

MAY MUSEUM & PARK HISTORICAL NEWSLETTER

MAY MUSEUM, 3802 SOUTH MAIN ST., FARMVILLE, NC 27828

POST OFFICE BOX 623

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SUMMER 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.



The summer blue sky reflects in the birdbath in the garden of the May Museum and Park.

Welcome Again! The Friends of the May Museum present this the third May Museum Historical Newsletter. We hope that you have enjoyed reading the past newsletters full of 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

- ❖ **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
- ❖ **October 22--- Annual Membership Oyster Roast...** 4:30 pm--until -- May Museum Garden RSVP 252-758-6882
- ❖ **November--- Museum Tours available**
- ❖ **December 10---Christmas Candlelight Tea...**3:00--5:00 pm --May Museum Garden RSVP 252-758-6882



Summer brings the sweet smell of Cape Jasmine in the garden.

On April 23, 2023, the Annual Garden Party was held in the Museum Garden.



Larry and LaRue King shared this beautiful giant basket of flowers to the occasion.



Local music legend, Steve Creech and friend, Bob Tyson, played their enjoyable cool jazz stylings for the Garden Party.



Different scenes from the Garden Party





(L-R) Erica Letchworth and Karen Smith, winner of both “Best in Show” and “Most Creative” catagory in the Hat Contest.. This was Smith’s tenth year placing in the contest.

On May 18, 2023, the Friends of the May Museum held its first Annual “Pig Pickin’ in the Park.” The excellent barbecue and fixin’s were purveyed by Gorham’s Café, located at 3569 S Fields St., Farmville, NC.



Ernest Gorham, of Gorham’s Café serves some of the good stuff to Darlene Gaynor.



Random scenes from the Music in the Park





(L-R) Mayor John Moore, Frankie Moye, Dana Cox, and Bob Newton.



(l-R) Dan Roberson, Paul Beil, Suellen Beil, and Bob Newton.



Above is the popular band, *Train Wreck*, which entertained us again on May 18, 2023.



Below, (L-R) Judy Gidley, Paul Rice and Ludie Moore.



On June 29, 2023, the May Museum hosted Joanne Honeycutt, of Greenville, N C, who gave a talk and book signing on her new novel, “Frozen Angels.”

The Friends of the May Museum Appreciate Our Sponsors For Their Contributions and Support.



The Museum Garden has exploded with Summer Zinnias



*4217 East Church Street
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*Special Thanks to the Mosquito
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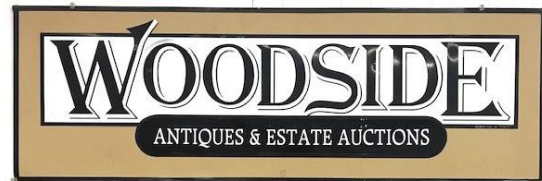
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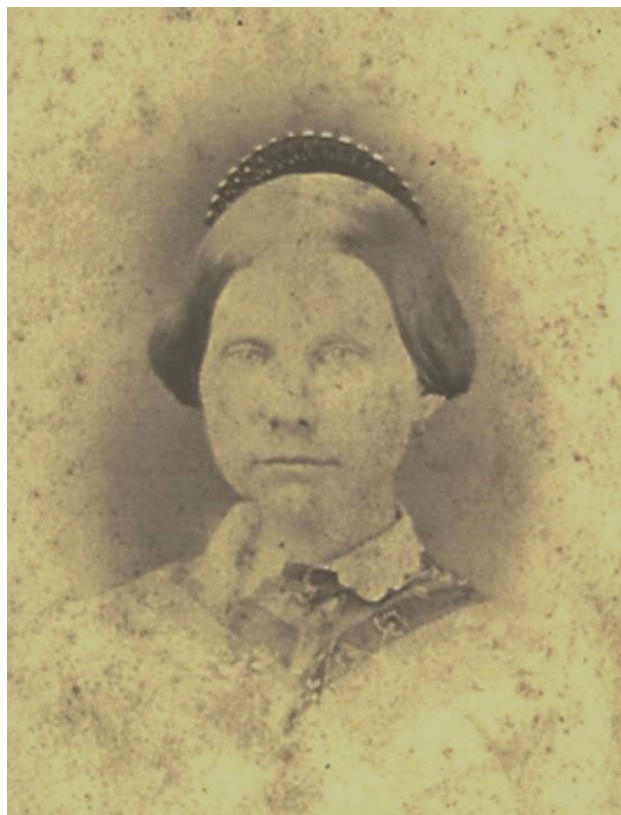
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BIOGRAPHY---Tabitha Bynum May



