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A HUSBAND FOR PHOEBE JEFFERSON

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By a curious quirk of human nature, rather than Mother Nature, every American family of the surname Washington is related to George, all Adamses are of the family of John Quincy, and all Jeffersons are cousins of Thomas—at least as far as family traditions are concerned. Such traditions, if proven, add interest to a family history, but *until* and *unless* they can be substantiated the careful genealogist must treat these traditions with a healthy dose of skepticism.

Descendants of Alexander and Phoebe Clark, who settled in Chatham Co., N.C., shortly after its establishment in 1770, have such a tradition. Like most oral accounts, it has its variants—depending upon who relates it. All the accounts found in family files studied by this researcher¹ hold that Phoebe was by birth a Jefferson and that she was the daughter of Feild Jefferson, an uncle of the president. Some accounts state that she was born and reared in Albemarle Co., Va., where Alexander's father, William Clark, was a prominent planter as well as a friend and neighbor of the Jeffersons. Other family accounts hold that she was reared on Feild Jefferson's plantation, Oconechee, on the Roanoke River in North Carolina, although she married Alexander Clark of Virginia at "Monticello," (or "Shadwell," as Monticello was first known), the home of her cousin Thomas.

As oral history, the family tradition can be traced back to the early decades of the 1900s and claims a specific continuity linking it to Phoebe herself. Among present-day descendants of the family, those in their sixties through eighties were told about Phoebe by their grandmother and great-grandmother, Mary Frances Garner Ross (born 1844, Mocksville, N.C.; died 1933, Laurel, Miss). Mrs. Ross' mother, Sarah Nelson Meroney Garner (born 1808, N.C.; died 1893, Enterprise, Miss.) is said to have personally known her grandmother Phoebe Jefferson Clark (*ca.*1752-*ca.*1823-30). Additionally, one present-day descendant² possesses a small spoon of coin silver which was formerly the property of Mrs. Ross, was one of

1 Family papers of Mrs. John Conley (Pearl Ross Moore) Merchant, 15 Gaywood Circle, Mountain Brook, Birmingham, Ala 35213 (died 7 Nov. 1982); Mrs. Earl C. (Edith Frances Moore) Sheldon, 1415 E. Lester, Tucson, Ariz. 85719; and Mrs. T. P. (Mildred Smith) Shumaker, 46 Cherokee Hills, Tuscaloosa, Ala. 35404.

2 Present owner of the last known "Jefferson spoon"

a set of "several" left by Mrs. Garner, and was said to have been the property of Phoebe originally. This branch of the family, through the generations, has referred to the set as "the Jefferson spoons."

Written accounts of the tradition date back to 1893. Upon the death of Mrs. Garner in Clarke Co., Miss., the Rev. Isaac L. Peebles penned the following tribute:

During the after midnight stillness just before the aurora of the second day of April 1893, Sister SARAH M. GARNER took her everlasting flight from earth's cares and goes to join the company of those beyond the skies who sing redeeming songs and say, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." She was the daughter of a Presbyterian couple, the Rev. William B. and Mrs. Winnifred Meroney, being born to them in Chatham County, North Carolina, Sept. 10, 1808. Her Maternal grandmother was Phoebe Jefferson Clark, a first cousin of Thomas Jefferson, Third President of the United States and who was married in his home "Shadwell."

In early girlhood, Sister Garner joined the Presbyterian Church in which she remained a number of years. She was married to Mr. Lewis Hicks Garner, May 23, 1833. He was a leading member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, having filled various offices in the same. In 1844 they moved to Decatur [Mississippi] the shire-town of Newton County. While there Sister Garner joined the Methodist Episcopal Church South, in which she continued until her earthly career closed. In 1858 she and her husband left Decatur and moved to Enterprise, where they spent the rest of their days. Their wedlock was favored with five children only two of whom are still living, Mrs. Margaret A. Andrews and Mrs. Mary F. Ross. Her husband died October 14, 1888, and after his death she lived awhile with her daughter Mrs. Mary Ross and then the remainder of her life with her grandson, Mr. Joseph Willis whom she reared and to whom she was much devoted. It was his greatest pleasure to make her as comfortable and as happy as possible. In the early part of her history her health was quite precarious but as she approximated the meridian of life it gradually improved until even in her declension it could be truly said of her that she was a very healthy woman. After she had thoroughly regained her health it remained good until she received

is Mrs. Frank Clayton (Mildred Alice Moore) Albert, 1909-A Vestavia Garden Apts., Vestavia, Ala. 35216.

a fall off the doorsteps that wrecked her health and made her a sufferer for seven weeks and finally terminated her days in her eighty-fifth year. Had it not been for that fatal fall she likely would have attained her four score and ten years, if not more. During her prostration ever and anon her sufferings grew intense but she endeavoured to endure them patiently as a faithful follower of the blessed Saviour. She had a bright mind and the probability is that if she had been circumstances so as to have given its fullest liberty the world would have known more of her. She was a descendant not only of the prominent merely but of the brainy. As she was nearing her expiration she said to her loved ones who were anxiously watching her not to be troubled about her for she had to die anyhow but when the shadow began to gather around her and her eyes to grow dim she exclaimed, "My children! My children!" which imparted to them that she disliked to leave them for she had thus expressed herself to them before and in a short while she was where "The wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest,". Job 3:17.

She leaves two children, ten grandchildren, thirteen great grandchildren, and many friends to mourn her departure. But why should they mourn? for from what we have gathered concerning her we are led to believe that she has been borne from the earth into the unbroken light of God and is now experiencing true rest and uninterrupted joy. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." Psalms 116:15. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord". Rev. 14:13.

Isaac L. Peebles, P.C.

Enterprise, Mississippi, April 17, 1893³

It is to be supposed, of course, that the Rev. Mr. Peebles' account of the life and antecedents of Mrs. Garner came from her two living children and-or his past conversations with the deceased. There is no reason to believe that he had, or sought, written evidence to support the statements he penned.

