

**REPLY TO RHETORICAL QUESTION: AWILL THE REAL
JOHN DAVIDSON PLEASE STAND UP?@**

By Lucian Holt Felmet, Jr.

I have been interested in Davidson family research for a number of years. As a descendant of Maj. William Davidson, I have read with great interest the recent articles published in the August 2002 and February 2003 editions of *A Lot of Bunkum*. My line of descent is: (1) Lucian Holt Felmet, Jr. (spouse - Diane Clayton), son of Lucian Holt Felmet, Sr. (spouse - Louise Roberson), (2) son of Claude Lucian Felmet (spouse - Estelle Moore), (3) son of Ellen Hawkins (spouse - Andrew Ham Felmet), (4) daughter of William Albert Hawkins (spouse - Nancy Evaline Jones), (5) son of Polly Smith (spouse - John Hawkins), (6) daughter of Mary Davidson (spouse - Daniel Smith), (7) daughter of Maj. William Davidson (spouse - Margaret McConnell), (8) son of John Davison (spouse - Jane).

In February of 1983, the Volume IV, #2 edition of *A Lot of Bunkum* included a letter the preface to which stated *ASubmitted by Florence Barton, 815 Onyx Circle, IA 500010 to News Journal of The Genealogical Society of Iredell County, NC, July 1982 - page 87. The letter was written by George F. Davidson to T. P. Davidson of Memphis TN regarding the Davidson family. This letter proves the John Davidson of Maury Co. TN was >One Eyed John Davidson=, son of John Davidson I, and that they stopped briefly in VA on their way to NC. The original of this letter was discovered by Nelson M. Davidson of Austin, TX and copied Feb. 3, 1896.@* The letter read as follows:

T. P. Davidson, Memphis, TN

*Iredell County, NC
Sept. 20, 1840*

Since my return I have seen the letter you wrote to Father making inquiries about the family of Davidsons, and he has attempted in some degree to answer them. The oldest members of the family who came to this country were John and George Davidson.

George married a widow Simmerl and was the father of General Wm. Davidson, killed in the Revolution, and another son who died a young man before that time.

John was the father of George D. and also four other sons, viz: Thomas who lived and died near Charleston, SC; William and Samuel (twins) who both lived and died in Buncombe. The latter was killed by Indians. The first was the father of Col. Samuel D. who now lives in Buncombe on the same plantation.

The fourth brother was the one-eyed John D. who lived in Murry Co. TN. A half brother William Morrison, whose family went to Kentucky.

Great-grandfather John had three daughters, Rachel and Peggy who married John and David Alexander, some of whose descendants are now living in Buncombe and Tennessee; and Betty who married Ephraim McLean and lived in Kentucky.

Great-grandfather and mother Reece died about 1800, the former whose first name was William, aged 100. The latter's name was Penelope Groner, aged 75.

Grandfather George Davidson was born in 1728 and died in 1814.

Our family emigrated from Rockbridge, VA, about 1748. Great-grandfather died

about 2 years later and was buried on his plantation.

These are some of the particulars about which you wished to be informed and I expect they are mostly correct. I hope they will meet your wishes and enable you to effect your purpose. We are all well at present time, tho Father has recently had a dangerous spell of sickness. There is little news here. I should be gratified to hear from you. Father sends his best wishes, etc.

Yours, etc. George F. Davidson

In response to the rhetorical question posed in the February 2003 edition of *A lot of Bunkum* "Will the real John Davidson please stand up?@", I am responding that I am persuaded, at this time, that the letter published in *A lot of Bunkum* twenty years ago is authentic. My belief is based upon the fact that the statement of facts, set forth therein, seems to be consistent with all primary sources of information about the family of John Davidson.

T. P. Davidson, the recipient of the letter, was apparently a grandson of George D. Davidson. He had written, in 1840, to his Uncle for the purpose of inquiring about the Davidson family history. His uncle was Gen. Ephraim Davidson. The General was then in his late 70s or early 80's and lived in Iredell County, NC, on land which may have been part of the original tract acquired by his paternal grandfather, John Davidson, when he came to North Carolina in about 1748. This tract had originally been a part of Anson County. The letter sets forth the family history as related by Gen. Ephraim Davidson to his son George Franklin Davidson.

