

MAY MUSEUM & PARK HISTORICAL NEWSLETTER

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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 museums 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.



Photo courtesy of Michael Cable

Welcome! The Friends of the May Museum present this the first May Museum Historical Newsletter. We hope that all who read this will get their “tastebuds wet” for the love of local history and will have a better appreciation for 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 Year 2022 was the Sesquicentennial-- 150th Anniversary of the founding of the Town of Farmville. The year was packed with numerous events put on by the City and the Friends of the May Museum. The following is a pictorial review of the past year of some of great events that happened in Farmville.....



In honor of the Sesquicentennial the Friends of the May Museum had published a new 254-page book on the history of Farmville by Roger Kammerer. The book entitled, “*Farmville Cavalcade: A Chronology of History,*” is an expansion on the history published in 1972 for Farmville’s 100th Anniversary. The new book is chock full of little known and forgotten history of Farmville, including the black community. It is fully illustrated with old photographs and

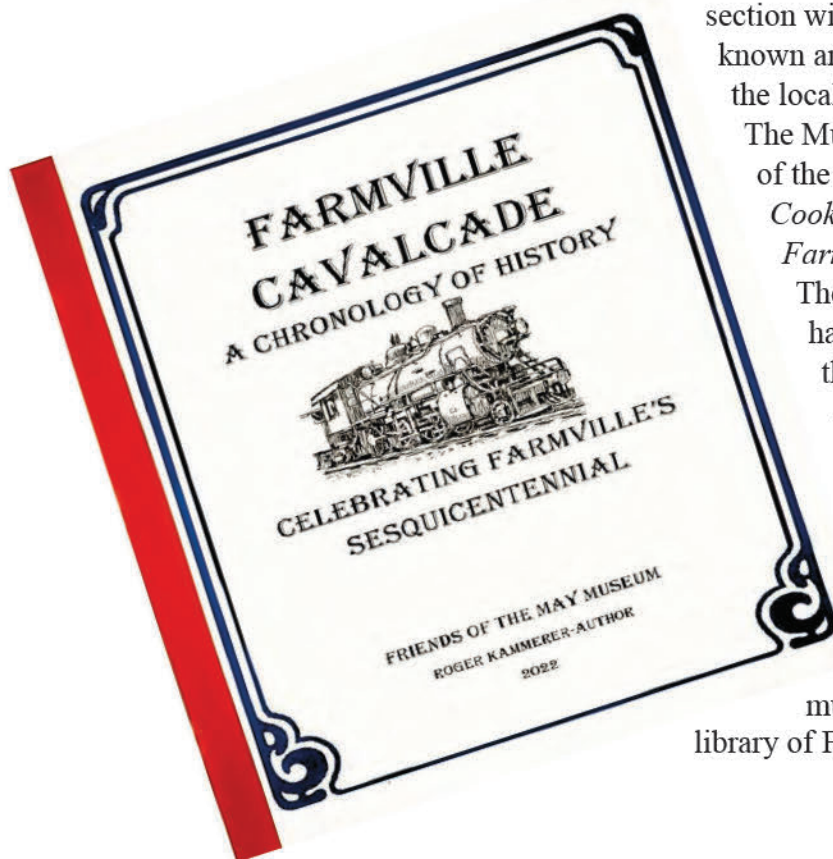
maps of the town. There is also a section with 100 biographies of known and little-known citizens of the local community.

The Museum is also selling copies of the *Sesquicentennial Cookbook, Vol.1-2 Cooking in Farmville from 1942-1992.*

There are a few copies left on hand and can be purchased at the May Museum.

A copy of the “*Farmville Cavalcade*” has also been placed at the Farmville Library in the history room for your perusal.

Both sets of books are a must have in your personal library of Farmvilliana material!





This was the fantastic display for a photo opportunity created by Michael Cable in the front yard of the May Museum for the Sesquicentennial Parade at the Dogwood Festival on Saturday, Apr. 22, 2022.



An 150th Anniversary reception on Apr. 21, 2022 was held on at the Colonial Inn, by David Whitley. This truly amazing spread was designed by David Whitley and Zach Duffy. The beautiful table centerpiece made of broccoli, cauliflower, asparagus, and tomatoes was designed by Joe Willoughby.



Farmville's 150th Anniversary Black Tie Gala was held on Sat., May 14, 2022 at the restored East Carolina Railway Station. Photos courtesy of Marion Stowe.