Attempts to document the variants of this family tradition have produced mixed results, as is generally the case when oral history is put to the test of documentary

3 Shumaker files. An unsuccessful attempt has been made to locate a published original of this tribute. A newspaper was published at Enterprise, 1886 to 1907 (*Clark County Times*) but there are no known extant copies prior to 1902.

evidence. Some elements of the family's genealogical account *can* be proven beyond reasonable doubt. Other elements are clearly wrong. Like most family stories, this one appears grounded in fact—although the passage of time has resulted in confusion of detail to one degree or another. As is also often the case, research to date has not yet yielded the ultimate record all researchers seek: a document clearly stating the filial relationship between one's ancestress and her father—that is, in this case, a document specifically saying that Phoebe Clark was indeed Phoebe Jefferson, daughter of Feild.

However, it is this researcher's opinion that this filial relationship *does* exist—in spite of the odds that prevail where families of "famous" names are concerned. This article attempts to provide an overview of the research to date, to provide a sketch of the known life of Phoebe Clark, and to summarize the arguments which may be made in support of the claim that she was indeed Feild Jefferson's daughter. Correspondence with other researchers who may have evidence to support or disprove this contention is invited.

The chain of genealogical relationships which connects present-day descendants with Phoebe and Alexander Clark has been satisfactorily proven.⁴ Family tradition regarding the identity of Alexander's father has similarly proved correct. Pertinent dates found in family records, for the five to seven generations that follow Phoebe and Alexander's daughter Winnifred, can be adequately substantiated through Meroney family Bible records, tombstone inscriptions, and public marriage records. Precise dates for both Winnifred and her parents still elude researchers. Records of the two marriages of Winnifred, *ca.*1790 and *ca.*1794, and the *ca.*1769-70 marriage of Alexander and Phoebe have not been located in the sketchy marriage records of early Virginia and North Carolina or in other sources.

In sum, family accounts have been exceptionally accurate with regard to all filial relationships and most vital statistics. With regard to the remaining dates, there have been found no *discrepancies* between tradition and documentable evidence in any of the generations which follow Phoebe and Alexander. Family accounts of this couple, however, have displayed the same sketchiness and inaccuracy in detail that generally prevail when such accounts are based upon handed-down-stories rather than public records or family records of quality. Yet, most such family traditions have at their core a germ of truth, and discrepancies between tradition and fact are more

4 Supporting evidence is to be found in Shumaker files.

commonly based upon the misinterpretation or confusion of detail by those who transmit the family story. Such is the case with the Jefferson-Clark family legend.

A review of published Jefferson family genealogies and primary source materials in the various counties in which Feild Jefferson resided immediately reveals problems with the family's interpretation of Phoebe Clark's life and origins:⁵

1. Feild Jefferson did own a plantation called Occaneechee but it was situated in Virginia, not in North Carolina as one version of the tradition states. However, this confusion over the location of the Jefferson farm, in an era when few families bothered to research the details of ancestral accounts, is easily understood—given the fact that an Oconochee Creek did empty into the Roanoke River in *North Carolina* where this family line resided for three generations after Phoebe.

2. The family account which attributes Virginia origins to Phoebe would still seem to be in error if she were indeed the daughter of Feild. His residence was not in Albemarle where the president resided. Feild Jefferson and his brother Peter, father of President Thomas, (as was Feild and Peter's father, Thomas II) were born in the county of Henrico. When Goochland was created from Henrico in 1727, the family became part of the new county. Peter, but not Feild apparently, established himself in the portion of Goochland that became Albemarle in 1744, while Feild remained in the area of Goochland which eventually became Cumberland. About 1749 Feild removed his family to newly-created Lunenburg and acquired extensive landholdings in the portion of that county which eventually became Mecklenburg. It was in Lunenburg/Mecklenburg that Feild's farm, Oconeechee was situated, near the Roanoke. Again, however, it is easy to understand tradition's error, given the extent to which the Jefferson name is associated with Albemarle. One must also consider the fact that Phoebe, as an orphan in her teens, would have lived with other family

5 Researchers may wish to consult Landon C. Bell, *The Old Free State: A Contribution to the History of Lunenburg County and Southside Virginia* (2 v.; Richmond, 1927), v. 2, pp. 289-97, *Genealogies of Virginia Families From Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine* (4 v.; Baltimore, 1981), v. 2, pp. 441-65, and Annie Lash Jester and Martha Woodroof Hiden, *Adventurers of Purse and Person, Virginia, 1607-1625* (2nd ed.; Richmond, 1964), p. 103, for accounts which specifically deal with the family of Feild Jefferson.

members and the fact that her father's will mentions the ownership of an Albemarle plantation by Phoebe's brother John. The possibility that she might have spent time in Albemarle cannot be discounted.

The same review of Virginia literature reveals just as many points which superficially support family tradition:

1. Feild Jefferson certainly had a daughter named Phoebe. She is identified as such in the will that he drafted in 1762⁶ and is known to have been alive as late as 1767 when her brother John Jefferson conveyed to her a slave "by consent of Henry Delony her guardian."⁷ No known genealogy of the family accounts for Phoebe after this date or identifies a husband for her. Given the fact that her father Feild led a non-public life and the identity of his offspring should not have been household knowledge in the late 1800s, it might be argued that a Mississippi lady in 1893, who was "circumstanced so as to" have had a relatively limited education, should not have known that Feild Jefferson's daughter Phoebe was a first cousin of Thomas—unless Phoebe Clark of North Carolina had passed that fact to her offspring.

2. The same argument might be applied to the family belief that the ancestors of Alexander Clark were prominent neighbors of Phoebe's father Feild. Occaneechee Farm was situated near *Clarksville* in Mecklenburg Co., Va., and county records do reveal associations in the 1700s between the Jeffersons, their Farrar kin, and one family of Clarks. Whether this is the family to which Alexander belongs has not yet been established.

Documentable details of the lives of Phoebe Clark and her husband Alexander place them in circumstances that would not have been incompatible with a family such as the Jeffersons, nor are they incompatible with known details of the life of Phoebe Jefferson:

Alexander Clark first appears on record in Edgecombe Co., N.C., on 29 Dec. 1763, as a witness to a deed executed by his parents William and Winnifred Clark.⁸ It is presumed that he was of legal age by this time or that he would not have qualified as a witness. His

⁶ Mecklenburg Co., Va., Will Book 1, pp. 4 ff, proved 10 June 1765.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Deed Book 1, p. 330.