On February 1, 2003, I was in Charlotte, NC, for a meeting. My first cousin Millicent Elkins Hodge and I attended, at Hopewell Presbyterian Church - north of Charlotte, a ceremony commemorating the 202nd anniversary of the Battle of Cowan=s Ford where Gen. William Lee Davidson was killed. The ceremony included a program about Gen. Davidson and a wreath laying at the grave of Gen. Davidson. His grave is in the cemetery at Hopewell Presbyterian Church. One of the speakers was Dr. Malcolm Lester, a professor of history at Davidson College.

Dr. Lester said that Gen. Davidson=s body was found by his men, after the battle, stripped of his clothing and his wallet taken. Dr. Lester said that friends went to Gen. Davidson=s home to get his widow that night and that he was buried at Hopewell rather than at his home church, Centre Presbyterian Church, because the Centre Presbyterian Church area was not safe due to British troop movements.

After the program, Millicent and I drove north on I-77 to Exit 33 and located the Centre Presbyterian Church just east of the interstate. The church is located across what is today the county line for Iredell and Mecklenburg Counties. Signs indicated that the Centre Presbyterian Church was formed in 1764. In the old part of the cemetery we found the following marked tombstones: (1) grave of George F. Davidson which indicated *ASon of Gen. Ephraim Davidson died July 16, 1893, aged 88"*; (2) grave of Gen. Ephraim Davidson which indicated *ADied February 25, 1842"*; (3) grave of Anne Brevard Davidson which indicated *AWife of Ephraim Davidson, died September 28, 1833, aged 68 years@*; (4) a joint headstone for the graves of

George and Catherine Davidson which indicated under the name of George Davidson *ADeparted this life on the 22nd day of Sept. 1814, aged 86"* and inscribed on the joint tombstone was *AThey were through life dear and kind, in two days to death these friends consigned These persons lived together in a married state for 65 years@*; (5) immediately to the left of the grave of Catherine Davidson was the grave of William Reece which indicated that he died in 1808 at the age of 99 years. All of these grave markers were consistent with the 1840 letter.

After leaving the Centre Presbyterian Church, Millicent and I drove a short distance to the Public Library in Davidson, NC. We found a book entitled *The Plantation World Around Davidson*, by Chalmers Gaston Davidson, copywrite 1969. Dr. Chalmers Davidson was a history professor and longtime librarian at Davidson College. He was an authority on Davidson family history. His book included, on page 44, the following section about the home of Gen. Ephraim Davidson which identifies the writer of the 1840 letter:

GEN. EPHRAIM DAVIDSON'S PLACE

The oldest plantation house in the vicinity of Davidson College is without doubt the two-story frame dwelling known as the Gen. Ephraim Davidson place. The exact period of construction is a matter of debate. Architectural evidence suggests its existence before the Revolutionary War as the home of Gen. Ephraim's father, Col. George Davidson. If so, the namesake of Davidson College once resided there as it is known that William Lee Davidson, first cousin to this George, lived with the latter before his marriage in 1767. Other research indicates a post-Revolutionary date for building.

*When Davidson was founded in 1835, Gen. Ephraim Davidson (his title came from the local militia) was living in this house and was elected one of the college's original trustees. He was also one of its most generous initial donors. He was a veteran of the Revolution, having served while still a boy as a courier for Gen. William Lee Davidson, and he became a highly respected local citizen. His wife was Jane Brevard, an aunt to William Lee Davidson II of Beaver Dam, to whom he was himself second cousin germane. Ephraim and **Jane** had five daughters and one son, George Franklin. All of the girls except Nancy, the oldest, attended Salem Academy. Nancy was the first wife of James G. Torrance of Cedar Grove. The others married into the families of Conner, McRae, Brevard, and McLean. Son **AFrank,@** as he was called, graduated at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and inherited the homestead. He became a lawyer and state senator (as had been his father before him), never married, and collected perhaps the best private library in the area. In 1860 he was the owner of fifty slaves. He and his parents are buried beneath modest stones in Centre Presbyterian churchyard.*

Several years ago a member of my church and a fifth cousin of mine through our George Clayton, Sr., line, Mary Lilly Foard Shaw, showed me a newspaper article she had clipped from *The Statesville Record* in the early 1980's when plans were to move the Ephraim Davidson home because of the Lake Norman project. The article indicated that the home was originally the home of Col. George Davidson and was on land patented by his father, John Davidson. My recollection is that the article made reference to Col. George Davidson also owning a plantation

at Old Fort. If true, this means that Col. George Davidson either moved to Old Fort for a period of time with his siblings, or at least participated in the land investment there with his siblings, Maj. William Davidson, Samuel Davidson, and Rachel Alexander, in the Old Fort area.

