

Additional Evidence Of The Impact Of Nat Turner

Lynn Veach Sadler

When Liberty Hall, as it came to be called, the ancestral home of the Kenan family, was being restored some years ago in Kenansville (Duplin County), North Carolina, among the many books left in the library was discovered an accounts ledger used by two members of the Chauncey Graham family. (footnote: The Grahams became related to the Kenansville by marriage. The ledger was brought to my attention by Mrs. Mattie Barbee, one of the curators of Liberty Hall. I should like to thank her as well as Mr. Thomas S. Kenan III, who has kindly given me permission to use the journal.) The most significant feature of this complex book is the obscurely-entered, first-hand account of a supposed slave insurrection and its consequences. The author is Dr. Stephen Graham, and the uprising that he depicts in Kenansville can be linked to the furor unleashed by the Nat Turner rebellion.

The ledger is approximately fifteen inches long and six inches wide. Its dark binding remains intact; but the front and back, both of which contain longhand notations and arithmetical calculations, are practically illegible now.

Inside, the owner is identified as Chauncey Graham (Jr.); and the book is said to have been started in January 1800 in Murfreesboro, North Carolina. Dr. Stephen Graham recorded his patients' names, the work he did for them (eg., extracting teeth), and prescriptions he gave them, as well as the ways by which he was paid (e.g., four pounds of butter; one cord of wood; or, less frequently, by cash). His last entry is dated 6 February 1811; and, as other sources reveal, he died on 20 February 1811.

The Grahams were a prominent southern family. The second son of Chauncey Graham Jr., Dr. Stephen Graham (1786-1834), studied medicine with his father. However, since Murfreesboro failed to develop as anticipated, he moved to Kenansville, in Duplin County, North Carolina, sometime before 1810. Dr. Stephen married, in 1817, Ann Dixon Williams, whose family was one of the two leading families in the county. By 1828, he was a large landholder. His wife's father was an influential Baptist minister, and Stephen himself became a Baptist and later helped to incorporate the Baptist school of Wake Forest College (later, Wake Forest University).

His interests were varied, and he used the ledger principally to keep records of his blacksmith shop. The blacksmith accounts (104 pages) begin in February 1824, and seem to be in several hands, though they are principally by Stephen Graham himself. Among them are occasional medical references (such as "one emetic") and personal information (such as the costs of boarding his children at school). Some of the "facts" are complemented by non-essential but eye-catching details. For example, on one page there is the observation that "Tom & Averett lost 1/2 day with the toothache and 1/2 day were... the Negroes were hung." (from footnote: This entry has no specific date but appears between entries for the "3 & 4 Oct." and "Oct. 15th." with the year, 1831, provided, as is customary throughout, at the top of the page.) Also worth noting is the evidence that the Graham place provided a kind of "country store" where its customers could get bacon, molasses, meal, and such. Even Dr. Graham's unmarried sister has accounts in the ledger for such items.

Included with this material, in approximately five and one-half pages, is the story of the "dreadful plot." No year is given but

the present writer assumes that it must have been between 1824, the date on the title-page of Dr. Stephen Graham's portion of the ledger, and 1834, the latest year referred to in the book. Moreover, the narrative does provide some dates, as "the 1st Sabbath in Sept. (4th)," "Monday 5th Sept.," "Monday the 12th." A perpetual calendar narrowed the possible years to three: 1768, 1831, and 1836. The 1824-1834 span for the years given in the ledger eliminated all but 1831. Additionally, 1768 could be dismissed by the fact that Dr. Stephen Graham was not born until 1786, and the family was not in North Carolina until 1789. Dr. Stephen Graham died in 1834. The only reasonable conclusion therefore is that he referred to events in 1831, the year of Nat Turner's insurrection. The reference cited above, as to the day when "the Negroes were hung," and suggesting a date between 3 August and 15 October 1831, was additional proof. Once the year was determined and was found to coincide with that of the Nat Turner furor, one could explore the effects of that furor on North Carolina.