⁸ Identity of the father of Alexander is established through a 1784 donation of record in Chatham Co., N.C., in which William Clark, Sr., gave slaves and land to "Winy Webb Clark, Fanny Roberson Clark, William Clark, Alexander Clark, and John Clark, all the children of deceased Alexander Clark ... my son." No document

presence in Edgecombe can be further documented on 26 Jan. 1767; 4 July, 18 October and 7 Nov. 1768; and 25 Feb. 1772. While his father was a landowner of substance, owning nearly 1400 acres in Edgecombe, there is no indication that Alexander was himself a landowner there prior to a Feb. 1772 purchase of 260 acres from his father,⁹ and his occupancy of this land was shortlived. Alexander's absence from county records for extended periods, during which his father and other family members appeared regularly, suggests that he may not have been a permanent resident in the county prior to 1768 or probably 1772. No wife is mentioned for him in any of the Edgecombe records.

Four years after Chatham County was created from the vast expanses of North Carolina's Orange County (1774), Alexander first appears on record in Chatham as a justice on the Commission of Peace and a road overseer ("from the fork opposite to William Pettys to the Horse pen Lick Spring"); and in the eight remaining years of his life he served his fellow citizens in several important capacities. He remained on the Commission of Peace through 1779, took tax rolls of real estate within his jurisdiction, and served as security for such other Chatham County officials as its tax collector and its county treasurer. In Dec. 1777 he was appointed a member of North Carolina's House of Commons, filling the unexpired term of a friend (Miles Scurlock) who had resigned in order to accept the position of county clerk; and in the spring of 1778 he was elected of his own right to continue in the colonial assembly. An Aug. 1778 list of "Cloathing to be found by the different Companies in this County," held "Alexander Clark's Company" responsible for the collection of "5 hatts, 20 Linnen, 10 Cloth, 10

specifically identifies the mother of Alexander. She is presumed to be the Winnifred who is William's only known wife, and the fact that Alexander and Phoebe gave her name to their eldest daughter does support this supposition of maternity. See Chatham Co., N.C., Deed Book C, p. 289; Edgecombe Co., N.C., Deed Book C, p. 193, abstracted in Joseph W. Watson, *Abstracts of Early Deeds of Edgecombe County, North Carolina, 1759-1772* (New Bern, 1966), p. 153.

⁹ Edgecombe Co., N.C., Deed Book C, p. 459, Deed Book D, pp. 4, 110-11, 425, abstracted in Watson, *op. cit.*, pp. 200, 257, 272-73, 325; will of Robert Lowry, abstracted in Ruth Smith Williams and Margarette Glenn Griffin, *Abstracts of the Wills of Edgecombe County, North Carolina, 1733-1856* (Rocky Mount, N.C., 1956), pp. 215-16.

pr Shoes [and] 10 pr. Stockings" for use by the revolutionary troops. By the fall of 1780 he had become the clerk of the Superior Court, one of the county's most influential public-service positions.¹⁰

Alexander's wife Phoebe, like most wives of that era, lived a life removed from the public eye. Prior to her husband's death, she appears on public record only on those occasions when he sold tracts of land and she was required to relinquish her dower rights. Since Alexander disposed of no land during his documentable presences in Edgecombe County, Phoebe is mentioned only in the records of Chatham. In Nov. 1774 the couple, now in Chatham, sold back to Alexander's father the land that Alexander had purchased from the father two years earlier; Phoebe affixed her "mark" to that (and subsequent) documents.¹¹

Upon Alexander's death in 1782, Phoebe assumed the administration of his estate and appears three times on record (1782, 1783 and 1785) in that capacity. When the aging William Clark made a donation to Phoebe and Alexander's children in 1784, he specified that the property would be (and already had been) "in the hands or custody" of both Phoebe and himself. At the auction of Alexander's estate in 1785 she purchased the two slaves offered for sale and most of the basic household and farm necessities, including a set of 8 pewter table spoons and another set of 6 tea spoons of higher quality (metal unspecified) that *might* be the "set of spoons of coined silver" which family tradition attributes to her—while such a speculation seems unprovable, there is at least no evidence yet of a contradictory nature.¹²

The widowed Phoebe did not remarry. The 1790 census of Chatham County, in the Hillsborough District, identifies her as a head of a household consisting of three

10 Marilyn Poe Laird and Vivian Poe Jackson, *Chatham County, North Carolina Court Minutes, 1774-1779* (n.p., n.d.), pp. 8, 21, 23, 28, 32, 34, 38, 43, 47, 50, 56, 67, 79; *The State Records of North Carolina*, v. 22, 1777-78 (Winston Salem, 1895), pp. 365, 655; *ibid.*, v. 23, Laws, 1715-1776 (Goldsboro, 1904), p. 993; Laird and Jackson, *Chatham County, North Carolina, Deeds, 1771-1782* (n.p., n.d.), p. 77.

11 Laird and Jackson, *Chatham County, North Carolina, Deeds*, pp. 21, 79; Chatham Co., N.C., Deed Book C, p. 118, Deed Book P, p. 390.

12 Chatham Co., N.C., Estate Records (Loose papers), Alexander Clark, 1783, file; Chatham Co., N.C., "Deeds, Bills of Sales, Inventories, of Estates, Wills, Etc.", p. 149b, both in North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh.

white males under 16 [her sons], two white females [herself and younger daughter], and five slaves; her elder daughter, Winnifred Webb Clark, resided in the same militia beat as the newly-wed wife of Dr. Joseph Mott. After the maturity of Phoebe's sons, the widow was more commonly enumerated in their households. In 1794 she conveyed title to a slave girl named Sally for "good will and Affection which I have and bear unto my Infant grand Daughter Phebe Mott daughter of Joseph Mott deceased." In 1808, she and son William, together with William's wife Susannah, sold Alexander's homestead on "Robertson Creek, beginning at mouth of Turkey Creek." Phoebe last appears on record 8 May 1823 when David Ausley of Chatham acknowledged that he had formerly sold to her a tract of some fifty acres adjoining himself, John Wesley Bynum and William Pyland, all of Chatham. No disposition of this land and no estate record for Phoebe has been found.¹³ Since she has not been located on the 1830 census either as head of a household or possibly as an older female in the home of a known child, and since she would have been approximately 80 years old in that year, it is presumed that she died 1823-1830.

