynchburg to Buchanan.) Lock #3 was the first lock on the Judith Dam pond, also referred to as Cat pond.” Further upriver, the next dam was Bald Eagle and the next near Holcomb, was Pedlar Dam. (Guard locks, at dams, were numbered separate from regular locks.) So it was that the larger amount of commercial activity had shifted away from the bateau era town of Bethel across the river to the towpath and the canal in Bedford County. But the Liberty-Bethel Turnpike and ferry continued to keep the two sides of the river connected.

Great activity was still in evidence at Bethel with quarry men cutting stone for canal company structures. The ferry still in operation under Barnet M. Page and locals along with slaves and Irishmen at work as stonemasons and laborers working and living all along the river. Thomas Jones was an inspector of tobacco in the Bethel area; Sylvester L. Burford and son were carriage makers; William Cox a cooper; D.C. Blanks and wife hotelkeepers; William Lankford a carpenter; Jesse Kelly a wheelwright; Robert Daniel a blacksmith and George H. Dameron, a constable. (1850 census)

As for landowners, Edward Tinsley, the son of David (1747-1828) had bought the Bethel Tract in 1837 from Eliza F. Echols. Eliza, the executrix of her husband Joseph with Tinsley reveals that “...within the boundaries of the 403 acre tract were the half acre lots laid off for the town.” However, the town and Bethel ferry were still subject to the unexpired lease with Henry P. and Isaac Rucker. It appears Edward Tinsley (1782-1959) did not renew this lease when it expired.

Looking back at the beginning time of this lease in 1828, Merritt White and his wife Judith Tinsley were a couple of some consequence that should be mentioned. Merritt and his brother William cooperated the Bethel general store then and were shippers of tobacco to Richmond since 1820. They began with two bateaux and at least two watermen, George Lackey and Edmund. Over time, Merritt and his wife amassed considerable personal property and seven of the twenty-four Bethel lots. Lot #18 was the site for the storehouse and lumber house. Four of the lots had houses on them with the Whites living in one of them. Eventually White’s property was indentured to secure his bonds.

The offering of free land in the Missouri territory found Merritt and Judith moving west about 1838. It may be said that the Rucker lease expiring that same year was another factor in their relocation. Land tax records list the seven Bethel lots in Merritt White’s name of Missouri until 1841. That year he appointed Edward Tinsley, his attorney for selling the lots and the share of estate left to his wife from Joshua Tinsley’s estate. Edward Tinsley no doubt was able to include some of this property among his holdings. Joshua appears to have been Edward’s uncle. (p. 404, Rucker Family)

Today only three marked gravestones survive to tell of William B. Davies (1806-1846) and his two children being buried in Vault Hill. A good many of the Davies gravestones appear to have been vandalized and stolen in years past as well as some of the stones from the cemetery wall. Within an Amherst chancery file (#38) a description of a 50 acre tract owned by Edward Tinsley, from which the cemetery is surveyed apart on one acre reads “... includes the vault and graveyard of Nicholas Davies, Sr., deceased and his descendants...” And so from this document, it is

apparent that Nicholas Davies and much of his family were buried in Vault Hill after all. (This chancery file also confirms that Nicholas Clayton Davies is buried in Vault Hill, too.)

The old Davies grist mill established on Salt Creek in 1775 perhaps was refurbished and became known as Tinsley's mill. Edward Tinsley had also obtained several other tracts of land in the area making him the local land baron and speculator for this time period. Although he owned only one half acre lot in Bethel in 1846, he acquired several others by the time he had made out his will.

A list of property in 1859 belonging to Edward Tinsley's estate (Will Book 15, page 337) included his mansion house and 396 acres of land being the Bethel Tract; Chestnut Island (23 acres); Bethel town property lots #6, 7, 12 and 13; lumber house, shop and stable; ferry lot and boat – four acres including lots #19 and 24; spring lot and house (two acres); mill sight [sic] containing two acres including house above Salt Creek; single trees, counters, ox yoke, traces, one old boat and one flat boat.