Tabitha Bynum May, b. May 18, 1822 in Pitt Co., NC, d. Jan. 28, 1891 in Farmville, NC, was the daughter of Gideon Bynum and Sarah (Sally) May. Gideon was a former Pitt County legislator. Tabitha Bynum married on June 25, 1844 in Pitt Co., NC, to her cousin, James Williams May, b. July 24, 1820 in Pitt Co., d. May 21, 1882 in Farmville, NC, the son of James May and Harriet Williams and grandson of Major Benjamin May of the Revolution. Tabitha Bynum's mother, Sally May, was the daughter of Benjamin May, Jr. and Penelope Grimes, and was the granddaughter of Major Benjamin May of the Revolution.

James W. and Tabitha were both buried in the Major Benjamin May Cemetery, Farmville, NC.

Tabitha Bynum appears to have grown up in Pitt County, NC, receiving a good education in local schools.

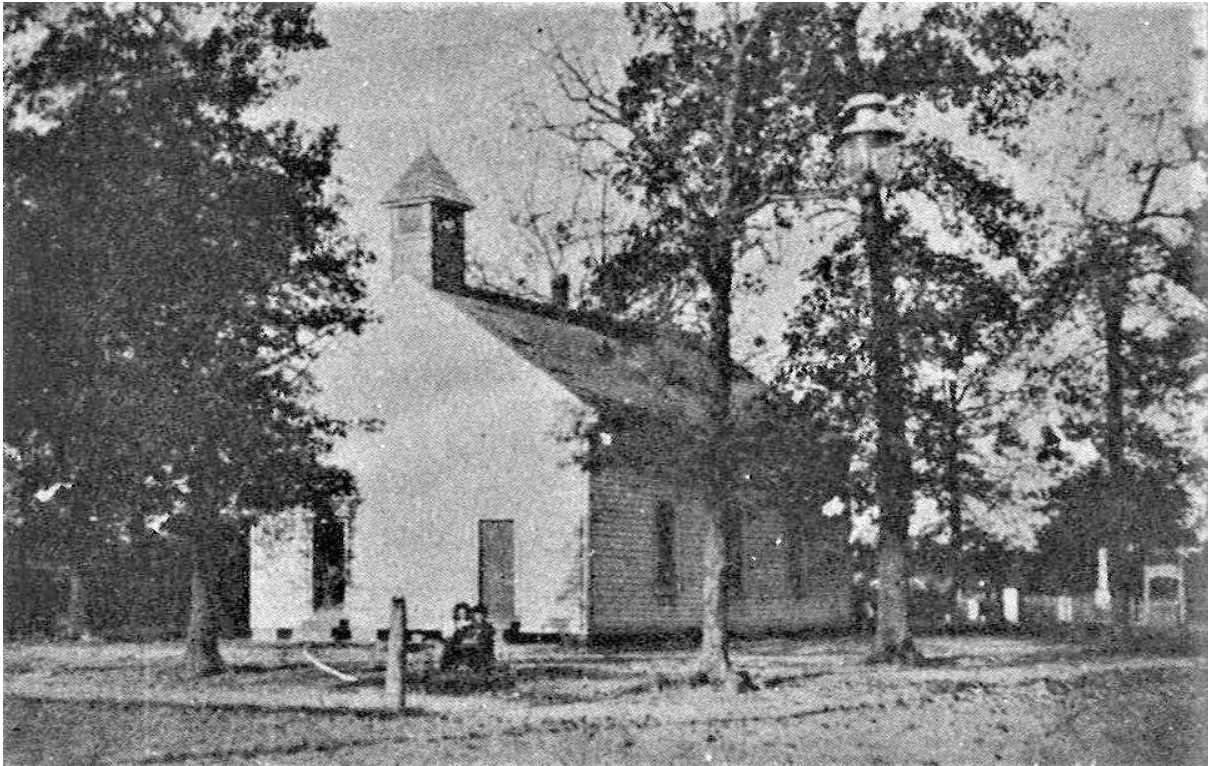
It is believed that James W. May built his Greek revival home [now the May Museum] on the Snow Hill Road in what is now Farmville around 1845 for his marriage to Tabitha. James W. May had growing wealth being a merchant and bought a piano forte for their home. Tabitha may have played the piano and filled her home with her talents. The May Museum has preserved several stunningly beautiful quilts she made.