Children born to Phoebe and Alexander were:

1. WINNIFRED WEBB CLARK, named at least in part for the wife of her paternal grandfather (and her presumed grandmother), Winnifred [maiden name unknown] Clark. Family tradition cites Winnifred's birth year as 1771; no documentary evidence has been found to substantiate this or any other date. She is the first child named in the donation made by her grandfather Clark in 1784¹⁴ and evidence does suggest that the grandfather cited them in chronological order, as will be seen.

Winnifred was married in 1790 (or shortly before) to Dr. Joseph Mott, to whom she bore one child Phoebe (family tradition identifies her as "Phoebe Jefferson Mott") before the doctor's death in 1794. In about that same year she remarried, taking for her second husband the Presbyterian minister William Britton Meroney, whose family had been neighbors of the Clarks in Chatham County.¹⁵

13 *Heads of Families at the First Census ... 1790 North Carolina* (Washington, 1908), p. 84; Chatham Co., N.C., 1800, 1810 and 1820 Federal censuses; Chatham Co., N.C., "Deeds, Bills of Sales, Inventories of Estates, Wills, and Etc.," p. 149b, North Carolina Department of Archives and History; Chatham Co., N.C., Deed Book M, p. 163, Deed Book Z, p. 28.

14 Chatham Co., N.C., Deed Book C, p. 289.

15 One William H. Meroney witnessed the 1794 deed of gift from Phoebe Clark to the infant Phoebe Mott according

Like many families headed by Protestant ministers of this era, the Meroneys were somewhat transient and relatively impecunious. They are known to have resided in Gates County, 1800, and Chatham County, 1810. It was in Caswell County that the Rev. Mr. Meroney died on 1 Aug. 1816 and was laid to rest in the Bethesda Presbyterian Church Cemetery near Reidsville. While he left the family little in the way of worldly goods, he did allegedly leave them rich advice in the form of a letter to his children. As published (without citation of source) in a recent Meroney family history, the letter reads in part:

I proceed to give you my last and best advice, fondly hoping that you will pay some respects to the words of a dying father; and that they will prove beneficial unto you in your progress through this world of trouble. [Extensive moral counsel follows.] Let me particularly exhort you to be kind and affectionate to your aged mother; and amidst all her sufferings and difficulties, remember she is still your mother, and has labored and toiled for you. Never suffer her to want, if in your power to prevent it.¹⁶

In Oct. 1816 the again-widowed Winnifred notified court officials in Caswell that her husband had died intestate and requested that three freeholders be appointed to "lay off and allot to her such part of the crop stock & provisions on hand ... as shall be sufficient for the support of herself and family for one year." Ill in health, according to the "letter" attributed to her husband, she did not long outlive him. A family chart published in the Meroney family history cites her date of death (without documentation) as 4 Oct. 1817; but this researcher has not been able to confirm that date. The Widow Meroney has not been found on the 1820 federal census; and in 1821, her youngest son "Philip Meroney orphan aged 11 years the sixth last June" was

to the clerk's rendition of the signature on the recorded deed. However, Meroney family records show that Philip Delancy Meroney, the immigrant father of William Britton and his Chatham County neighbor in 1790, did not have a son or other relative in the county whose name was William H. It would appear that the clerk erred in transcribing the middle initial and the witness to the deed of gift was the Widow Mott's new husband (*Ibid.*; see also *Heads of Families ... 1790, North Carolina*, p. 84, and previously cited tribute to Sarah Nelson Meroney Garner).

¹⁶ W. A. V. Meroney and M. C. Macinnes, *Ma/eroney Clan History* (n.p., ca.1978-82), unpaginated [5th page]. See also Gates Co., N.C., 1800 Federal census, p. 272;

bound to one Alexander McAlpin "to learn the art of a Taylor." The family chart which dates her death gives the birth date of her son as 5 June 1810, a date almost identical to the county probate records, a fact that lends credence to Winnifred's undocumented death date.¹⁷

2. FRANCES ROBERTSON CLARK, the second child of Alexander and Phoebe named in the 1784 donation (in which she, under the name "Fannee Roberson Clark," was given title to a slave girl, Lucy), appears to have been born *circa* 1773. There has been found no document naming her after 1784, although it is probable that she was the second female in her mother's household in 1790.

3. WILLIAM CLARK, the third child named in the donation, was born 1775 according to the 1850 federal census of Chatham County. This birth date, and his third-place position on the donation, conforms to the pattern created by the 1771 birth date attributed to the first alleged child of Phoebe and Alexander (i.e.: in an era when children were normally spaced every two years, a 1771 birth for a firstborn child would mean a 1775 birth date for the third sibling).

Under the terms of his grandfather's 1784 donation, William received a "Negro man Johnson," but unlike his brothers he did not additionally receive land from the elder Clark. It appears to have been assumed that, as the eldest son in his family, he would take over the plantation his father left, and two subsequent documents in which he disposed of that land (part of which he and his mother jointly sold) indicates that this presumption materialized.¹⁸

William was apparently married at the time of the 1800 enumeration of Chatham County, but no wife co-signed or relinquished dower rights at his 1801 sale of family land to a younger brother. The 1808 joint-sale which he made with mother Phoebe did carry the co-signature of wife Susannah. This is presumed to be the same Susannah who was named in his 1847 will and who was enumerated with him on the 1850 census. Her maiden name has not

Chatham Co., N.C., 1810 Federal census, p. 213; Bethesda Presbyterian Church Cemetery, "North Carolina Cemetery Inscriptions" (typescript; Works Progress Administration, n.d.), unpaginated, microfilm 314976, Genealogical Society of Utah.

