



The Cromartie Reunion News

August 14, 2009

The President's Corner

Greetings!

It has been another exciting year for Cromartie happenings! We had a wonderful gathering of the family at the 79th Reunion, featuring an interesting virtual tour and discussion of the historic Alexander Cromartie house (c 1799) and the people who lived there. We toured the house itself, facilitated by Henry Liles, whose family owns it. The younger set explored how Alex's bricks were made using a brick salvaged from an original chimney that failed. Impressions on the brick told its story, including the finger marks of a child who turned the brick to dry while it was still green. Have you ever heard the story of the ham hidden in the ceiling to keep Sherman's bummers from stealing it? And how a spot on the ceiling never held paint? The story is true! We saw pictures of the "found" ham and the spot on the ceiling! We also settled the question of which clan we belonged to. (See the Clan article on page 4.) The food was good, the family talk was great and the kids dutifully recorded it all with pictures now shared in *Snapfish* (See the *Snapfish* article).

On March 14th, 2009, two Cromartie cousins went exploring again, seeking to develop more "Cromartie Links to the Past." The object of their Cromartie Expedition was the historic house last occupied by Thelma Cromartie and located on the Old Fayetteville Road in Bladen County. The story of their adventures starts on page two.

We regret our Corresponding Secretary, Jasper Parham, is unable to continue serving in that position and we thank him for his major contributions to Reunion activities. I have asked Tom Lennon to fill the unexpired portion of Jasper's term and he has graciously agreed.

As you may know, I have had major medical issues involving oral cancer. I have been overwhelmed by the love, support and prayers my family and I have received during this difficult time. I extend my heartfelt thanks to all. Your present and past Reunion officers have stepped in to cover duties I am unable to perform and your 80th Reunion is in good hands. Our program this year again focuses on "Cromartie Links to The Past" and is entitled "Did You Know?" (See the "Reunion Plans 2009")

Enjoy the Clan News and I look forward to seeing you at the Reunion on October 11th.

Kelly Ricketts

Reunion Plans 2009

Our program for the 80th Reunion is entitled "Did You Know?" and is a talk about the life and times of some of our 18th and 19th century ancestors in southeastern North Carolina. The young folks program is entitled "Ugh, what's that smell?" and explores the making and use of an important product from our ancestors' plantations. Our speaker is Bob Jenkins, of the Wilmington Adventure Tour Company. In 2007 when Susan Cromarty, our Australian cousin, was our Reunion speaker, we had Bob introduce her to the history of the settlement and economic development of Wilmington and the Cape Fear region. It was a most interesting and informative program and we look forward to having Bob inform us of the role some of our Cromartie ancestors played in this history.

Following the program, we will celebrate family with a catered lunch on the grounds where the real stuff gets done - catching up on all the family talk. *The Front Porch* from Elizabethtown is our caterer.

Last year, through the wonderful efforts of Fred Butler, we had a portable generator to power a computer and scanner. Fred has again volunteered to make those services available. You are encouraged to bring photos and documents to share with the Clan. If you have materials to digitize, please arrive by 10:00 o'clock so Fred will have time to scan and return them by the conclusion of the Reunion. Thanks for your consideration and thanks, Fred, for providing this service.

The Bladen County Historical Society has been invited again to have their books available at the Reunion for purchase.

The Reunion post card reminders will be sent out about three weeks prior to the Reunion date. We will ask for an RSVP so we can get a good estimate of our catered lunch needs. Please RSVP to our Hospitality Committee by Thursday, October 8th. RSVP by phone to Ann at 910-395-9326 - by email to Sara at dhoneycutt1@ec.rr.com Thanks Ann and Sara for setting this up.

Cromartie Expedition 2009 – Jim Bill Cromartie's House on Ellis Creek

We have conducted these “Expeditions” over the last three years to rediscover and share bits of our Cromartie heritage. For those of us who have moved far from Bladen County, it gives us touchstones to feel better connected with interesting family members of earlier days whose lives were so different from ours.