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 May home, the store and post office of James W. May, a blacksmith shop and schoolhouse. According to the 1850 census, there was a store close to James W. May's house was rented to and run by John P. Bynum. .

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 $\frac{1}{4}$ 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.

Both James W. and Tabitha May were members of the Tyson's Primitive Baptist Church near Bell Arthur, Pirr County. In 1853, there was an upheaval over alcohol in the Church . James W. and Tabitha May and 94 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.

Tabitha was certainly filled with apprehension when on Feb. 21, 1862, her husband James W. May enlisted in the Civil War. He served in Company C, 44th NC Regiment-Infantry,. 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 Dec. 1866 in an IRS Tax Assessment James W. May paid \$177.00 for making 118 gallons of cider brandy. He was also under the firm name of “James W. May & Pippin,” and 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.



James Williams May



Tabitha Bynum May

According to the 1870 Pitt County Agricultural Census, James W. May owned 460 wooded acres and 325 cleared acres, valued at \$8,000. He had 3 horses, 6 mules, 4 milk cows, 3 working oxen, 4 other cattle, and one hog, all valued at \$600. In the year 1869-70, James harvested 100 bushels of winter wheat, 850 bushels of Indian corn, 30 bushels of Irish potatoes, 250 bushels of sweet potatoes, and 5 tons of hay. He made 44 bales of cotton [450 lbs. each], made 50 lbs. of butter and 5,400 lbs. of farm products.. He also slaughtered \$500 worth of farm animals.

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 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.

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. On Oct. 10, 1882, Tabitha May, administratrix of James W. May, dec'd., petitioned the Court to sell her husband's land to pay off debts. An order of the Court was obtained on Nov. 4, 1882. James W. May had left \$3,000 worth

of debt at his death, and Tabitha May had to sue her children to sell off 209 acres, several town lots and his store and warehouse.

At the death of J. O. May, son of Mrs. Tabitha May, Tabitha became guardian of her granddaughter Ione B. May. It seems that J. O. May bought land near Tampa, FL in 1877 and was developing it. The land was then owned by Ione B. May and Mrs. Tabitha May, as guardian, had to sell land to keep the taxes paid on the Florida land. R. L. Davis eventually became guardian of Ione B. May and he went down to Florida to view the land in the interest of Mrs. Sue M. Albritton, Mrs. Tabitha May's daughter.

On Feb. 18, 1886, Mrs. Tabitha May paid \$100 in legal fees for the divorce of her daughter, Addie May from Francis Marion Dupree.

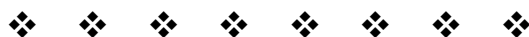
On Oct. 20, 1887, Mrs. Tabitha May bought a tombstone for her husband's grave for \$70 from B. F. Sugg, Greenville tombstone dealer. On Jan. 30, 1889, Tabitha May bought property on Goldsboro Street in Wilson, NC, belonging to the heirs of Mrs. Fannie Hines, dec'd.