17 Meroney, *op. cit.*, no page number; Caswell Co., N.C. Estate Records (Loose papers), William Meroney file, 1816, North Carolina State Archives; Katharine Kerr Kendall, *Caswell County, North Carolina Will Books, 1814-1843* (n.p., 1983), p. 54.

18 Chatham Co., N.C., Deed Book M, p. 163, Deed Book P, p. 390.

been identified. William died at Chatham between that enumeration (30 Sept. 1850) and the 1852 initiation of extensive proceedings in the probate of his estate.¹⁹

4. ALEXANDER CLARK, II, fourth child named in the 178 donation, was apparently born between the 1775 birth of the third child and the *ca.*1782-83 birth of the fifth child. (The existence of only one child born in this interval suggests that at least one Clark child may have died in infancy and the noticeable omission of a child named for Phoebe's father—after the naming of Phoebe and Alexander's first-born son for Alexander's father—raises the question whether this child may have been a son named Feild.)

The 1800 census identifies Alexander as an apparently wed head of household, aged 10-16 (which age is surely i error since it would place his birth at least two years after his father's death), and he has not been found on the 1810 enumeration of Chatham nor has he been identified as one of the numerous Alexander Clarks on censuses elsewhere in that year. It might be presumed that he had had just come of age in Oct. 1801 when his older brother William deeded to him a tract of family land; if so, this would place his birth at *ca.*1780.²⁰

The recipient of a "Negro boy Edom" who was "to be his property at seventeen years of age," as well as 400 acres of his grandfather Clark's land "near the Old Chappell," Alexander additionally purchased some 40 acre of his father's plantation from his brother William in 1801. However, he did not remain a Chatham County farmer. After disposing of his family holdings in 1805-1806 (under the signature "A. Clark") he disappears for the most part from Chatham County records. He seems to be the same Alexander who, together with Nancy Clark and other Henderson heirs, executed a Chatham County conveyance in May 1824. In the "loose paper" estate file for his father in the State Archives at Raleigh there is found a bill of account drawn against the estate of "Alexander Clark, dec'd." by one John Newlin before a justice of the peace in Orange Co., N.C. Entries date from 1816 through 21 Dec. 1826, one of which places the deceased in "Pittsborough," Chatham County, in Feb. 1822 It is believed that this Alexander who died late in 1826

19 *Ibid.*; Chatham Co., N.C., 1800 Federal census, p. 155; 1850 Federal census, Lower Reg't., p. 489, family 722-722; Chatham Co., N.C., Estate Records (Loose papers William Clark file, 1852, North Carolina State Archives.

20 Chatham Co., N.C., 1800 Federal census, p. 152; Chatham Co., N.C., Deed Book M, p. 163.

is the son of Phoebe and Alexander, Sr.²¹

5. JOHN CLARK, the last child named in the 1784 donation to the children of Phoebe and Alexander, was born 1784 according to the 1850 census. However, since his father's death occurred in 1782 (late 1782, apparently), a posthumous birth for John would place that birthdate no later than mid-1783, while his sale of part of his inheritance on 17 Nov. 1803 suggests that he had just come of age at that time; 1782 would be a more probable birth year. Under the terms of his grandfather's donation John received one "negro boy Peter," together with 200 acres adjoining "a tract entered by the deceased Alexander Clark ... adjoining John Ramsey's line," and with all appurtenances, negroes, etc., belonging to the plantation. Due to the vicissitudes of life, however, he was to part with most of this, beginning with that 1803 sale of his grandfather's land. The 30 Nov. 1850 enumeration of his neighborhood portrays him as a widowed farmer, claiming an estate valued at only \$75, who lived with and among his offspring.²²

The records which document the foregoing sketch of the family of Phoebe and Alexander Clark also document a series of important parallels between Phoebe Clark and Phoebe Jefferson and serve as the basis for this researcher's conclusion that the two Phoebes are one and the same:

MAJOR CONSIDERATIONS:

1. An association can be proven between Alexander Clark and one John Jefferson who is believed to be Phoebe's brother John, as evidenced by the following document:

John Perritt and wife, Agnes (x) Perritt, of Pitt Co., N.C. to William Clark of Edgecombe Co., Nov. 7, 1768, for £50 Proc. money a tract of 700 acres on the north bank of Maple Swamp, adjoining Henry Horn's old line, Lewis Perritt, John Perritt, and Job Bass. Wit: *Alexander Clark, Jno. Jefferson*, Wm. Costillo Hill.²³

John Perritt and wife Agnes (x) Perritt, of Pitt Co., N.C. to William Clark of Edgecombe Co., Nov. 7,

²¹ Chatham Co., N.C., Deed Book O, p. 98, Deed Book U, p. 200, Deed Book Z, p. 182; Alexander Clark Estate file, 1782, Chatham Co., N.C., Estate Records (Loose papers), North Carolina State Archives.

²² Chatham Co., N.C., Deed Book N, pp. 210-11; Chatham Co., N.C., 1850 Federal census, Lower Regt., p. 488, family 707-707.

²³ Edgecombe Co., N.C., Deed Book D, p. 110, abstracted in Watson, *op. cit.*, pp. 272-73. Italics supplied.

1768, for £17 10s. Proc. money a tract of 260 acres on Maple Swamp and Bay Branch adjoining Job Bass. Wit: *Jno. Jefferson, Alexander Clark, William Costilo Hill.*²⁴

The recorded deeds from which the above abstracts are taken are only clerk's copies; they do not offer for study the actual signatures of "Jno. Jefferson." Similarly, all the Virginia documents found on Phoebe's brother John also do not provide an original signature. However, it is noted that both Johns habitually signed with the abbreviation of their/his given name(s)—i.e.: Jno.