Our Cromartie Expedition this year focused on exploring the former home of Thelma Cromartie and touring the historic Harmony Hall, owned by the Bladen County Historical Society and managed in partnership with the Harmony Hall Foundation.

Our team consisted of Scott Cromartie and myself. Regretfully, Opal Smith and her daughter Kelly Ricketts had to cancel their participation because of Kelly's medical difficulties and we wish her well on her path to recovery. They had visited Thelma in her home and Kelly's husband, Curtis, was instrumental in contributing the story in the Heritage book mentioned below. Their recollections of those visits would have added much to our enjoyment and understanding of our experience.

The house is owned by Dr. Donald Creed and is located on his residential estate lying along the Old Fayetteville Road, SR 53, about half-way between US 701 and White Oak, NC. Don was recovering from a fall and was unable to accompany us but was most gracious in accommodating our tour of the house.

We believe the house was constructed by James William “Jim Bill” Cromartie based upon family lore published in the Bladen County Heritage book (p. 124). According to folklore, the carpenters were called to their patriotic duty to defend their country during the War of Northern Aggression and walked off the job, leaving their tools and ladder for the day they would return - they never returned. The house is reported to have been fired upon and occupied by Sherman's troops when they passed by in 1865. Based on these stories, the construction date would be around 1861. The Bladen County Map of 1885, which we reported on in the 2008 newsletter, indicates J.W. Cromartie was the property owner as of 1885 and the family cemetery across the road gives further evidence to that fact. The 1860 U.S. Census valued “Jim Bill's”

holdings at \$25,000 - one of the largest plantations in the county. The map also shows that James William Cromartie owned a grist mill on nearby Ellis Creek. Dr. Creed indicated some remains of the mill existed there when he bought the property. The house has been unoccupied for over fifteen years.

Thelma, who died in 1994, was the daughter of Charles Homer Colvin Cromartie, (b.8/7/1871-d.11/30/1945) and Etta Grady. (8/12/1875 - 6/27/1929). There were two children from this union, neither of whom ever married. Thelma's brother, Charles Albert Cromartie was born Oct. 18, 1911 and died June 23, 1964.

Charles Homer Colvin Cromartie's parents were James William “Jim” “Bill” Cromartie, b. 1819 - d. 1908 and his second wife Jane Smith Colvin b. Sept. 21, 1831, d. March 12, 1906. Interestingly Charles bore two middle names that were a younger brother's name who had died in infancy.

“Jim” “Bill” Cromartie's parents were James Cromartie, b. March 28, 1767 - d. June 6, 1845 and James' second wife Catherine Taylor, b. Dec. 22, 1768 - d. June 15, 1869. James was a planter, lived in the vicinity of the South River Presbyterian Church and owned interest in the Wilmington and Raleigh Railroad and the Branch Creek Bank of Cape Fear, Fayetteville, N. C.

James was the first son of William of Orkney (our immigrant forefather) b. May 31, 1731 - d. Sept. 21, 1807 and Ruhamah Doane b. Oct. 31, 1745 - d. Dec. 26, 1813

The house is impressive from several standpoints. First, it is a relatively large two story house of eight rooms; four rooms on each floor with large 10 foot wide halls running from the front to the back of the house, all with very high ceilings. The total square footage of the house proper is 3404 plus an addition of a kitchen on the back that brings the total square footage to 3808. The kitchen and pantry storage rooms were added after the main part of the house was built and reflected the practice of the time to have a separate kitchen building to keep the main house cooler in the summer and safer in case of fire. The architectural style of the kitchen is much simpler than the main house and its attachment to the house indicates it was built elsewhere and moved to its present position as a wing on the house.