This magnificent centerpiece was originally on display at the 150th Gala and was moved to the May Museum for display. The piece was designed by Michael Cable and the flowers were designed by Joe Willoughby. The piece sits on one of the “Piano Shawls” that was part of a large display of piano shawls on exhibit at the Museum.



The 11th Annual May Museum & Park's Garden Party held on Sunday, May 15th, 2022



The May Museum Garden Party Hat Contest winners were Diane Mckeel Morris, winner of this years "*All Around Favorite*" and Karen Smith, winner of both "*Best in Show*" and "*Most Creative*" catagories. This was Smith's ninth year placing in the contest.



Scenes at the 11th Annual May Museum Garden Party. Photos courtesy of Melissa Glen, Honeybee Photography



Members and guests enjoying a park bench at the 11th Annual May Museum Garden Party.



The Friends of the May Museum sponsored a highly successful “*Music in the Park*” series on the third Thursday evenings from June-Sept. 2022. There was live music, food trucks and adult beverages in the Museum garden. Below is the popular band, *Train Wreck*, which played on July 21, 2022.





Stewart Barnette, president of the Friends of the May Museum, lights the candles for this year's Candlelight Christmas Tea held at the May Museum on Sunday, Dec. 11, 2022.





Above is a photograph of the beautiful cheese display at the Christmas Tea designed by Museum Board member, Traci Durrett. Snapshots from the Christmas Tea show David Whitley and Marion Stowe and Traci Durrett and Brad Durrett.



BIOGRAPHY----Tabitha Marie DeVisconti



Tabitha and Sue DeVisconti

Tabitha Marie DeVisconti, b. Dec. 20, 1890 in Atacosa Co., Texas, south of San Antonio, d. July 20, 1983 in Farmville, NC, dau. of John August Lorenzo DeVisconti and Addie Gertrude May. She was buried in Forest Hill Cemetery, Farmville, NC. Miss Tabitha and her siblings were brought back to Farmville, NC from Texas by their mother in 1891. Miss Tabitha grew up in the May house [May Museum]. Tabitha's mother, Mrs. Addie Gertrude May Dupree, died in Nov. 1901 and Miss Tabitha and her sister Sue went to live with their aunt, Mrs. Sue May Albritton, their guardian. Mrs. Albritton died in 1908, and Miss Tabitha and Sue then lived with their stepfather, Francis Marion Dupree, who became their guardian, at his home on Church Street. Francis M. Dupree died in 1912. In a lawsuit over the division of family land in 1913, Miss Tabitha and her sister Sue May Sheppard, were given the entire block from Church to Pine Street and other properties around town. Miss Tabitha was given the James W. May house and property [May Museum]. During 1913-14, Miss Tabitha attended Woman's College in Richmond, VA. After returning from college, Miss Tabitha boarded most of the time at the Davis Hotel on Church Street, until 1931. Part of the DeVisconti property in West Farmville was turned over to the Atlantic Coast Realty Company which laid it off into residential blocks and first auctioned the lots off on Jan. 9, 1917. Nearly \$12,000 worth of lots were sold. In 1917, Miss Tabitha was named as Chairman of the Farmville Civic Club and under her leadership the cemetery was improved. The officers of the Civic Club also got the town council to pass a law that charged a fine of \$5.00 for spitting on the streets. They also got the merchants to put up placards in their stores stating, "*Do not spit on the floors.*" In 1918-19, Miss Tabitha took a home nursing course and acted as a Red Cross nurse in the Spanish Flu epidemic. In 1922, Miss Tabitha worked to help set up the Red Cross in Farmville, NC. By 1922, Ms. Tabitha owned a car and she traveled





extensively around the State. Miss Tabitha was a member of the Progressive Bridge Club in 1922; was a member of the Farmville Magazine Club in 1924; was a member of the Farmville Parent-Teacher Association and chairman of the grounds committee in 1924; and was a member and secretary of the Major Benjamin May Chapter of the DAR. Miss Tabitha owned the “lonely old house” (May House) in 1924 and allowed groups to hold Halloween parties in it. In 1924, Miss Tabitha defaulted on a mortgage for 5 lots in Farmville owned by her mother, Addie G. DeVisconti, and they were sold at the Court