2. Again in 1770, there is found in the Edgecombe Co., N.C., neighborhood of William Clark another Jefferson by the name of one of Phoebe's brothers, Thomas. It also can be established that this Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Clark had associates in common:

William (W) Byrd (Bird) of Bute Co., N.C. to Jacob Sessums of Edgecombe Co., Nov. 26, 1770, for 96/6/8 Proc. money two tracts of land in Edgecombe Co.:

(1) 100 acres on Maple Swamp near Fishing Creek, it being part of a tract granted by patent to James Moore on April 3, 1730; (2) 200 acres lying on the west side of Maple Swamp adjoining George Stevenson, William Price, and Lewis Perritt, it being part of a tract granted to John Scott bearing date Aug. 10, 1762. Wit: *Thos. Jefferson, Is'c Sessums, Solomon Sessums.*²⁵

Not only do these abstracts reveal that Thomas Jefferson's associate (be he Byrd or Sessums) lived along Maple Swamp, as did Alexander's father (and later Alexander), but a contemporary deed dated in Jan. 1767 identifies Alexander Clark as a witness to another purchase of land by the same Jacob Sessums who is affiliated with Thomas Jefferson in the conveyance above.²⁶ Again, it is noted that the Edgecombe signature of this Thomas Jefferson, like those of Phoebe's brother Thomas appearing on Mecklenburg records, uses the abbreviated form of the first name rather than a signature with the name spelled in full.

3. With regard to both the Thomas (Thos.) Jefferson and the John (Jno.) Jefferson above, it should be noted that neither were residents of Edgecombe County and neither has been found yet in any other North Carolina document. It appears in both cases that they were in this colony temporarily—either on business or for a

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 302, citing Edgecombe Co., N.C., Deed Book D, p. 284.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 200, citing Edgecombe Co., N.C., Deed Book C, p. 459.

visit. If so, with whom? The fact that on both occasions their visit took them into the Clark neighborhood and, in the case of John, physically in the presence of Alexander Clark, is surely significant.

4. It can be shown that both Phoebe Jefferson and Phoebe Clark were in possession of a female Negro slave who bore a name that was highly unusual among females—Frank. In both instances, the name of the slave is written on the recorded copy (the document closest to the original that is known to exist in each case) with extreme legibility, removing the possibility that the name is being misread out of a misguided eagerness to "prove one's point"; in neither case might the name be *Frankie* or some other more common diminutive for the female name Frances. Consider:

... I, John Jefferson of the County of Mecklenburg have bargained and sold unto Phebee Jefferson by consent of Henry Delony her guardian one Negroe girl named Frank for the sum of Forty pounds. ... s/ *Jno.* Jefferson. Witnesses: Thomas Feild, Thomas (x) Gadd; John (x) Thomson. Drawn: no date. Proven: 9 Feb. 1767, Mecklenburg, by John Jefferson.²⁷

Upon the death of Phoebe Clark's husband Alexander, in 1782, an inventory taken of his estate showed that the couple owned "6 Negros, 4 fellows & 2 wenches." Names were given for none of the six. By the time that the estate was auctioned in 1785 to effect its settlement, there remained only two slaves belonging to the estate, males James and Mentos, both of whom were purchased by Widow Phoebe. Extant records from the estate do not account for the disposition of the "missing" slaves—two men and two women—in the intervening years.

One common explanation in such cases was that they had been mortgaged by the deceased and were subsequently claimed by a creditor, or otherwise used to clear a debt left by the deceased. There is not known to exist any schedule of debts, accounts or notes left by the late Alexander, but the body of documents existing for him indicates that his financial health, at the time of his death, was not good. His family was left in straitened circumstances, occupying a house and farm that were sparsely furnished even for that era.²⁸

Meanwhile, two months before the auction, Alexander's father executed the previously mentioned deed of gift to "the children of deceased Alexander Clark ... my son." The donation consisted of the outright conveyance of

27 Mecklenburg Co., Va., Deed Book 1, p. 330.

28 Chatham Co., N.C., Estate Records (Loose papers), Alexander Clark, 1782, file, North Carolina State Archives.

four slaves—two males and two females—as well as the future promise of one other slave to become the property of one son when he reached the age of 17 and the donation to the sons of two plantations. The grandfather William concluded with the statement that the above property was at that time "*In the hands or custody of the said William Clark Senr. and Phebey Clark, mother to the aforesaid children.*"

It may be reasonably expected that Clark's two sizable plantations would not already be "in the hands" of Phoebe, who as a young widow with small infants would have had her hands full caring for the struggling plantation her husband left. The property that *would* more likely have been "in her hands or custody" would have been the slaves—particularly the two men and two women who were given immediately to her children—and the most logical reason for her already having custody of those slaves would be that they were the "missing" two men and women that were her and Alexander's property prior to his death.

It is the conclusion of this researcher, based upon experience with numerous similar situations in which more clarified documentation exists, that:

a. After the death of Alexander, his father acquired title to the "missing" four slaves in exchange for clearing incumbrances faced by his grandchildren and their mother.

b. To assist the family of his late son in its economic struggle he let those four slaves remain with them.

c. By executing the 1784 donation, he returned to his son's offspring the title to those slaves.

In light of the above facts and conclusions *it is most important to note that the first of the four slaves conveyed was "a negro wench FRANK."*

As a further test of the hypothesis that the "Negro girl Frank," acquired by Phoebe Jefferson in 1767, might be the same "negro wench Frank" in the custody of Phoebe Clark 14 years later, an effort has been made to establish statistically the commonness/uncommonness of this name among contemporary female slaves of both the Lunenburg/Mecklenburg area of Virginia and the Chatham County area of North Carolina. A sampling of fifty documents dealing with slaves, in each of the geographical areas for the relevant time period, revealed a number of slave names used repetitively—some in only a handful of cases, some in a relatively large number of cases—but *no other female slave named Frank was found in this sampling in either state.*

5. Naming patterns within the Jefferson family of Virginia favored the use of family names as given names as well as the more common repetition of first names

through several generations. For example, two of Phoebe Jefferson's brothers were named Peter Feild and John Robertson—Feild being the family name of their paternal grandmother (Mary Feild) as well as their father's first name; Robertson being the family name of their, and Phoebe's, mother (Mary Frances Robertson).