Although slave-holding not generally profitable in North Carolina, there were enough slaves to keep their owners in constant fear of insurrection. The years following 1790 were agitated particularly by rumors of discontents among the slaves attendant upon reports of uprisings in the West Indies. Outstanding among the events prior to 1831 whose repercussions were felt in North Carolina were the Denmark Vesey conspiracy (1822) and the publication of David Walkers "Appeal" and of George Moses Horton's "The Home of Liberty" (both in 1829). The first issue of William Lloyd Garrison's "The Liberator" appeared on 1 January 1831; and North Carolinians had already begun to feel that they had much to fear from Quakers and abolitionists stirring up the slaves to seek freedom. Fear among the whites was so intense, in fact, that legislation sharply restricting slaves, for example from learning to read and write, had been passed prior to the Nat Turner uprising. It was, nonetheless, that episode which drove some white North Carolinians to near-frenzy.

The Nat Turner insurrection, which was widely reported throughout the South, took place in Southampton County, Virginia, in late August 1831, only some twenty miles from the North Carolina line. In fact, at the time, many of the white families of the area were away in North Carolina attending camp meetings. Nevertheless, the news of Nat Turner's insurrection was somewhat slow in coming, for no whites escaped to tell of it until some four hours after it had begun late at night. Slaves on the plantations that had not been visited finally received the word and told their masters, protecting themselves by reporting that the British were leading the massacre. Thus it was not until approximately 9 a.m. on Monday, 22 August, that the whites knew the full horrors of the events. Couriers were immediately sent to the larger settlements across the border in North Carolina as well as to Richmond and other towns in Virginia. A number of citizens of Southampton county, including eye-witnesses of some of the mutilated dead, fled into North Carolina bearing tales of horror. Although Turner later denied any knowledge of rebellion in that state, practically the entire citizenry assumed that the Southampton episode was but a prelude, and North Carolina was soon in a panic. Many towns called their citizens to arms and sent help to Virginia as well. "The terror and excitement in the Tar

Heel state," a recent commentator reports, "was at least as great as it was in Virginia." Exacerbating the situation was the rumor, emphasized in the northern press, that the Negroes were being assisted by whites.

The north-eastern part of the State of North Carolina, the section closest to Southampton County, Virginia, was particularly susceptible to fears of slave uprisings. Laid out in huge farms because of its geographical features, notably the Roanoke River, it contained large numbers of slaves. Fears also derived from the fact that the Great Dismal Swamp and other areas of wilderness in the state provided sanctuary for run-aways who might at any moment group around a leader like Turner. Immediately after the rebellion, in fact, reports circulated that two to three thousand slaves had gathered in the Great Dismal Swamp, which extended from Southampton County into North Carolina. Throughout the eastern part of the state, indeed, rumours of bands of run-aways making forays from these havens on unsuspecting whites had been rather constant. Now they increased apace. Also, because of the more lenient North Carolina laws, free Negroes from Virginia and South Carolina had been moving into the state. The north-eastern section had many of this group, whose members were generally considered more of a threat than the slaves.

Less easy to account for is the fact that North Carolina's most infamous conspiracy, the "Duplin Insurrection" described by Dr. Graham, took place in the south-eastern part of the state, although there were rumors of slave uprisings throughout the state as a direct result of the Southampton news. Probably the reason whites were so impressed was that the plot appeared to be so well thought out and to involve some of the major cities of the state. Letters and dispatches to Governor Montfort Stokes and accounts in the North Carolina Press suggest the following general plan: slaves, led by "Dave" and "Jim," were to kill their masters in Sampson and Duplin Counties; march south to Wilmington in New Hanover County, where they would be joined by two thousand more Negroes; march northwest through Fayetteville; and then turn north to take the capital, Raleigh. An express to Raleigh on 12 September actually reported that Wilmington had been burned and half of the white population massacred and that nearby counties were under attack. Numerous other tales of atrocities against Negroes and whites flew from one part of the state to the other. Their appearance led to charges of dangerous exaggeration being levelled by some newspapers against others. The harrying of Negroes that began after the capture of Nat Turner and his men increased with the rumors of the new plots in the south-east and in other parts of the state. It was well into November 1831 before the beatings and lynchings ceased. Many people, including the governor, were to express their concern at the persecutions; and some even went so far as to claim that the whole web of post-Southampton rumors was an attempt to keep the price of slaves low.