In 1992, I was invited to attend the Davidson-Alexander Reunion at Warren Wilson College. The invitation came from Betty Morrison Johnson, a fifth cousin of mine through our Maj. William Davidson line, whose husband is a fellow member of the Harnett County bar. At that time, I assumed that I was a descendant of Maj. William Davidson only because of some references in an unpublished Hawkins Family History written by Katherine Hawkins in 1932. I wanted to be sure that my assumption was correct before attending, so I went to the NC Department of Archives. I located an 1824 Buncombe County record from the estate of Daniel Smith which had survived the 1830 fire at the courthouse and which verified that Polly Hawkins was a child of Daniel Smith and Mary Davidson Smith.

I later secured, from the Library of Congress, a copy of the Revolutionary War pension file of Capt. Daniel Smith (later Col. of the Buncombe County militia). That file indicated A *Soldier married, in the fall of 1781, Mary Davidson. They were married at the home of her father William Davidson in Burke County, North Carolina Their first child, William D. Smith was born on October 1, 1784. On July 4, 1844, James M. Smith, their second son of Asheville, . . . applied for a pension . . . on behalf of himself and the only other surviving children of said Daniel and Mary, as follows: John L., Daniel, Moses, Betsy who married M. B. Patton, Polly who married John Hawkins, Nancy who married William Burnett, and Jane who married Alfred Fortune.*@ At the Davidson-Alexander reunion I met Frances McDowell, curator of the Smith McDowell Museum, and learned that my Hawkins connection was known by local historians. She later sent me copies of family bible pages that substantiated the connection.

One of the program presenters at the 1992 Davidson-Alexander Reunion was George Spears Reynolds, Sr. I was impressed by his materials because they cited numerous primary sources for his Davidson history presentation. These materials are available in the Old Buncombe County Genealogical Society Library. They indicated that John Davison had land surveyed near Rockbridge, Va. on May 4, 1738. They further indicated that John Davison proved his family=s importation to the Colony of Virginia before the Orange County Court on July 24, 1740, as evidenced by an Order recorded at Orange County Order Book II, page 209. John Davison listed, in 1740, his children as George, Thomas, William and Samuel Davison. All of the older four children are listed in the 1840 letter. The material also indicated that, while in Va., John Davison attended church at the Tinkling Springs Presbyterian Church Meeting House where the following children were recorded as having been baptized by the Reverend John Craig: Elisabeth on 4/19/1741, Margaret on 12/5/1742, John on 11/25/1744, and Robert on 4/5/1747. Robert may have died at an early age because he is not listed in the 1840 letter. Rachel is listed in the letter, but was not on the list of children in the importation order or on the records of children baptized. George Reynolds=s supposition was that she was baptized by a minister who preceded John Craig at Tinkling Springs.

Mr. Reynolds reported that John Davison was in North Carolina in 1748 in the area of Davidson Creek in Awhat is now Iredell and Mecklenburg Counties. His survey of 650 acres purchased from Lord Granville was surveyed in 1748.@ Mr. Reynolds included in his materials probate records for John Davison from both Anson County, North Carolina, and Augusta

County, Virginia, which showed that he died in 1749 which is consistent with the 1840 letter. His North Carolina estate was initially administered by his widow, Jane, and later by her new spouse, William Morrison. In the letter set out above, Gen. Ephraim Davidson refers to his father having a half brother, William Morrison, who moved to Kentucky. Mr. Reynolds explained the change of the spelling of Davison by stating AThe spelling of the name Davison was used until circa 1780, because General William Lee Davison, in various correspondence, signed his name using two d=s and the other members of the family followed his lead.@

The letter purportedly written by George Franklin Davidson in 1840 fits almost all provable facts, ultimately discovered, about the migration of our Davidson family. If Gen. William Lee Davidson was the only child of the first George Davison to survive to adulthood, this could account for the fact that he lived with a first cousin, George D. Davidson, prior to his marriage, as stated by Dr. Chalmers Davidson, rather than living with a sibling, if his parents had died. It is a shame that no one remembered, in 1840, to ask Gen. Ephraim Davidson the maiden name of his paternal grandmother, Jane.