House door in Jan. 1925. Miss Tabitha, along with Mrs. R. R. Cotton and Annie Perkins attended the annual meeting of the NC Federation of Women’s Clubs in Pinehurst, NC in May 1925. In 1925, Miss Tabitha was a joint manager of the tennis court of the Farmville Recreational Club. In 1925, she was elected vice-president of the Farmville Literary Club. At a meeting of the Benjamin May Chapter of the DAR in April 1926, Miss Tabitha presented the original Will of Major Benjamin May, written in 1805, for all to view. In 1926, Miss Tabitha was chairman of planting in the 15th District of NC Federation of Women’s Clubs; she was elected vice-president in 1927 and was genealogical committee head of the Tyson Family Reunion in 1927. In 1927, Miss Tabitha was Chairman of the Tree Planting Committee of the Benjamin May Chapter of the DAR. In March 1927, Miss Tabitha and other Farmville ladies went to Raleigh, NC to attend the unveiling of the bronze tablet to the NC Signers of the Declaration of Independence. She was a member of the Pitt County Welfare Committee from 1927 until she resigned in 1934. In Feb. 1928, Miss Tabitha organized and became first Chairman of the Farmville Garden Club and was chairman of the annual Flower Show. In Mar. 1928, Miss Tabitha took two airplane rides out of Wilson field. She gave Garden Parties and Plant Exchanges in her gardens in the 1930’s. In 1930, Ms. Tabitha was named as treasurer of the Farmville Woman’s Club, being re-elected in 1931. Because of the Depression, Miss Tabitha was said to be “land rich but money poor.” Thankfully, Miss Tabitha got a job as librarian of the Farmville City Library in 1931 through the Woman’s Club, serving seven years and was also head of the Community Christmas Tree Service in that year. The Septuagenarian Club held a dinner on the lawn of the James W. May house in May 1931. In Apr. 1931, Ms. Tabitha resigned as corresponding secretary of



the Major Benjamin May Chapter of the DAR. Miss Tabitha moved from the Davis Hotel into the May House in October 1931 and she was given a surprise housewarming party by many citizens in honor of her service to the community. In Nov. 1931, Miss Tabitha attended a memorial tree planting at Cottendale. In Dec. 1931, Miss Tabitha was chairman of the Major Benjamin May Chapter of the DAR committee of Thrift and Conservation and had three miles of the Farmville-Fountain highway planted with dogwoods, cedar, crepe myrtle and holly trees. Also from 1931-1933, Miss Tabitha was involved in the Farmville Relief Association and the Pitt County Relief Association to help the poor and was named chairman of the Farmville fundraising campaign. Miss Tabitha was substitute organist for the Episcopal Church Sunday School and played the piano at club meetings. In Oct. 1933, the Tyson and May Reunion was formed, and a dinner was served on the grounds of the James W. May House. In June 1934, at an annual Flag Day celebration of the DAR, meeting in the garden of the James W. May House, Miss Tabitha announced at the “James W. May House and grounds, willed to the Major Benjamin May Chapter of the DAR at her death, is to be used as a cultural centre and beautiful park for the community and its future citizenship. It is to be known as “The Major Benjamin May Chapter House D.A.R.” Miss Tabitha was chairman of the 1935 Farmville rat eradication program through the Woman’s Club. She served as president of the Farmville Literary Club from 1935-1937. In 1937, Ms.



Tabitha was chairman of the health division of the public welfare department of District 15 State Federation of Women’s Clubs. In June 1937, at a meeting of the Garden Club, Ms. Tabitha presented a gavel made of holly wood to the group. In March 1939, in honor of Forestry Week, Miss Tabitha was the chairman of planting trees along the Farmville-Fountain Highway. In 1940, Miss Tabitha had a wildlife sanctuary established on her farm under the Cooperative Farm Game Program. Also in Sept. 1940, Miss Tabitha organized a Bird Club at her home to teach children about wildlife. In 1941, the Woman’s Club asked Miss Tabitha to put