In his will (Will Book 15, page 207) Tinsley bequeathed the Bethel property to his two daughters, Judith A. Hendricks (wife of Joseph C.) and Nancy M. Powell (wife of James). Judith had previously been married to William Steen, the Bedford County landowner opposite Bethel. Other children of Edward and Sarah Jane (Dawson – the daughter of Pleasant Dawson) Tinsley were Lucy J. Rucker (wife of John D.L. Rucker), Sarah Shelton, Frances J. Scott, Virginia P. Love and sons Robert, Chapman J. and Edward M. Tinsley. (Lucy J. Rucker's gravestone is the only one found in another river bluff cemetery down river from Vault Hill.)

A post office was re-established on Salt Creek at the upper end of Bethel in 1856. Its first postmaster was John S. Kyle who was replaced that same year by Samuel R. Wortham. That particular year was one of the coldest in the recorded history of Virginia. Several snowstorms dumped over fifty-six inches of snow in a short time which made survival precarious for humanity and livestock. The canal froze solid and closed for two months and the same conditions of freezing occurred the following year. Despite this fact, the James River & Kanawha Canal finally began experiencing some of its best years in shipping volume during the decade of the 1850s.

Over on the south side of the river, William Steen sold 55 acres to Robert G. and James P. Scott in 1860 (Deed Book 41, page 207). This Bedford tract of land lay about eight and a half miles above Lynchburg and was where the Bethel Lock was located on the canal, and was the ferry landing site. (What concessions the canal company made to accommodate the ferry up to and across the towpath is not yet known.) By December, Robert and James, sons of William Waller and Eliza Pendleton Scott, had built and were operating a new grist mill.

Back over to the Amherst shore, the young thirty-year-old Robert G. Scott cast his eye. If his new business venture prospered, he envisioned one day owning the Salt Creek property and bringing it to life as it had never known. His father William W. Scott, in 1823, had owned property some miles lower on the Amherst County side of the river within view of John Lynch's covered toll bridge, from the mouth of Harris Creek. This is where Robert with his brothers and sisters grew up. He had always known the river well and most everyone who lived along it. In his early manhood he worked on a canal boat and thereby knew the river better on a much larger scale.

Robert's older brother, William Preston Scott had married Frances Tinsley, another of Edward's daughters. And so the two families knew each other fairly well as did most families of that era in any community. Captain Bob's name would become part of life on the river for the next forty years. No one's name held forth that long, on the beautiful Bethel level between Judith and Bald Eagle Dam, since the days of Nicholas Davies.

An Outline History of the Town of Salt Creek (Bethel) Part Five

When the War Between the States was underway, it affected the small Salt Creek village in Amherst County like any other community in the South, having most of its young men called away. Among some of these were Robert W. Dawson, the son of George and Camillia Dawson; Hiram Cheatwood's son D.B. who served in Kirkpatrick's Battery, later with the 11th Virginia Infantry. Dr. William Brown Davies's son, John Whiting, served with the 19th Va. Infantry while his brothers Roderick H. and William Boyle both rode with the 2nd Cavalry. (Hardesty's and Davies Family in Virginia)

Robert Garland Scott (1831-1909) is also said to have ridden with Gen. Jeb Stuart's 2nd Cavalry, which he may have done after serving as a first Lieutenant with Kirkpatrick's Amherst Light Artillery. Robert's brother-in-law, George H. Dameron, was the constable of Salt Creek until 1862, then served in the Amherst County Reserves and afterwards continued on as a deputy sheriff for ten years. Dameron, who married Frances Ann Scott in 1852, was another prominent name on the Bethel level of the river.

Also in 1862, Edward Lorraine, the chief engineer of the entire James River & Kanawha Canal came to live in the area, on Trent's Ferry road in Bedford County. He acquired property adjoining Judith Creek, Mayo Davies and Hugh Roy Scott land, one of Robert Scott's brothers. Lorraine came from his home in Richmond to be more accessible for the construction of, but ultimately unfinished, Third Division of the canal above Buchanan. Below this valley town, the canal served as a vital artery of transportation during the Civil War. Above it lay vast iron ore deposits that were inaccessible, except by bateau, until the canal could be furthered west through the Superintendent of Repairs of the Second Division, or the section between Lynchburg and Buchanan.

