

Standing reminder

The grave of John Gilchrist stands in the family cemetery along with his wife and other descendants. His epitaph not only memorializes him but shows what history books claim, that Gilchrist was an educated and religious man. He also was a powerful member of the community having served as a legislator for many years. The tombstone, which was hand-designed remains in good condition almost 200 years after it was erected.

Gilchrist, A Founding Hoke Family

By Sherry Matthews

Wander back in time. Go to the year 1770, and imagine what it must have been like.

Hoke County did not exist. The area was divided between Cumberland and Robeson.

Scottish highlanders were immigrating to the Cape Fear region after a battle with England that had left them homeless.

One such highlander who made the journey and eventually carved out a niche in the history of the county was John Gilchrist of Kintyre, Scotland.

Most Hoke County residents probably are not keenly aware of Gilchrist and his family or the contributions they made to the area, but he did a great deal to educate and advance the people of his day.

Gilchrist, his wife, Effie, her parents and his sister, settled in Bladen County, which became

Robeson in 1787 and is now Hoke County, in 1770.

Although most of the Scottish immigrants were destitute, Gilchrist appeared to be a man of some means.

Records show that Gilchrist brought a tutor for his children to the region, which seems to indicate he was a man of some knowledge and wealth.

He served in the House of Commons for five years (1792-1797) and in the North Carolina Legislature for two years.

Many historians feel that within 20 years after his arrival, Gilchrist had carved out a place for himself in the community.

He was no longer just an immigrant; he was a leader and an achiever in the area and the state.

Gilchrist was a religious man and believed to have been at least partly responsible for founding the

Presbyterian Church in his section of the county.

Some believe he may have attended the Raft Swamp Church which has since been relocated and renamed Antioch Presbyterian.

Another reminder of John Gilchrist and his family still stands today and is being restored.

The Mill Prong House, located in Hoke County, that Gilchrist built for his second wife, remains erect after over 200 years of existence.

In the woodwork of the house is a history that has been left untold for years.

It is a story of a man and his family, immigrants who were trying to take their place in a new society.

The Gilchrist family made their place, a rather large one, and today Hoke County residents interested in keeping the remainder of Gilchrist's work in tact are trying to restore Mill Prong.

Gilchrist is believed to have designed the house himself which again indicates that he was an educated man.

Along with most of his family, John Gilchrist is buried in the cemetery he purchased in Hoke County.

Graves in the Gilchrist Cemetery date back 200 years and remain in good condition.

John Gilchrist Sr. was not the only one who made history in Hoke County.

More popular than his father, John Gilchrist Jr. made an even larger contribution to the people of the area.

John Jr. was probably the most illustrious of the Gilchrist children. He was one of the first graduates of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill from Robeson County.

He received a Bachelor's Degree in 1809 and later went back and gained his Master's Degree.

John Jr., was also a lawyer and like his father served in the state legislature.

But the most important of all his contribution was the founding of Floral College.

Floral College was the younger Gilchrist's dream.

In 1841 that dream was realized and Floral College became the first college chartered by the state legislature allowing women to receive bachelor of arts degrees.

Along with his co-founder, Gilchrist accomplished a great task by allowing women the chance at a better education.

John Jr. appears to have been a well educated man and a community minded citizen.

Even with his achievements, Gilchrist never married, which for those days seemed a bit strange.

It was rumored and later reported in a history of the county that John Jr., was in love once, but his fiancée died with typhoid fever.

After her death, it is said that Gilchrist never chose to marry and was not interested in a social life.

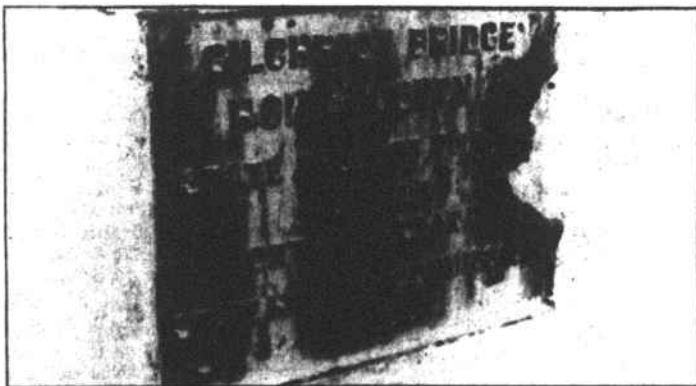
He seems to have become completely engrossed in working with the college and the legislature.