Although the furor eventually subsided, some of the effects of the Duplin Insurrection and of the horrors initiated by Nat Turner were far-reaching. Whites became more suspicious than ever of the Negroes and increasingly vigilant. Turner having been designated a Baptist preacher, North Carolina passed legislation to

prevent free Negroes and slaves from preaching. Most striking, perhaps, the impact of the anti-slavery forces in the State was greatly lessened. The overall result, however, was that fewer rumors of slave conspiracy and insurrection circulated thereafter.

Dr. Graham's narration is a remarkably dispassionate account of the Duplin affair. He is careful to open by labelling it "meditated" and to point out unsubstantiated rumors. The only inflammatory references are those to "the dreadful plot" and to the plan to "commence the horrid work of murder of all the whites without respect to age or sex" (as Nat Turner and his Negroes had done in Southampton County, Virginia). So carefully does he record dates (e.g., "Tuesday evening the 13th Sept."), times (e.g., "4 o'clock in the morning"), places (e.g., "Island Creek meeting"), and numbers (e.g., "five magistrates," "embodies the number of 200") that he appears to be working from notes. Since he was one of the magistrates at the original hearing in Kenansville, it is possible that he may have been writing a draft of an official record. Alternatively, he may have wanted to provide a balance to the extravagant reports in the newspapers, or he may have wished to record the exact extent of his own involvement in the illegal execution of Dave and Jim, or he may simply have been following his own bent of meticulousity.

One could at times almost accuse the writer of understatement. His reference to the behaviour of the white women and children is a case in point. Many of the newspaper accounts have them seeking refuge for several nights in the swamps (ironically, the normal hiding place for run-away slaves). Another citizen of Duplin County, Jeremiah Persall, the "Jer. Persall" of Dr. Graham's account, speaks at some length of the distress brought to him by the cries of his relatives. Dr. Graham says quite straightforwardly and logically, "most of us carried our wives and children to the court house for safety. By night there was a great many families collected and many of the ladies frightened very much, some alarmingly so."

Persall's account would seem also to bear out the tales of atrocities in the newspapers. He reports that General Dave and Colonel Jim were not only shot, but had "their heads severed from their bodies and elevated in the air..." Dr. Graham attests to "whipping and paddling" and to the fact that "Some could not be brought to the court house in consequence of the whippings they had received." However, he is careful to delineate the procedures used in arriving at the execution of the leaders and to indicate his own role in the affair. The magistrates are at first disappointed because they can find no legal way to hang the guilty. Then, in the midst of preparations to fight a band of two hundred Negroes, the people in Kenansville hear from one of their own that fifteen hundred Negroes are on the way to rescue Dave and Jim. The "propriety of killing" the two prisoners is again at issue, and Dr. Graham reports his observations: "if there was a large black force coming and it was probable they intended releasing them... it might justify destroying them." His qualification is lost in the excitement, and the two are taken out of jail and shot near its door. Dr. Graham gives no indication of mutilation of the bodies.

The narrator also presents the other side of the issue. Before sentence is passed, Pizarrah denies any knowledge of the intended in-

surrection, and Pompey claims that he has not had a fair trial and that what he has confessed was beaten out of him. Then Dr. Graham records "a very singular incident." Ned's recantation of the testimony that led to the conviction of Pizarrah. Ned is tried for perjury, but Dr. Graham seems to have been compelled to voice the questions raised by Ned's behaviour.

The account also suggests dissatisfaction within the ranks of the whites. Colonel Morrissy, the owner of Dave, refuses to believe the citizens of Kenansville and threatens to sue them for arresting his slave. That night, however, he goes to the jail, whips and threatens Dave, and makes him reveal those involved in the plot. Towards the end of his account, Dr. Graham returns to do "justice" to the repentant Colonel Morrissy, who apologizes for his "harsh reflections." Dr. Graham again draws no conclusions; but some of the newspapers, perhaps recalling the fact that Nat Turner and his men had all been well treated by their masters, point out that Dave was the trusted servant of Colonel Morrissy.