Other signs of the War along the canal on the Bethel level were packet boats laden with Confederate soldiers and freight boats impressed by the government for transporting pig iron to reach Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond . Though there was never a steady supply of iron available, Tredegar became the Mother Arsenal of the South, furnishing most of its manufacture in Ordnance. The F.B. Dean & Son Foundry on Lynchburg 's lower basic also filled military contracts and received a portion of its pig iron from the Amherst Furnace, built in 1863. This charcoal blast furnace, operated by William H. Jordan, lay fourteen miles upriver from Bethel and employed local men from both counties.

News of Gen. Stonewall Jackson's death reached Salt Creek in May of 1863. Though the packet boat Marshall transported the casket to Lexington from Lynchburg at night, area residents likely crossed to the canal side of the river in Bedford to witness the boat's passing by lantern and torch light.

The war itself never came too close to Salt Creek but once. This one occasion was in mid June 1864, when Gen. David Hunter's Federal troops ransacked Lexington , burning the VMI cadet corps withdrew down the James River anticipating using delaying tactics against a Federal advance intent on reaching Lynchburg . Lynchburg served as the supply depot of the Army of Northern Virginia with its rail and canal lines and foundries.

When it was learned that Hunter had taken another route to reach Lynchburg , Confederate officers took quick action. Gen. F. H. Smith, the commandant of the VMI Cadet Corps formed a line of defense at the Rope Ferry in Amherst . Brigadier General John Imboden ordered Gen. McCausland to Waugh's Ferry. On June 14, McCausland informed Gen. Smith the enemy was advancing from Buchanan on the town of Liberty (or Bedford), Gen. Smith next received word from Gen. John D. Imboden at Pedlar Mills that he would cross at Bethel the next day and make for Forest Depot as rapidly as possible. (Couper, William, 100 Years at VMI). It appears these cavalry units used all available ferries to cross the river and swam their horses at the old fords. Their efforts kept Lynchburg from destruction and with Gen. Jubal Early sent Union forces fleeing. During the latter days of the war, there was desperation on the upper James River --more than just families being without food and clothing. Deserters had taken to hiding out in the nearby mountains. Desperate men, who in desperate times, robbed passengers on boats or slipped into settlements at night to steal animals and food. In the meantime the canal had fallen in great disrepair at the end of the war until Federal occupations forces authorized funds and materials to repair it. Slowly some order returned during the painful loss, adjustments and transition of Reconstruction.

There is record that Robert G. Scott was occupied as a contractor on the Bethel lock and towpath in August of 1862, three months after declining to re-enlist with the Amherst Light Artillery. In a report made by Edward Lorraine in 1865, recommending manufacturing sites along the entire canal, he tells of water power being furnished at Bethel (on the south shore) for six pair of burrs (grist mill stones). This would have been Scott's Mill, identified on the 1864 Gilmer map of Bedford Co., which paid the canal company for water power to turn its wheels. With the war over, Robert Scott slowly began speculating on the future by obtaining more land. He began by purchasing Samuel Wortham's house and tanyard lot in Bethel on the public road from the ferry to Pedlar Mills.

Samuel Wortham is found to be the Salt Creek's postmaster (after John S. Kyle) from 1856-1866. He was married to Mary Hane Cox in 1855 and after his term as postmaster, went into the grocery business. George H. Dameron bought from Wortham in 1869 the remaining portions of Edward Tinsley's estate including Samuel's dwelling house, lumberhouse, warehouse, blacksmith and wheelwright shop and other necessary outbuildings.

On September 28, 1870 , the James River flooded twenty six feet above normal water level. Ten people drowned and the toll bridge at Lynchburg was completely washed away. The canal and any riverside settlements were ruined. The extent of destruction at Salt Creek can only be speculated but it must have been devastating. From that time period to present, only the old tavern chimneys remain standing that must have withstood the high water. The canal did not resume operation until a year later when it froze during that winter.

