

MAY MUSEUM & PARK HISTORICAL NEWSLETTER

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SPRING 2023



The May Museum and Park is dedicated to preserving and interpreting Farmville area history. Ms. Tabitha M. DeVisconti, bequeathed her 19th century home with its contents, the first house in Farmville, NC, to the Town of Farmville in 1983. The Town opened the facility in 1991 as the May Museum and Park. The museum's mission is preserving, interpreting, and sharing the history of the Farmville region to foster better understanding and appreciation of the people that built and contributed to Pitt County's rural heritage.

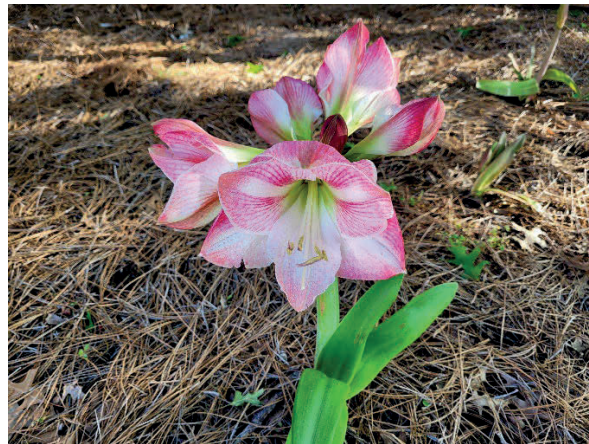


Since 2013, the Susan Howard Wyre Cable Memorial Garden at the May Museum has lovingly been tended to with seasonal flowers and plants. This Easter the garden was whimsically decorated for the delight of children with colorful large eggs, chicks, and goats.

Welcome! The Friends of the May Museum present this the second May Museum Historical Newsletter. We hope that all who read these newsletters enjoy the fascinating local history of the May Museum and the town of Farmville. Each issue of the newsletter will have recent Museum events, Museum displays, history, old and new photos, biographies, and memorabilia all dealing with the May Museum and the Town of Farmville. You are always invited to become a member of The Friends of the May Museum which sponsors enjoyable social events in the museum gardens throughout the year. The following is a list of the upcoming events sponsored by the Friends of the May Museum for the year 2023 to put on your calendar.....

2023 SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- ❖ **April--June--- Exhibition of Early Maps of Farmville**
- ❖ **April 23--- Annual Garden Party** (with Parade of Hats) May Museum Garden, 3-6pm
- ❖ **May 18--- First Annual Pig Pickin' in the Park**—Live music from Trainwreck. 5:30-8:30 pm May Museum Garden
- ❖ **May 30**—Program in conjunction with the Farmville Library on the Quilt Collection at the May Museum. Farmville Library, 10:30 am
- ❖ **June 15---Music in the Park--** Live music from The Rakiem Walker Project. 5:30-8:30 pm May Museum Garden
- ❖ **July 20---Music in the Park---** Live music from Adrian & Co., featuring Lonnie Britton. 5:30-8:30 pm May Museum Garden
- ❖ **August 17--Music in the Park---** Live music from Cooper Greer. 5:30-8:30 pm May Museum Garden
- ❖ **September 21---Music in the Park---** Live music from The Monterio Experience. 5:30-8:30 pm May Museum Garden



A NEW EXHIBITION:
HISTORIC MAPS OF FARMVILLE
1864-1923



APRIL-JUNE 2023
MAY MUSEUM & PARK
3802 MAIN STREET, FARMVILLE, NC
OPEN MON.-THURS. 9:30-1:00

FOR APPOINTMENTS CALL 252-758-6882
OR E-MAIL RKAMMERER@FARMVILLENC.GOV

BIOGRAPHY----James Williams May



James Williams May



Tabitha Bynum May

James Williams May, b. July 24, 1820 in Pitt Co., d. May 21, 1882 in Farmville, NC, was the son of James May and Harriet Williams and grandson of Major Benjamin May of the Revolution. James Williams May married on June 25, 1844 in Edgecombe Co., NC to Tabitha Bynum, b. May 18, 1822, d. Jan. 28, 1891 in Farmville, NC, dau. of Gideon Bynum and Sally May. James and Tabitha were both buried in the Major Benjamin May Cemetery, Farmville, NC.