together a survey pamphlet of the industrial life of Farmville. In 1942, Ms. Tabitha was on the committee running the Red Cross Sewing Room, in the American Legion Hall, located upstairs in the Horton building. In Feb. 1942, Ms. Tabitha was named secretary of the Farmville Woman's Club. In Sept. 1942, Miss Tabitha was appointed Home Service chairman for the Red Cross, assisting veterans and their families. Through her efforts, Miss Tabitha got a Servicemen's Center opened in Farmville on Dec. 24, 1944. When it was impossible for the hostesses to secure accommodations for the weekend visitors, she opened her home to them. In June 1944, the Benjamin May Chapter of the DAR presented Miss Tabitha the insignia of the National Society in recognition for her splendid service as Director of the Farmville Servicemen's Center. In July 1945, she was named secretary of the Farmville Woman's Club. In Aug. 1945, Miss Tabitha was named president of the Garden Club. She was a member of the Literary Club and was chairman for the Literary Club sponsored Tuberculosis Christmas Seal Sale for many years. In 1947, Miss Tabitha served as president of the Farmville Woman's Club. In July 1947, Ms. Tabitha was elected to the board of directors of the re-organized Pitt County Tuberculosis Association. In Oct. 1948, she was elected secretary-treasurer of the District DAR. At the dedication of the DAR house on Apr. 29, 1949, Ms. Tabitha was named Flag custodian for the celebration. In 1951, Haywood Smith, of 208 E. Church St., was mentioned as the overseer of Ms. Tabitha's 243 acres of tobacco farms. In Jan. 1952, Ms. Tabitha was named to the Council of Church Women Welfare committee. Ms. Tabitha was very active and served as first secretary of the reorganized Pitt County Historical Society in 1952; was a member of the Queen Anne Chapter of the Daughters of the American Colonists in 1953; Daughters of the War of 1812; was on the Bicentennial Committee's Planning Board; a member of the Eastern Carolina Stamp Club; and was a member



of the Farmville Golden Age Club. In 1977, Miss Tabitha was named "*Woman of the Year*" by the Junior Woman's Club and June 11, 1977, was called "*Miss Tabitha DeVisconti Day*" by the Major Benjamin May Chapter of the DAR. Miss Tabitha had a roan horse that her mother used to own, named "Baby." She had a stable built for her on the grounds of the May house. Baby was more than 30 years old at her death. Miss Tabitha also had a white Eskimo Spitz named "Eski," who came to live with her at the death of her sister, Sue May Sheppard in 1946. Both pets were buried on the grounds of the James W. May house.

FEATURE ARTICLE---James W. May House

Old Homes Command Curiosity

News and Observer, Raleigh, NC Apr. 20, 1969

[Note there are several errors in this article]

FARMVILLE----House stars tend to be slick productions. Find the most expensive, sprawling Frank Lloyd Wright houses in town, pressure the owners with their duty to civic pride and products, and invite the world to see what goodies the well to do can afford.

But in the small towns of Eastern North Carolina the magazine houses are too few and too well known. Often it's the fading ladies of the town that command curiosity---old homes, sometimes well preserved, sometimes not, filled with original furniture and a few thousand family mementoes, and presided over by "old family" widows who still are or at least have been grande dames of their day.

They're generally closed to newcomers and the public at large, and as they cling stubbornly to the past they become ever more intense objects of curiosity.



Giving that curiosity a chance to be assuaged, two century-old houses will be open Wednesday, April 20, for the Farmville House Tour which benefits the town's kindergarten and nursery. The Little Red School is supported by the Farmville Junior Woman's Club. There will also be three other houses on the tour.

Curiosity about the Main Street residence of Miss Tabitha De Visconti is no thicker than the cloak of ivy that all but shrouds the 104 year-old house.

"Miss Tabitha," in her late 70s, is as indomitable as is the house. It was her grandfather who built the house, constructing it from timbers saved from the trees from his grandfather's farm. Miss Tabitha lives alone, just as she has since the Depression. It was in the 1930's that she returned to the house. Women didn't live alone then, and she recalls she was admonished it wasn't the thing to do. But interference never stopped her.

The kitchen is more 1930s than modern, and the garden is a thicket of jonquils and azaleas spiced with fragrant, and more old fashioned sweet Betsy and bridal wreath.

The house has remained virtually unchanged. Nothing has been done to the interior except to add plumbing and modernize the lighting. The walls have been replastered, but have been left unpainted. The floors of wide pine boards and the window and door casings have never been stained or painted. As much as possible, it is in its original state.

At the close of the Civil War, James W. May built the house, a story and a half high, and eight rooms large. There was an open porch which connected the front part of the house with the dining room and kitchen. The kitchen had a large- fireplace which was used for cooking.

An unusual feature was the well on the porch connecting the two sections of the house. The kitchen and porch still remain, though the well has since been filled in.