Among residents of the Bethel Creek area in 1870:

- S. R. Wortham & Rucker - country store
- George H. Dameron, 48, \$10,000 real estate
- Thomas Frazier, 25, shoemaker
- William Figgins, 53, wagonmaker
- Micajah Clark, 70, wagonmaker
- James Crawford, 69, farmer from Scotland
- James A. Keating, 65, carpenter
- William Drinkard, 48, blacksmith

- Claudius L. Tucker, 56, tanner
- Drury L. Tucker, 16, farmer
- George Hobson, 63, farmer from England , \$10,000 real estate
- Louis P. Poiner, ferryman
- (Elvira J. Hewitt, postmaster, 1866-1872)
- William B. Roberts, postmaster, 1872-1876

Robert G. Scott at this time, at age 40, headed a household of twenty-eight people, eighteen of whom were servants. He owned real estate worth \$15,000 in Amherst . His grist mill, built across the river from Bethel in 1860, was owned jointly with his brother James at first, and then this half interest sold to brother Hugh Roy. The mill may have survived the flood of 1870 but not another one seven years later when the superstructure of the building was swept away.

The flood of 1877 again seriously disrupted life along the river. Private work crews and convict labor provided by the State worked diligently to repair the damage done. But the canal company could not fully recover and was sold to the Richmond & Allegheny Railroad in 1880. Tracks were laid on the old towpath, lockhouses were converted to depots and old canal men were hired for their experience to build a railroad where the canal had been., The coming of the railroad completely revitalized and changed life and commerce along the river. The canal era became history.

The R. G. Scott & Co., with partner George Dameron, rebuilt a smaller grist mill near the Bethel lock to replace the previous one. The lockkeeper and miller appear to be Robert G. Scott himself during the last years of the canal's existence. (James M. Harris payroll ledger) In 1881 the railroad bought rights to the Bethel public road and to operate the ferry on land where Scott's mill was situated. They also purchased the Bedford land on which grist mill was located. (Deed Book 53, 512)

Among other changes, the Richmond & Allegheny railroad assessed canal company dams and removed several of them, including Bald Eagle Dam, not far upriver from Salt Creek. The railroad also purchased properties along and in addition to its right of way. Edward Fletcher sold to the company the Bethel ferry on the Amherst side of the river. (Deed Book NN, p 170-181.)

Robert Scott appears to have been prepared for the coming railroad. On the Amherst shore, he bought from Judith Hendricks, the old Tinsley Mill site and land at the mouth of Salt Creek and the road to Bethel . (Deed Book NN. p. 173). He also converted or rebuilt a mansion house that he named " Riverside " and furnished it out as a resort for visitors and passengers on the railroad. The site of this mansion was possibly the same as Edward Tinsley's manor house which may have been destroyed during one of the two floods in the 1870s. " Riverside " was located where the present day Monacan Park Public Boat Landing now exists.

When George H. Dameron died on July 22, 1884 , R. G. Scott bought his brother-in-law's estate which enabled him to own the majority of property in and around Salt Creek. It is said in the Scott family history that Robert Scott also had a brick making business and so many local houses and buildings may have been built by him.

Amherst residents at Salt Creek (from the Lynchburg City Directory, 1885)

- E. W. Scott, dentist
- Charles Buchanan, druggist
- Robert Thompson, druggist
- George Wright, foundry & machine shops
- Thomas E. Williams, general merchant
- D. H. Hawks, hotel
- R. G. Scott, saw mill, land agent, postmaster 1886-1895
- D. W. Wash , millwright
- W. B. Roberts, physician
- Walter Buchanan, wood dealer

The 1880s saw a short lived iron boom affecting the foundry community below the Judith Dam. Central Virginia 's first rolling mill, the Lynchburg Iron Works, was built there just after the Civil War, providing railroad iron. The James River Steel manufacturing & Mining Co. took its place in 1880 but was quickly followed by the Va. Nail & Iron Works. One of the directors of this company had his surname, Reusens, attached to the small industrial village that remains to this day. During that time the Amherst Furnace likely furnished iron, transported by rail, to the Campbell Co. foundry until 1884 when the furnace went out of business. Men who lived at Salt Creek and all along this region of river found employment at these iron establishments, also with the railroad, and also when the Big Island Paper Mill began operations in 1890.

Robert G. Scott had built up quite a personal empire on the river when the twentieth century arrived. As postmaster of Salt Creek, and his other business ventures, Scott kept very active and in touch with most everyone who lived in the area. He had even brought in a steamer on which his lodgers could ride from the train station in Reusens to "Riverside" with a famous old boat captain to while his passengers with river stories of old during their trip. This would likely whet an audience's appetite to hear even more stories at the resort that only "Capt. Bob" could tell.