Indeed, there are indications elsewhere that Colonel Morrissy over-reacted to Dave's confession and joined those who wanted to take the law into their own hands. Colonel James Wright (also referred to by Dr. Graham) records that Colonel Morrissy "had told him that they were going to carry the Negroes to a place convenient to both Sampson and Duplin and 'there to have no Courts no Law nor no Justice but to deal with them as they intended.'" Colonel Wright is trying to secure a pardon for his Jerry, whom he has told to confess with the other slaves and thus escape with a beating. Unfortunately, as Dr. Graham reveals, Jerry was sentenced to be hanged. A great controversy ensued, with petitions to the governor. In his last paragraph, which appears to have been written with a different pen and in a neater hand (still clearly his, but at a later time), Dr. Graham adds that Pompey and Pizarrah were hanged but that Jerry was "respited and ultimately pardoned by the Governor."

The eyewitness account of Dr. Graham follows.

Dr. Stephen Graham's Narration

Acct. of a meditated insurrection amongst the slaves in Sampson, Duplin, and New-Hanover, (sic) Counties.

At Island Creek meeting (the) 1st Sabbath in Sept. (4th) (I heard that Col Morrissy's Dave had communicated the plan to free fellow named Armwood, who had told some gentlemen, Monday 5th Sept. was (?) sent for to meet at court house, met sundry citizens and magistrates, understood by A. Hurst Esq. that Col. M. would bring Dave down on Wednesday - Doct. Frederick, Mr. Jer. Persall and (omission) went after the witnesses Armwood and Burdon's Dave(.) 7th Wednesday (.) made a temporary court of five magistrates. Dave brought before us on a state warrant. The evidence against him was of a positive nature, and we had no doubt of his guilt. We therefore, not having cognizance of his crime, being felony, committed him to jail to await his trial at our Superior Court and bound the witnesses to appear at the said (?) court. Our proceedings gave very great offence to Col. Morrissy (the owner of Dave), who did not spare us in harsh re-

flections, even declaring he intended suing us all, that is the justices that sat on the trial of the warrants. That evening the Col. went to the jail and Ave make (sic) some confessions to him(.) (He remain(ed) all night in Kenansville and after whipping and threatening Dave he gave him sundry names that had engaged in the dreadful plot. They proceeded Thursday 8th Sept. to take up negroes and carry them to the lodge near Col. Kenan's. Many were implicated and some confessed, belonging to Duplin and Sampson. After whipping and paddling(.) they turned all loose but Col. Wright's Jim(.) the next in command to Dave(.) (H)im they brought to our jail Saturday evening. At this proceeding we were disappointed our opinion was and we expected it prevailed at the lodge to bring all the guilty to jail and try them and hang them if we could legally. Monday 12th at 4 o'clock in the morning an express (from) Mr. Hollister arrived bringing the new(s) that the negroes had embodied to the number of 200. We were assembling and preparing to meet the insurgents, when Mr. And. Hurst arrived and stated that there was 1500 negroes coming on toward the court house massacring the whites indiscriminately and he had no doubt they intended rescuing there (sic) leaders Dave and Jim who were in jail. In reply to the question as to the propriety of killing the, I observed if there was a large black force coming and it was probable they intended releasing them, that it might justify destroying them. However the excitement was so great they were taken out of jail in a few minutes and shot near the door.

The alarm spread rapidly and most of us carried our wives and children to the court house for safety. By night there was a great many families collected and many of the ladies frightened very much, some alarmingly so.

Some hours after Mr. C. Cooper and Mr. Colvin returned, who had set off early in the morning to ascertain the correctness of the report of the 200, and stated that there was no assemblage of negroes at this place nor had there been.

Tuesday 13th left home to have an interview with A. Hurst Esq. and Col. Hooks (.) to meet R. Middleton Esq at Mr. Hurst's. Proceed(ed) and met them coming to the court house. We proceed(ed) to issue warrants against all concerned whose names we could obtain, and sundry have been taken(.) witnesses examined and them committed. Some could not be brought to the court house in consequence of the whippings they had received.

There (sic) plan was to collect at or near the lodge on Tuesday evening the 13th Sept. (Footnote: A dispatch from Major General Nathan B. Whitfield, of Lenoir County, to Governor Montfort Stokes, in the North Carolina Archives, says that the slaughter was to begin 1 October. Contrastingly, the Carolina Observer of 14 September 1831 cites the target date as 4 October.), as soon as practicable after dark and commence the horrid work of murder of all the whites without respect to age or sex. Sept. Superior Court of Duplin commenced the 4th Monday in Sept.