Floral College, which is located about 10 miles from Raeford in Robeson County, faltered soon after the younger Gilchrist's death, but a limb of that school still exists today.

Many believe that Floral College was continued in pride and tradition through the founding of Flora Macdonald College in Red Springs.

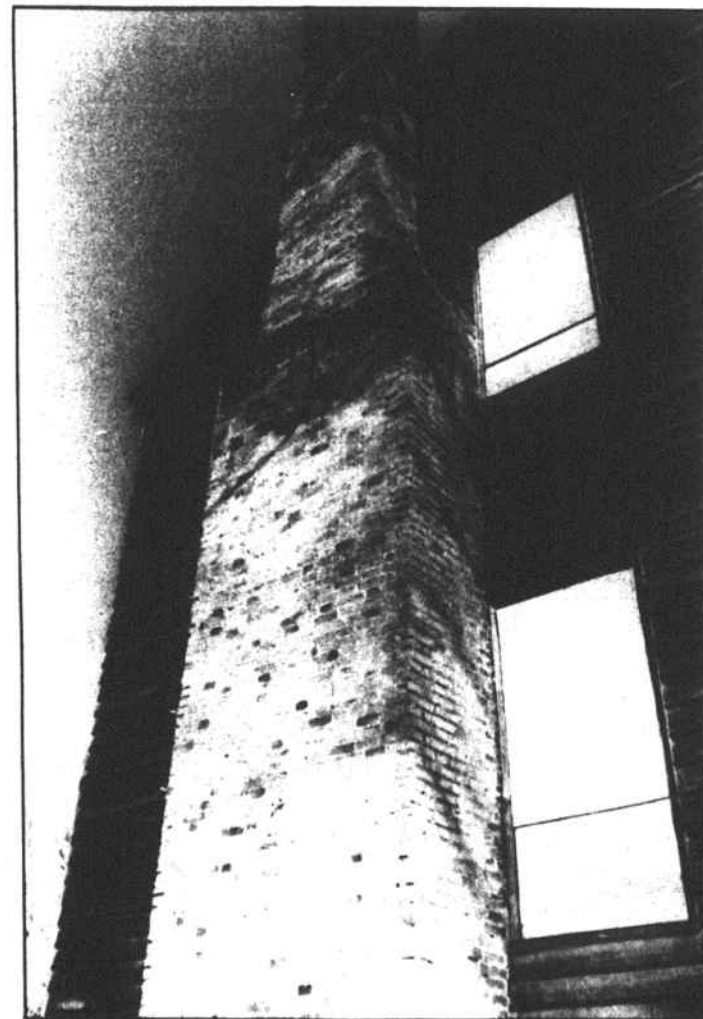
Some of the people involved with Gilchrist and his college were connected with the organization of Flora Macdonald and in essence John Jr.'s dream lived on.

Hoke County may not have existed at the time of the Gilchrist family but their achievements are felt not only in the area, but across the state.



Acre of land, and a bridge too

Members of the Gilchrist family, descended from John, were honored with this memorial bridge which was erected in the early 1900's. The bridge crosses land owned by the Gilchrist family. It is believed that the Gilchrist family were some of the largest land owners in Hoke and the surrounding areas. Some say that over the years the family members purchased around 40,000 acres of land and were generous in re-selling at a low price. There is some evidence that at times, the Gilchrists did not receive payment for land they sold.



Renovations set

Mill Prong, the home of John Gilchrist and his second wife, still stands after 200 years of existence. Although weather and age have deteriorated some parts of the house, the frame and chimney stand much as they did in the late 1770's. The Mill Prong Preservation Society is in the process of trying to restore the old house so that Hoke County can revel in the history that exists within the hand-hewed timbers.