With the passage of many memorable experiences at "Riverside," the time also approached when Capt. Scott was forced to sell his riverside mansion and properties. He did so in 1904 and retired to Lynchburg. He died on December 13, 1909 after a year-long illness. Captain Robert Scott is buried in the family burial ground opposite the Virginia Episcopal School in Lynchburg. With his passing so passed yet another era that affected life and livelihood at Salt Creek.

An Outline History of the Town of Salt Creek (Bethel) Part Five (continued) and Conclusion

Amherst residents at Salt Creek (from the Lynchburg City Directory 1885)

- E.W. Scott - dentist
- Charles Buchanan- druggist
- Robert Thompson - druggist
- George Wright- foundry & machine shops
- Thomas E. Williams - General merchant
- D.H. Hawks - hotel
- R.G. Scott- saw mill; land agent, postmaster 1886-1895
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Robert G. Scott had built up quite a personal empire on the river as the Twentieth century approached. As postmaster of Salt Creek, and his other business ventures, Scott kept active and in touch with most everyone who lived in the area. He had even brought in a steamer on which his lodgers could ride from the train station in Reusens to 'Riverside' with a famous old boat captain to while his passengers with river stories of old during their trip. This would likely whet an audience's appetite to hear even more stories at the resort that only "Capt. Bob" could tell in the evening.

With the passage of many memorable experiences at Riverside, the time also approached when Capt. Scott was forced to sell his riverside mansion and properties in 1904 and retired into Lynchburg. He died 12/13/1909 after a year long illness. Three sons are said to have followed his example as contractors on other canals and railroads in America. Capt. Robert Garland Scott is buried in the family burial ground opposite the Virginia Episcopal School on Reusens road. With his passing, so passed the last colorful character who could be considered by all, "the Mayor" of the Bethel- Salt Creek level of the James River. And with him passed another era.

Conclusion

Little trace of bateau era towns and settlements along the upper James River could be found at the onset of the Twentieth century. Yet the small Amherst village of Bethel, as it was still referred to by old timers, continued to survive despite hard times, floods and change. Bethel's location, in the outer bend of the river, the people who had lived there and the ferry crossing at the Liberty-Bethel turnpike all contributed to its survival. Larger towns, such as Lynchburg, changed with the times, but the Bethel/Salt Creek village remained much the same but for the people who lived there.

Great changes had come with the railroad in 1881. Old canal men quietly retired to relate stories of their days on the river. Others still had a few years left and were gladly hired by the railroad for their knowledge of the canal and the river. The old Bethel lock house on the Bedford side of the river, opposite Salt Creek, had been converted into a train depot at Abert, possibly named after a canal agent from the early 1840s. A new ferry was built by the Richmond Allegheny railroad in 1887 which could handle two wagons. At the depot, extra platform flooring was added to the existing one to accommodate growing passengers and freight. [Richmond & Allegheny RR Annual Reports] Passenger trains along the James River line stopped daily at numerous depots built at most all the old river towns and crossings.

Tremendous and monumental technological changes that began to occur at the end of the nineteenth century. For example, Edison's electric light bulb determined future uses of the James River. To meet the region's needs for electricity, dams on the river were modified to generate electric power. Paper mills and large tanneries using chestnut bark operated in Lynchburg, Big Island, Snowden and Buena Vista. Iron foundries and other industries also utilized the water power created by dams built in the canal days. Employment with the rail road or for the foundry at Reusens were considered excellent jobs to have. Just up from the Salt Creek settlement another industry was built at One of the Watt's grandchildren tells of his grandfather operating the old heavy timber grist mill that stood out over Salt Creek. A mill appears to have existed at this site for one hundred and fifty years but probably sustained some damage during the 1870s floods or another in 1913. As yet, there is no evidence how old the corn and flour mill was at the time Watts worked it, or anything to tell if it had been rebuilt and refitted. Any modifications or improvements to the mill could have been made by Robert G. Scott.