In justice to Col. Morrissy of Sampson I will state that he said he was sorry for what he said on the day his fellow Dave was committed which satisfied us.

The grand jury found a true bill against Pizarrah,

Jerry and John belonging to Col. (?) Wright, Pompey - to Parson Stanford, Sam - to Peter Carlton and Erwin belonging to John Monk. The court and jury manifested great patience on the traverse of the bill, continuing all Friday night, and the jury brought in their verdict about 10 o'clock A.M. Saturday. They convicted Pizarrah, Jerry and Pompey, and Judge Daniel (?) in a very solemn and impressive manner pronounced the sentence of death on them, and set apart Saturday the 8th of Oct. for their execution.

The judge proposed before sentence to the convicted to speak if they wished. Pizarrah and Jerry denied knowing anything of the intended insurrection. Pompey said he had not had a fair trial, that what he said was beat out of him (to use his own words).

There was a very singular incident which I will record. Ned(.) a young fellow belonging to Mr. Wright(.) a witness against Pizarrah, had

been sworn three or four times and his tale was the same. In court, (.) tho, (.) stated the same with some addition. He was called in by the judge (after he had given in his evidence) to explain something he had said, and he stated to the court that he knew nothing about it and that what he had testified before was all untrue. A warrant brought him before six justices and we committed him to jail to be tried at our County Court for perjury.

Pompey and Pizarrah were hanged according to sentence of the court. Jerry was respited and ultimately pardoned by the governor (Montfort Stokes).

(Dr. Sadler is Director of the Humanities Division, Bennett College, Greensboro, North Carolina. She is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Veach of Warsaw and the daughter-in-law of Mrs. Mattie Barbee of Kenansville.)

Nurse Aides Graduation Held

On May 4th, the nurse aide class of James Sprunt Technical College graduated from classes that began on February 22. Twenty-four students were awarded certificates at ceremonies held at the old Kenansville Elementary School Tuesday night.

During the 10-week course, the students learned many things, not only about health care, but compassion for others. They also learned that good health is one of life's greatest blessings and great care should be taken to keep it.

The students worked for three weekends at Duplin General Hospital and three at Guardian Care giving them on-the-job training. While at these facilities, they had the opportunity of personal contact with the patients. Special treatment such as ultrasonic heat and physical therapy for stroke or accident patients were observed. After each workday, there was individual discussion about what had been observed and learned.

When the average person hears anything concerning nurse aides, they automatically assume that the aides are those who do the "dirty work." Nurse aides should be re-evaluated! They are part of the nursing team. The jobs they do are valuable and necessary for the proper functioning of any health care institution. The title of nurse aide should be held with respect.

The last segment of the course was devoted to learning C.P.R. (cardio-pulmonary-resuscitation). The instructors were Joe White, Steve Kilpatrick and Andi Bostic. Molly Jarman was the in-

structor for all classroom work and is the clinical instructor at Duplin General Hospital, where she is employed as the charge nurse in the intensive care unit. Martha Williams was the clinical instructor at Guardian Care, where she is employed.

Those graduating were: Nancy Acker, Carolyn Allison, Dora Batchelor, Sandra Ann Bland, Dorothy Marie Cavanaugh, Joyce Cavanaugh, Sara Dobson, Wanda Aultman, Frances Edwards, Stella Evans, Barbara Hall, Jennifer Lee Jenkins, Edna Ruth Jones, Shirley Mathis, Milley McLean, Shelby Melton, Joe Ann Murphy, Sula Murphy, Carolyn Newkirk, Minnie Lee Owens, Eva Taylor and Angelia Wells.

Lenoir Cheese Program

Lenoir County food stamp unit at 215 East Gordon Street in Kinston, will be accepting applications for the cheese program for only those households currently receiving food stamps and who did not file an application during February, 1982. Food stamp households who filed an application during February do not need to file another application. Those households currently receiving food stamps will only be eligible for the cheese program.

In order to avoid long lines and waiting time, the office urges people to make application from 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., according to the following schedule: A-D, May 3; E-H, May 4; I-P, May 5; Q-V, May 6, and W-Z, May 7.

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