Mrs. Tabitha May died at her home in Farmville on Wed., Jan. 28, 1891. Her obituary appeared in the Wilson, NC newspaper ---*"Died Wednesday of last week at her home in Farmville, Mrs. Tabitha May, one of Pitt County's best, noblest and truest Christian women. She was buried on Thursday, Rev. J. L. Winfield conducting the services. Many are the times this writer enjoyed the warm welcome and open-hearted hospitality at her home and was proud to reckon her among his friends, faithful and true. Her Christian life was most beautiful. The controlling impulse of her heart was a broad catholic spirit of charity, and her life exemplified it to a well-known degree. But, alas! She is no more. Peace to her ashes."*



According to another obituary, *"Mrs. Tabitha May, only a week before her death, attended the funeral of her brother-in-law, Dr. King in Wilson, NC. At that time she seemed well and vigorous, and her active movements and general spriteliness gave promise of many more years of usefulness to her family. This good lady, while her death was not sudden, died very unexpectedly, and the shock to her relatives here in Wilson was indeed overwhelming and overpowering."*

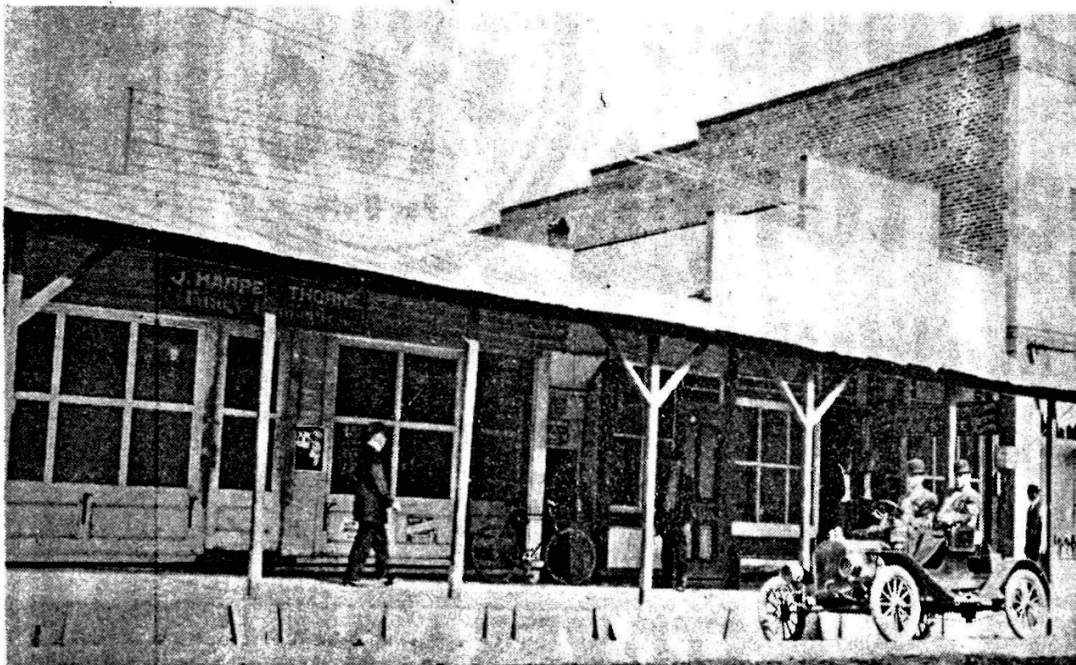
In her Will, recorded in Wilson Co., NC, Tabitha May left a number of prized family quilts to different family members. J. N. Bynum was named as executor of her estate and at her estate sale some of her interesting possessions included two spinning wheels, one loom, a linen wheel, 38 dishes, 24 chairs, two sewing machines, two stoves, a black cow, two red cows, and 1781 pds. of lint cotton.



FARMVILLE---PHOTOGRAPHS



Even in 1914 this business block on Main Street had few empty parking places. This is a view of Main Street, looking northward from the intersection of Church and Main.



The Askew building (now Mormac, on the corner of Main and Wilson) was one of the first brick structures. This photo was made in 1910. The wooden structures, later replaced by the Horton building, housed a drug store operated by Thorne & Newton and next that the Harper & Thorne grocery store.

LAST PHOTOGRAPH



The early evening summer sun casts its light through the window of the Museum kitchen across artifacts from the Robson-Whichard-Taylor house. The Robson house, built ca. 1740 in Pitt County, was moved to the NC Museum of History in Raleigh, NC in 2011, where it is now on permanent display.