The main house is essentially symmetrical. Four large windows in each room makes it a very “light” house. One of these large windows looks

Jim Bill's Place Conti.

into the later attached kitchen. Two internal chimneys with back-to-back fireplaces on each floor provided warmth in cold weather. The fireplace mantels on the first floor front rooms were very ornate while the other rooms were simple and plain. These front rooms were obviously used for entertaining guests. There were no doors between the rooms, all access to the rooms is from the halls. The walls were all plastered with evidence of horsehair used for a binder.

There were two closets on either side of the fire places in each of the back rooms on both floors. These were rather shallow closets with pegs for hanging their clothes. One closet had been converted to shelves.

Electric wires, a recent addition, provided single drop cord lights for the rooms. There were no indoor toilet facilities.

As we explored the first floor, the story of the unfinished room kept pulling us to ascend the beautifully crafted but unfinished staircase with no banister! Ascending the stairs I reached out to touch the wall to steady myself and wondered about the deepening mystery this house held for us. Why had such a beautifully crafted house never been finished? Was it because of the worst depression in our history, the first "Great Depression" that followed the War of Northern Aggression? The U.S. 1850 Slave Census shows that James W. Cromartie had 31 slaves and 6 slave houses. What impact did the freeing of these slaves have? Was the house really crafted by slaves? Was it they, who left behind the carpenter tool box found in the upstairs hall and the unfinished room that stands as it was left so long ago? The exciting aspect of the unfinished room is that it provides us an opportunity to study construction methods that are so different from today's methods. The trim around the entrance doors, the molding throughout, and the fancy mantels were elegant. The skill of the craftsmen who created the mortise and tenon joinery of the framing was equally impressive and was destined to be hidden by a plastered wall. This house was meant to stand for a long time.

The remaining contents of the house told a story themselves. Thelma was a librarian and one of the upper rooms reflected her interest in books, books

she'd left behind. She was noted as a lover of pets and that passion was reflected in empty pet food bags still there after she moved into an assisted living facility.

We did not have time to examine the remaining contents in detail but couldn't help skimming some of the newspaper collection from the 1950's and a small box of keepsake items - small items of no monetary value, but never-the-less precious for the memories they held for their owner. The story evidenced by these contents was of a fine elderly lady coping with her ability to remain in her home filled with things that helped define her life.

Leaving the home, we were left with intriguing questions and many exciting discoveries. We dropped off the key with our host and thanked him for his gracious hospitality. We drove a short distance down the highway to a side road and there found the Cromartie Family cemetery. Paying our respects to our family members, we headed for Wilmington recounting our adventures earlier in the day visiting historic Harmony Hall.

Our Harmony Hall visit was motivated by two desires. Last year, we discovered Alexander Cromartie's house, "Cederville", had originally been of a "hall and parlor" design with two rooms up, two rooms down and one room deep. We wanted to tour Harmony Hall because it was the same design and had fewer modifications than "Cederville." We were rewarded in being able to relate Harmony Hall's design and structural similarities to the original portion of "Cederville."

Because of Scott's efforts to create an entity to possess and manage the South River Presbyterian Church, we were interested in the management aspects of the Harmony Hall property and the associated structures found there. We were assisted on our tour by Laurie Smith of White Oak, a volunteer for the Harmony Hall Foundation which opens the facilities for tours on Saturday and by appointment.

The "2008 Expedition Album" has been placed in the William Cromartie Family group room on *Snapfish* for your viewing.

Tom Lennon

Preserving our history

Realizing that much of our family history is stored in dresser drawers, trunks, shoeboxes and bookshelves where it is occasionally pulled out to share with an interested family member, we are seeking ways to

Preserving our history Conti

identify and share those family treasures more broadly. By doing so, we hope to save these treasures from being lost to future generations of the Cromartie descendants. Can you help us identify/collect, document, preserve and share oral histories, stories, photographs, and keepsakes?