Andrew Watts was the last known miller to operate the two story grist mill in addition to being postmaster and having the general store, which his wife likely ran.

When Mr. Watts took over the mill, a tub turbine was utilized to power the mill stones instead of a water wheel. When he changed from grinding corn to grinding wheat, different mill stones would be used by means of a swing arm. A saw mill was also connected to the mill to saw lumber for those needing it in the locality. During low water a gasoline powered motor operated both grist or saw mill which remained in operation prior to 1934.

On the Bedford side of the river, the property through which the Bethel ferry road passed came to a descendant of the Steen family named Emily Leckie. Leckie's siding was located on the railroad in the early 1900s. The ferry road still received use by farmers bringing crops and produce to be shipped by rail and train passengers on their way to and from the Abert depot. The Abert post office in Bedford was discontinued in 1919 and moved to Salt Creek, at which time it is believed the Bethel Ferry service ended.

Over in Amherst, Andrew Watts had to retire for health reasons and his wife Lena took over the post office in 1922. According to the 1930 census, nearly three dozen families lived in Salt Creek and on the road leading to it. Hurley Branham, Wesley Johns, and 'Nic' Terry were among some of the Monacan Indians residing there. Charles W. Dameron's family lived atop the farm road to Bethel, neighbors to Jesse S. Burks and James M. Horton's families. Some Black families were those of Walter Fuqua, Thomas Parks, John H. Woodroof and Warner Slaughter. After Mr. Watts died in 1932, his wife remained with the Salt Creek post office until it was finally discontinued moved to Madison Heights in 1934.

Robert Scott's *Riverside* mansion tract had been sold to John Ellis and J.A. Meriwether, who continued the resort on week ends. A friend to the Dameron family wrote in 1906 that he was sorry to hear that Scott had been obliged to sell [the mansion] on account of the scarcity of labor and that "all the old families are leaving the farms so long associated with their old names." [Charles Dameron papers MSS- Jones Memorial Library] This same expression holds true in present times, old family farms continue to give way to speculation and development that often eradicates remaining traces of a region's history.

John Ellis sold the mansion property to Thomas W. and Emily V. Oglesby in 1917. During this time Alphonso [Phonsie] Hicks, a red haired, blue eyed Irishman, worked as a section hand foreman on the railroad. His wife, Maude Branham, a Monacan Indian, worked at Riverside for the Oglesby's. The couple are said to have also lived in the old tavern at Bethel for a time. Scott's mansion continued on as a hotel into the 1930 and 40s owned by Coke Stuart and remained a popular and well known site on the river, three miles above Reusens dam. One could still get a sense of earlier times from the surroundings of the place after the building was abandoned in the 1950s and 60s when the property came to be owned by the power company at Reusens.

The Riverside mansion was torn down in 1968 and the ten acre site donated to Amherst Co. for a recreational park, known as ' Monacan Park ' including a public boat landing. Since the park opened it attracts a great number of boaters and fishermen to that level of the James River one hundred years after Robert Scott did the same. Little do those who now use the river, know that the two remaining large evergreen trees, an old stone retaining wall and a corn crib outbuilding that has been converted into a house, are the sole remaining vestiges of Scott's grand mansion and plantation. Presently there are updated permanent and summer homes all around the old mansion site.

When the Salt Creek post office was discontinued, Mrs. Watts moved away to live with her children in Lynchburg. Remaining families living in Salt Creek/ Bethel area were mostly Monacan Indians. It is not without some irony that ancestors of these same Indian families very likely lived upon this same site many years before the coming of

Europeans to America . Two hundred years later, the village began to return to it's natural state in the 1930s and Monacan Indians were still to be found there. There is a different point of historical view that may never be fully known but in bits and pieces handed down from oral tradition to grandsons and granddaughters of the present day Monacan people.