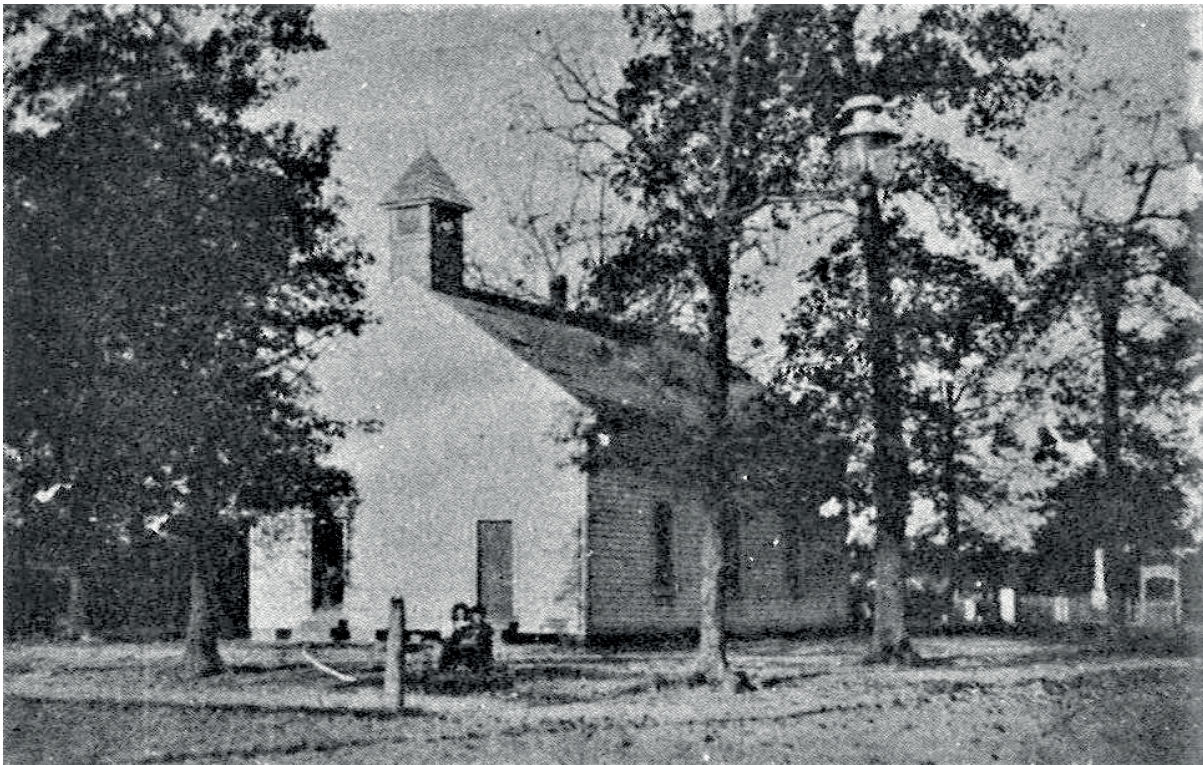
It is believed that James W. May built his home [now the May Museum] on the Snow Hill Road in what is now Farmville around 1844 for his marriage. By 1849, James W. May and Gideon Bynum were in co-partnership under the style "May & Bynum." According to the notes of Ms. Tabitha DeVisconti, Farmville in 1850 consisted of the home and store of James W. May and a blacksmith shop and schoolhouse. According to the 1850 census, there was a store adjacent to James W. May's house run by John P. Bynum.

James W. May served as postmaster of Farmville, NC, from Sept. 23, 1850 to Jan. 10, 1851, when the office was discontinued.

According to the 1850 Pitt County Agricultural Census, James W. May owned 655 wooded acres and 120 cleared acres, valued at \$3,100. He had 4 horses, 1 mule, 5 milk cows, 3

working oxen, 13 other cattle, 15 sheep and 60 hogs, all valued at \$462. In the year 1849-50, James harvested 13 bushels of wheat, 700 bushels of Indian corn, 25 bushels of Irish potatoes, 300 bushels of sweet potatoes, 250 bushels of oats, and 100 bushels of peas and beans. He made ¼ of a cotton bale, 30 pds. of wool and 150 pds. of butter. He also had \$113 worth of farm implements and slaughtered \$282 worth of farm animals.