The same pattern existed in the family of Phoebe and Alexander Clark. The fact certainly does exist that a number of their contemporary families (though probably not the majority) followed this same custom. However, the element that is important to this research problem is that *Jefferson family names are used as middle names within the Clark family*. As previously shown, the eldest daughter of Phoebe and Alexander was named Winnifred Webb for Alexander's mother. The second daughter was named *Frances Robertson*. Is it only by coincidence that this is the name of Phoebe Jefferson's mother? It is also noted that Phoebe Clark used the nickname Fanny for her daughter Frances Robertson—while in the Jefferson family all of the females named Frances were routinely called Fanny (including Phoebe Jefferson's sister Frances who married the previously mentioned guardian of Phoebe, Henry Delony).

There also exists for consideration the family tradition that Phoebe Clark's granddaughter, the previously mentioned Phoebe Mott, was actually named Phoebe *Jefferson* Mott and the fact that Phoebe Jefferson Mott's half-brother, John Alexander Meroney, named his first son Thomas Jefferson. (While this latter name was quite common in this era—many families named sons after President Jefferson—it is important to note that *all* other names which John Alexander gave to his six children were, without exception, family names.)²⁹

6. It also can be proven that Phoebe Clark and her offspring, in Chatham Co., N.C., were neighbors—and intermarried with—Jefferson kin. According to studies of the Virginia Jeffersons and Farrars, Phoebe Jefferson's uncle George Farrar (husband of Judith Jefferson) had nephews Peter and Joseph Farrar (sons of John Farrar). In the 1790s these nephews relocated in Chatham—not merely in the same county with Phoebe and her sons, but as near neighbors. A Farrar grandson subsequently married Phoebe's granddaughter Mary Clark, daughter of William.³⁰

29 Meroney and Macinnes, *op. cit.*, [pp. 103, 165].

30 Landon C. Bell, "Judith Jefferson's Husband," *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine*, ser. 2, v. 11, p. 224, discredits the earlier theory that Judith Jefferson was married to one William Farrar and effectively proves her husband to be George, son of Maj.

SECONDARY CONSIDERATIONS:

1. There has also been noted, after the marriage of Phoebe and Alexander, the introduction of Clark named into the family of Phoebe Jefferson. For example, in 1779 a son born to Peterfeild Jefferson (Phoebe's brother) was given the name *Alexander*—a name that has not been found among earlier members of this Jefferson family. Similarly, the name "Winny"—the nickname which Phoebe used for her first daughter—was introduced in that same period into the slave household of Phoebe Jefferson's guardian Henry Deloney and his son Henry, Jr.³¹ There is also observed among Clark slaves the presence of names prominent in the Jefferson and Farrar families, for example the previously mentioned slave Peter.

2. Henry Delony, Sr., Phoebe Jefferson's Virginia guardian at the time that Alexander Clark of Edgecombe Co., N.C., took a wife named Phoebe, appears to have connections of his own to Edgecombe. The origins of Henry and the other Lunenburg Delonys (variously spelled Delone, Deloney) have never been determined. Henry first appeared in Lunenburg in 1746, the year the county was created. Landon C. Bell "supposes" (admittedly without proof) that he was the son of Lewis Delony, one of the first justices of that county. (It is possibly significant to note that Henry does not appear to have given the name Lewis to any of his sons—although he did give to one of them the name Edward, a name that is significant to this research problem.) Henry is also known to have taken, as his first wife, Frances Jefferson, a daughter of Feild—although Bell appears to have been unaware of this union. Upon the death of Frances, which occurred about 1752 according to the Mecklenburg County genealogist Katherine B. Elliott, Delony entered into a

William Farrar. See also "Notes From the Records of Albemarle County," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, v. 26, p. 318, and "The Farrar Family," *The Virginia Magazine ...*, v. 7, p. 427, and v. 9, p. 324, for additional relevant data on the Virginia Farrars. Much North Carolina data of use is to be found in such sources as 1800-1850 federal censuses, population schedules, Chatham Co., N.C., extensive Farrar-Clark entries; Chatham Co., N.C., Probate Book A, pp. 38 and ff, 67 and ff; William Clark file, 1852, Chatham Co., N.C., Estates Records (Loose papers) North Carolina State Archives.

³¹ Jefferson Family Bible, in "Jefferson," *Genealogical of Virginia Families from Tyler's Quarterly Historical Magazine*, v. 2, pp. 452-55; Mecklenburg Co., Va., Will Book 3, p. 407.

marriage with the widowed Rebecca Broadnax Walker of Brunswick. At the time that Phoebe Jefferson became Delony's ward, it was Rebecca who was Delony's wife rather than Phoebe's sister Frances.

Documentary evidence found to date only scantily covers the Virginia activities of Delony prior to 1753. Meanwhile, one Henry Delony/Delone/Deelon/Dulon appears on scattered records in the colony of North Carolina. In one instance, he appears in the same county in which an earlier *Edward Delone* had been granted a tract of land in 1739—and that county was Edgecombe, where Phoebe and Alexander Clark first resided. Moreover, the land grant made to Edward Delone in Edgecombe was on Fishing Creek where Alexander's father, William, entered his own land and where Thomas and John Jefferson later appeared contemporaneously with Alexander and Phoebe as witnesses to deeds executed by William Clark and his neighbors. No other Delonys have been found in colonial North Carolina and none have yet been found after 1752. Most of the 1741-52 appearances of the name Henry Delony are in counties which adjoined Edgecombe—particularly Bertie and Chowan.³²

It may be correctly concluded that the Henry Delony references that have been found in North Carolina prior to (but not yet after) 1753 refer to a single individual, and if it may be concluded that he is the same individual who after 1753 appears regularly and prominently in Lunenburg (this being the same Henry Delony who was guardian of Phoebe Jefferson), then there may be found in this man another geographical link between Phoebe Jefferson of Lunenburg/Mecklenburg and Phoebe Clark of Edgecombe/Chatham.