Furnishings include magnificent century-old quilts made and signed by the owner's grandmother, Tabitha May. They were thought to have been made for her trousseau. There are also antique china, and a pink and white teapot which belonged to her great-great-grandfather, Major James W. May.

Major May was an extraordinary figure, a Revolutionary hero for whom the local DAR chapter and its Georgian chapter house are named. Upon the end of the Revolutionary WAR, he was granted by the government a large section of land that stretched for miles. On one extremity he built his own house. That house was destroyed by fire. But nearby, his son Benjamin May II built, in 1812, the other old house that will be on the tour. A double lane of great trees lines the drive to the eight-room house, which has most of its original woodwork.

Still intact are the original square brass door locks bearing an English seal, and much of the original bubbled window glass. Dozens of crabapple and dogwoods line the land around the house, "I hope," said Mrs. Ben Lewis, the present occupant, "the crabapple and dogwood will be in bloom for the tour," Mrs. Lewis is a widow of a descendant of Benjamin May II.

Tour hours will be 10:30 until 6:30, and tickets will be on sale at the Farmville Presbyterian Church, where a lunch will be served. Other homes are: Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Johnson Jr., 201 N. Pitt St., a contemporary residence; Mr. and Mrs. John B. Lewis, 306 E. Horne Ave., Georgian; and Dr. and Mrs. Sylvester Aycock, 258 North St., a brick colonial.

Co-chairman Mrs. John H. Lewis Jr. and Mrs. William H. Farrior say that all monies will go to pay off the mortgage on the School House, a new \$15,000 building. The Farmville Juniors have supported the nursery and kindergarten since its inception in 1956, and are also planning an antique show in September to further allay the cost of the new building. ❖

FARMVILLE---Photograph



This amazing snapshot was taken at the unveiling of the Aaron Tyson and Cornelius Tyson Monument on Nov. 2, 1927. The monument sits by the railroad track on the Moye-Turnage Road (old Hwy 91) south of Farmville. The photo depicts a curious observer watching the unveiling ceremonies of the monument by the Tyson Reunion organization and the Major Benjamin May Chapter of the DAR. The photo also captures the only known photograph of a Tyson homestead in the background. The small piece of land for the monument was given by Robert Lee Smith, of Greenville, NC.

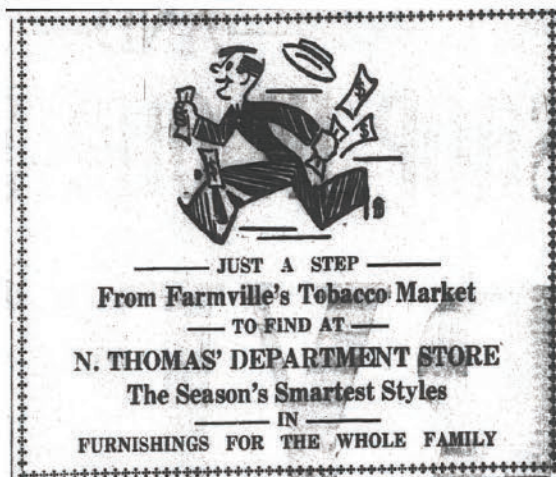


FARMVILLE--- N. THOMAS DEPARTMENT STORE



(R-L) Miss Emma Jones, Lela Williams, Ms. Marshburn, unknown lady, George S. Thomas

George Shaker Thomas (b. June 18, 1893 in Hammana, Lebanon, d. Apr. 22, 1947 in Rocky Mt., NC) md. Nov. 2, 1930 in Weldon, NC to Nagha Rabil (b. Feb. 18, 1906 in Marion, SC, d. May 6, 1993 in Farmville, NC). They were both buried in Hollywood Cemetery. George came to America in 1910 with his brother and sister and they settled in Goldsboro, NC. With only a 7th



grade education, George opened a dry goods store there. In Aug. 1935, George moved his family from Goldsboro, NC to Farmville, NC and opened the N. Thomas Department Store on Main Street [where the current Farmville Chamber of Commerce now sits]. They first rented a home on Pine Street and in 1946 bought the Dr. C. C. Joyner home on the corner of Pine and Contentnea Streets. The N. Thomas Department Store started out like a Macy's Department Store, but eventually became a ladies apparel store. They did well and would go on vacations to Wrightsville Beach, NC. ❖

LAST PHOTOGRAPH



As the winter sun fades, it casts a beautiful light on the back porch of the May Museum