In 1853, there was an upheaval over alcohol in the Tyson's Primitive Baptist Church of which James W. May was a member. He and 95 members left the Tyson's Primitive Baptist Church to form their own congregation. James W. May gave them one acre of land beside his house on the Snow Hill road to build their own church near the old free schoolhouse, to be used "*as a house of Christian worship of Almighty God and no other purpose or use whatsoever.*" On Dec. 12, 1854, after the church building was built, James W. May deeded the land to the new church which was called "Antioch Christian Baptist Church." James W. May was named one of the first church trustees.



Old Antioch Church, corner of Church and Main Streets

On July 1, 1858, James W. May sold a corner lot of 8 ¼ acres adjacent to the Common School District 4 to the President and Trustees of the Pitt County Female Institute, being: Peter E. Hines, John May, Lemuel DeBerry, Lambert P. Beardsley, Joseph N. Bynum, and Alfred Moye.

In the 1860 Pitt County Agricultural Census, James W. May owned 450 wooded acres and 150 cleared acres, valued at \$1,200, made 44 bales of cotton (400 pds. each), made 66 gallons of wine, harvested 1200 bushels of Indian corn, harvested 300 bushels of peas and beans, and had 40 pds. of orchard products.



James served in the Civil War enlisting on Feb. 1, 1862, in the 44th Regiment-Infantry, Company C. After participating in numerous bloody battles, James W. May was wounded at the battle of Jones' Farm, VA on Oct. 1, 1864. He was mustered out from a Federal Field Hospital on Oct. 4, 1864. His Civil War record said he died from his wounds but clearly he survived and returned home to become a planter and businessman.

On Sept. 13, 1865, James W. May took the required Oath of Allegiance to the Union before Walter Newton, JP.

In 1865, James W. May was named treasurer of the Marlboro Lodge, No. 177. In Dec. 1866 in an IRS Tax Assessment James W. May paid \$177.00 for making 118 gallons of cider brandy. He also under the firm name of "James W. May & Pippin," paid \$56.10 tax for making 1870 pds. of cotton.

In 1867, J. W. May, Sherrod Belcher and Mr. Grimmer opened a store. On Aug. 1, 1868, John H. Hines transferred his interest in the firm "J. T. Bynum & Co." at Marlboro to James W. May.

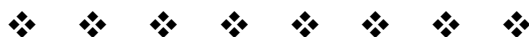
In 1872, James W. May was named as one of the six commissioners of the new town of Farmville. James was named the first Mayor of Farmville. On May 15, 1872, James W. May sold a lot at the corner of George and Pine Streets to Jane E. Brand for \$35. On May 25, 1872, James W. May rented the house of James W. Collins in Morehead City, NC for \$30 for one year. May was to put in a good well in the yard at his own expense.

By 1873, James W. May was in business with Matthew R. Jones under the style "May & Jones." Jones left the co-partnership and sold the store lot to May on Mar. 31, 1873 for \$800.

In Aug. 1873, upon township election, James W. May was elected magistrate of California Township. He was elected again in 1875.

On Nov. 12, 1874, James and Tabitha May sold a lot behind the Antioch Meeting House to Richard A. Bynum. By 1877, James had a store in Farmville known as "James W. May & Son." The store and warehouse were located at the corner of Main and Belcher Streets.

James W. May died on May 21, 1882 in Farmville, NC. In the journal of Willis Robert Williams (1826-1910) he mentions the death of his cousin James W. May by saying, "...*he is blest for he was a good and noble Christian man and to loose such a friend is like tearing cords around my heart.*" At his death, James W. May had \$3,000 worth of debt and Tabitha May had to sue her children to sell off 209 acres and his store, warehouse, and lots to pay off the debt.



FARMVILLE---- Photographs



Old postcard showing the west side of Main Street looking north from the intersection of Wilson Street. Notice the brick Turnage Buildings on the left.



Old postcard showing the east side of Main Street looking south from the intersection of Wilson Street. Notice the William Moye Lang brick Buildings on the right corner.

LAST PHOTOGRAPH



The warm early morning light that comes through gaps in the tree canopy creates a dance across the front of the May Museum as it has done for over a hundred and fifty years.