At the Hopewell Presbyterian Church program, Dr. Malcolm Lester gave a brief history of Gen. William Lee Davidson=s military career. He had, earlier in the Revolutionary War, served as a Continental officer under Gen. Washington and was with him during the terrible winter of Valley Forge. He came home, when the southern campaign began, to serve in the militia and was a popular leader. He was appointed Brigadier General of the Salisbury District after Gen. Rutherford=s capture at the Battle of Camden in August of 1780. The action at Cowan=s Ford was part of efforts to delay Cornwallis in his movement toward Guilford Courthouse and ultimately Yorktown. General Davidson had been part of planning the delaying tactics with Gen. Nathaniel Green and Gen. Daniel Morgan.

Dr. Lester devoted a portion of his program to the legacy of Gen. William Lee Davidson which has been preserved in the form of Davidson College. The school was named for Gen. Davidson. After his death, his widow and most of the children migrated west to Tennessee. But, his youngest son, William Lee Davidson II, stayed in North Carolina. William Lee Davidson, II, married Elizabeth Davidson daughter of Maj. John Davidson a signer of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, who lived at Rural Hall above Charlotte. Elizabeth was known to that family as AAunt Betsy@. This couple did not have children. Dr. Lester said that such noted Davidson historians as Dr. Chalmers Davidson had not been able to prove a blood connection between the Rural Hall Davidsons and Gen. William Lee Davidson though there may be one.

In 1835, the local Presbyterian churches wanted to establish a manual labor institute. William Lee Davidson, II, and Rev. Robert Hall Morrison were named to serve on a seven man committee to select a site for the school. William Lee Davidson, II, sold 469 acres from his Beaverdam plantation as a site for the school for \$1,521.00. Robert Hall Morrison who had served as pastor of several Presbyterian Churches including Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church in the northern part of Charlotte served as the first President of the school which graduated its first class containing eleven members in 1840. Robert Hall Morrison was married to a niece of William Lee Davidson, II=s wife Elizabeth. The first students studied moral and natural philosophy, evidences of Christianity, classical languages, logic and mathematics. A daughter of

the Morrison couple married Gen. Stonewall Jackson of Civil War fame.

I hope this article has provided some information that may be of use to other researchers. I realize that my analysis may be partially in conflict with earlier histories by such noted historians as Dr. Foster Sondley, Theodore Davidson and John Hill Wheeler. But, I don't believe that they had all of the facts in evidence when their histories were written.

I certainly have not meant to criticize their works. In 1927, my Grandfather Felmet served as a member of the Board of Education that elected Dr. Sondley A Historian of Buncombe County. He obviously had confidence in Dr. Sondley. Dr. Sondley was a great historian who probably contributed more to the preservation of Buncombe County history than any single individual. However, in the field of genealogy, we are always collecting new evidence. I know there may be readers who have evidence that I have not seen and I would appreciate their sharing of research which may tend to disprove, or prove, my analysis of early Davidson family history.

The family of John Davidson, or Davison, has a rich heritage in the history of Buncombe County and the state of North Carolina. I have not attempted to deal in any way with the history of Samuel Davidson, reputed to have been the first settler in Buncombe County, or with the history of his twin brother, Maj. William Davidson, or their sister, Rachel Alexander after their migration up the Catawba to Old Fort and on into Buncombe. I hope that others who have done more research than I have about that time period will make contributions of their materials to the Society.

It is probable that both my ancestor, Maj. William Davidson, and his first cousin, Gen. William Lee Davidson, were named for their Grandfather William Davison. There appear to be two conflicting theories as to whether their respective fathers, John and George Davison, were the children of a William Davison who died in Ulster, Ireland, in about 1723 or whether they were the children of a William Davidson who had immigrated from Ulster, Ireland, to Cecil County, Maryland.

I am currently persuaded that my ancestor, John Davison, immigrated from Ireland. He appeared before the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions of Orange County, Virginia, on July 24, 1740, to prove his importation. I have secured a copy of the Order of Importation which I will place in the Old Buncombe County Genealogical Society Library. The marginal entry in the Orange County, Order Book 2, 1739-1741, Reel 30, page 209, reads *ADavison proved his rights to land*. Based upon the testimony of John Davison, the Court entered a handwritten order that reads as follows: *John Davison came into Court and made oath that he imported himself, Jane, George, Thomas, William & Samuel Davison as his own charge from Ireland to Philadelphia & from there into this Colony and that this is the first time of his proving his and their rights to obtain land. This order to be certified.*