32 Landon C. Bell, *Cumberland Parish, Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1746-1816; Vestry Book, 1746-1816* (Richmond, 1930), pp. 201-02. Bell, however, was not aware of the Delony-Jefferson marriage and erroneously identified Delony's daughter by Frances Jefferson as a daughter of Rebecca Broadnax Walker. For additional documentation of this daughter's maternity, see will of Feild Jefferson (Mecklenburg Co., Va., Will Book 1, p. 4). Virginia material on Henry Delony can be found in Katherine B. Elliott, *Early Settlers of Lunenburg County, Virginia* (2 v.; South Hill, Va., 1964), v. 1, p. 106; v. 2, pp. 42, 64, 103, 165; Bell, *Cumberland Parish*, p. 503; "Brunswick County Marriage Bonds," *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine*, ser. 1, v. 20, p. 197; and the numerous volumes of extant county records in Lunenburg and Mecklenburg as well as in the parent counties of Brunswick and Surry where Lewis Delony first

3. Still another family name which appears to provide a circumstantial link between Phoebe Jefferson of Lunenburg and Phoebe Clark of Chatham is Robertson. It will be recalled that the mother of Phoebe Jefferson was Mary Frances Robertson. No genealogist has yet succeeded in identifying her birth family, to the knowledge of this researcher. The following may be merely coincidental, but certainly it raises a germane point for further study:

a. When the Clarks first moved to Chatham County they chose to settle on *Robertson Creek*—first purchasing 127 acres from Thomas and Elizabeth Robertson—and Phoebe and her children remained neighbors to this family of Robertsons at least through 1808.³³

b. The Farrar cousins of Phoebe Jefferson, who also moved to Chatham, married into this same Robertson family.³⁴ Given the family's proclivity for in-group marriage, the probability of these Robertsons being related to Mary Frances Robertson, wife of Feild, should be considered.

4. A final piece of "evidence." of a now-undocumentable nature, is possibly worth a measure of consideration. In the Clark-Meroney family files studied by this researcher, there appear notes from correspondence conducted in the early 1920s between Mrs. William James (Katherine Meroney) Morphy⁵, Germantown, Pa. (John Swift Meroney⁴, John Alexander Meroney³, Winnifred Webb Clark², Phoebe Jefferson Clark¹) and Miss Esther Alice Meikleham of

resided. For referenced North Carolina Delony data see Margaret M. Hofmann, *Colony of North Carolina, Abstracts of Land Patents*, v. 1 (Weldon, 1982), #3947; Hofmann, *Abstracts of Deeds: Edgecombe Precinct, Edgecombe County, North Carolina, 1732 through 1758* (Weldon, 1969), p. 82; "Bertie County: Inven., Sales, & Divs., 1727-1744," *Journal of North Carolina Genealogy*, v. 9, p. 1184; "North Carolina Administrator's Bonds, 1680-1778," *ibid.*, v. 20 p. 2985; "Photocopy of North Carolina's Oldest Extant Marriage Bond," *The North Carolinian*, v. 2, Dec. 1956, no page number. It should be noted that the editor of this last source read Delony's name as "DeLon" and indexed it as such—although the photocopy does reveal the presence of a somewhat disjointed "y" at the end of the name. Other editors-abstracters seem to have had similar problems in deciphering his signature or name, as for example Hofmann's Edgecombe deed abstract which renders his name as "Henry Deelon/Dulon (?)"

33 Laird and Jackson, *Chatham County Minutes*, p. 28; Laird and Jackson, *Chatham County Deeds*, p. 375; Chatham Co., N.C., Deed Book M, p. 163, Deed Book P, p. 390.

34 Chatham Co., N.C., Will Book A, p. 38.

Lindale, Ga., a great-granddaughter of President Thomas Jefferson. One typescript, labelled "Copy of record sent to Mrs. William James Morphy by her Kinswoman Miss Esther Alice Meckleham," provides the typically (for that period) undocumented overview of the "Field or Feild" family and the Randolph family (from which Miss Meikelham descended although Mrs. Morphy did not) and concludes with a sketch of the family of Feild Jefferson which identifies Feild's daughter Phoebe as the wife of Alexander Clark; and the latter's father William is described therein as a friend and adjoining landholder of the Jeffersons. From the manner in which this typescript is presented, it is impossible to determine exactly what words were used by Miss Meikleham, what paraphrasing has taken place, and to what extent the typescript might interject someone else's opinion. The inference, however, is that Thomas Jefferson's great-granddaughter acknowledged the fact that Phoebe Clark was indeed her great-grandfather's first cousin.

Any filial relationship "established" by genealogists is subject to doubt. Even so-called "original" documents which specifically state relationships may be in error. According to the noted attorney/genealogist, Noel C. Stevenson, J.D., F.A.S.G., "insofar as genealogical research is concerned, 'absolute proof' or 'conclusive proof' of ancestry is not possible. ... instead ancestry may be established according to a 'preponderance or greater weight of the evidence.'"³⁵

In short, the best that any family researcher can do is to attempt to locate every shred of evidence possible, and, untiltimately, to base a decision upon the preponderance of that evidence. In doing so, he must "build a case" to support each link in the chain of relationships that he reconstructs—in the same manner as a lawyer who must convince or dissuade a judge and jury—and the evidence upon which that case is built may range from substantive to circumstantial. Genealogical relationships "established" in this manner will, in many instances, withstand all future tests of scholarship. Others may be proven invalid as more documents become available for research and more sophisticated methods of exploiting and linking genealogical data are developed.

Given these existing limitations, it is the opinion of this researcher that the preponderance of evidence known to exist at this point in time weighs heavily in favor of one conclusion: Phoebe Clark, wife of Alexander

³⁵ Noel C. Stevenson, *Genealogical Evidence: A Guide to the Standard of Proof Relating to Pedigrees, Ancestry, Heirship and Family History* (Laguna Hills, Calif., 1979), p. 182.

Clark of Edgecombe and Chatham cos., N.C., appears to be the identical person as Phoebe Jefferson, daughter of Feild Jefferson of Lunenburg and Mecklenburg cos., Va. It is also hoped that other interested researchers will view this present argument as a challenge and will attempt to develop a case—whether it prove to be supportive or contradictory—that can be based upon more substantive and less circumstantial evidence than that found to date.