Works in progress or completed in this regard include (1) Bible Family Records from William of Orkney, William James, Alexander, and George Cromartie. (2) Written histories and family trees include, works by Elizabeth Black, George B. Lennon, Peter Cromartie, Dr. Sam Cromartie, Olivia Harvey, Amanda Cook, Robert Cromartie (3) Newspaper articles contributed by Amelia Thompson, (4) Reunion scrapbook and (5) Numerous photographs with known and unknown subjects have been posted to our Snapfish website. If you can help in any way, please contact a history committee member (See Reunion Officers article for contact information). Thanks!

Welcome to new members We extend a warm welcome to those new members on our mailing lists. We look forward to seeing you at the Reunion and getting to know you. If you know of other Cromartie family members that would like to be involved, please let us know their email or snail mail address. Thank you.

Help Wanted. During our Reunion program we recognize Cromartie family members that have gone to their glory. Our family members are scattered across the U.S. and around the world so it is difficult for us to be knowledgeable about obituary notices. If you have such information please share it with Kelly. (See contact information in Officers article)

The Urquhart Clan The newsletter last August discussed how we proposed to settle the question of which Clan the Cromartie Family Reunion would be associated with in the future. At the Reunion, the attendees voted unanimously to become associated with The Urquhart Clan. Research by Bob Cromartie and Susan Cromarty found that the Cromartie(y) family had traditionally been a sept (family) of this Clan. There has also been a standing invitation on The Urquhart Clan web page to Cromartie family members to join.

Why join a Clan? Clan membership is simply a means of extending our knowledge of our Scot heritage and supporting efforts to preserve that heritage as we're doing with our Reunion activities. Check out the Urquhart web site www.urquhart.org/ and click on "septs" to view the invitation for Cromarties to join.

You are encouraged to join as individual members and we are also in contact with Chief Kenneth Trist Urquhart to determine if there is a possibility of our Reunion organization being recognized in some form of membership. Our Vice-President, Bob Cromartie and his son Alex, attended the "Great Gathering" of the Clans in Edinburgh last month along with more than 40,000 Scots from around the world. Prince Charles opened the two-day event dressed in his ancient hunting Stewart tartan kilt. At the Reunion, Bob will report on his discussions with Urquhart.

Our Snapfish Website

We now have 93 members signed on to The William Cromartie group room. New photos were recently added so check it out at <http://thewilliamcromartiefamily.snapfish.com/snapfish> room code: **1929reunion**
Enjoy and share **your** photos - leave a message!

Cromartie Reunion Officers

President - Kelly Smith Ricketts
Vice President - Bob Cromartie
Recording Secretary - Taylor Cromartie
Corresponding Secretary - Tom Lennon
Treasurer - Len Clark
Standing Committees:
Catering - Ann Butler & Sarah Honeycutt
Genealogy - Amanda Cook
History - Jane Ross, Margaret Calhoun, Tom Lennon
If you have questions, comments or suggestions about Reunion activities contact Kelly at kellysricketts@gmail.com or 919 801 4349
Please send Tom changes or additions to our email and/or mail address lists at (703) 425-1538 or email tomdottye@att.net

Expedition Photo Album



James William Cromartie's house on the Old Fayetteville Rd. near White Oak, N.C. built around 1861 according to family folklore. The house has four rooms on each floor with large 10 foot wide central halls running from the front to the back of the house. The two entry doors seen here and the one at the back door on the first floor are framed by elegant trim and windows.



Attached kitchen wing on rear of house.



Fancy mantel in front room where guests were entertained.



Back room with shallow closets on each side of chimney. Left one has pegs for hanging clothes, right one has shelves. Note plain mantel.



The unfinished room and a box of cherished keepsake memories - a pipe, a doll shoe.



More pictures may be seen in our Snapfish group room in the James William Cromartie album.

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Site of the Cromartie Reunions



79th Cromartie Family Reunion, October 12, 2008

The South River Presbyterian Church

Built in 1857

Located between Elizabethtown and Garland, North Carolina

*It is on the left side of State 210, approximately one and a half miles
southeast of the intersection of US 701 and State 210.*