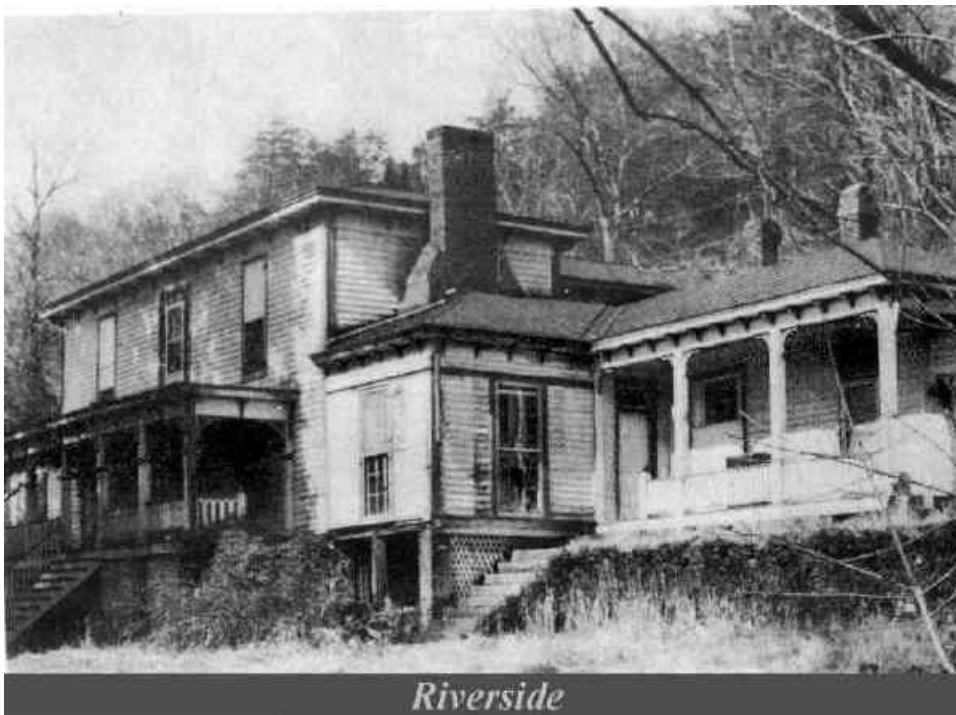
High up on the bluff known as Vault Hill is a Monacan Indian cemetery next to the old Davies cemetery. Buried in both, are generations of Branham and Johns families among others who lived in Salt Creek and Bethel area.

Among some of the stories about the region is one about a fellow named 'old man Batteau'. This batteau man who survived the canal and railroad eras continued to pole an old batteau and live the life of a hermit in a cave. Another legend tells of a canal boat captain who, when he died, was buried upright somewhere atop a bluff so he could always overlook boats winding their way on the James river . No one appears to know who this man was or where he is buried. However, there is a good likelihood that it is none other than old Nick Davies himself, the founder of Bethel town.

Proof that Nicholas Davies was buried in the Amherst Co. Vault Hill cemetery appears in chancery papers [file #38] between Edward Tinsley and the Davies family in 1837. Tinsley had purchased a 50 a tract on which was located the Davies family cemetery "including the vault and graveyard of Nicholas Davies Sr. and his descendants." Tinsley had cleared the land without regard to the cemetery which was the cause for the chancery suit. Perhaps the stone wall was built after Tinsley granted 153 square perches for the present cemetery to be set aside.

The fact Nicholas Davies' name is not memorialized in this cemetery may be the result of vandalism. The cemetery may have been kept up for a time, but now is bereft of many original Davies stones. Large oak trees grow within cemetery walls that have been raided for some of it's stone. There is a rumor that a Confederate battery emplacement may have used the site to guard against an advance of Federal soldiers down river to Lynchburg , but such a battery would have seen no action because the Federal army took another route. There are only three Davies gravestones currently standing at Vault Hill, one is that of William B. Davies [1806-1846] and the others, his infant son and daughter.

Bethel was one of the few early bateau era towns to survive into the twentieth century. Its history is relevant because it was the creation of one of the first large land owners in Central Virginia . It thrived from batteau commerce and was an important early river crossing up until the age of railroads and the first automobile bridge was built at Snowden in the early 1920s. Nowadays, the Reusen's level of the river appears to be the most active of any on the James River above Lynchburg . Those who have lived on the river for the last fifty years can tell stories of more recent historical times and now have this outline as a reference for the older history of the Salt Creek community's past and Revolutionary War era village known as Bethel .



Riverside

This mansion no longer stands, but is the site of today's Monacan Park

[*Home*](#)