

# CCHA Documents History of Property for New County Agricultural Center and Saves Unique Smokehouse

*Compiled by Linda Carnes-McNaughton, Beverly Wiggins and Paul Webb  
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## **History of the Property**

The land on which Chatham County's new Agricultural Center is to be built has an interesting history. The earliest owner shown in Chatham County records is Mary Watters, daughter of Continental Army General James Moore, and wife of Colonel William Watters, who also served in the Continental Army. In 1825 Mary Watters sold the 99-acre property to her son-in-law, Frederick Jones Hill. The deed (Z/460) indicates that the property was her former residence. The property is on the north side of US Highway 64 Business West adjacent to the Central Carolina Community College and Boy Scout properties. The Old Stage Road formed the southern boundary of the parcel and then turned north for some distance within the parcel before joining Old Salisbury Road which continued northwest.

Frederick Jones Hill was a physician, planter, and legislator known for his early legislation to establish public schools in the state. Raised in New Hanover County, he, like several other wealthy Wilmington families of the period, had ties to Pittsboro. Hill, his father, and three uncles owned elaborate summer homes in and around Pittsboro. Hill and his uncle, Dr. Nathaniel Hill, were instrumental in building St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church in 1831 in Pittsboro.

The records are unclear whether Frederick Jones Hill built his summer home, "Kentucky," on the parcel he purchased from his mother-in-law Mary Watters, or whether it was built prior to his purchase of the property. Hill and his wife, Anne Ivey Watters, were third cousins, once removed. They married in 1812 and had no children. The Kentucky property was eventually inherited (in 1874) by William H. Moore, a presiding elder of the Methodist Church, and to whom both Hill and wife Anne had family connections. Until the property was purchased by Chatham County in 2012, it had been handed down in the Moore family through several generations. See Appendix 3 for a chain of title.

Remarkably, some features and artifacts from the property's early history survived, and the Chatham County Historical Association sought to document those and to learn whatever possible about that history prior to its development as the county's long-awaited Agricultural Center.

## **Architectural Survey of the Property**

CCHA was granted access to the parcel in July of 2014. Volunteers, including two local volunteer archaeologists, Paul Webb and Linda Carnes-McNaughton, made several visits to the property to assess the various structures and ruins discovered there. Among the features explored and documented were the remains of what was once a large barn, with adjacent animal enclosures; the ruin of a small residential structure; the still-standing but collapsing guest-house; the site of the now-razed main house known as Kentucky; and an adjacent smokehouse and hand-dug well. Appendix 1 shows the location of these historical features as an overlay on the proposed Agricultural Center plan.

**Kentucky, the main house.** At the time of our first visit in July 2014, all that remained of Frederick Jones Hill's summer home, Kentucky, was part of a brick chimney, a few rotting hewn sills, and a scrap of pegged window trim. The footprint of the house was still evident, even though the house was razed in the 1970s. Quartz rocks outlined former gardens and the main approach to the house, and huge white oaks stood on the grounds. Because the oaks appeared to date from the early 1800s they were of historical interest as an integral part of the early homestead and its original landscaping. All of the major oaks, cedars, and other hardwoods (50 total) were eventually piece-plotted onto the development plan using GPS technology (See Appendix 2 for more details.)



*Kentucky, Federal-style home of Frederick Jones Hill  
Taken in 1970s  
View shows front (south face) of structure  
From Architectural History of Chatham County, NC, 1991.*

**Guest House.** The outer walls of the guest house were still standing in July 2014, though the roof and central chimney had caved in. Stylistically, the structure was an interesting one. The building rested on dressed stone piers and had circular-sawn joists.

The one-story structure with very high ceilings had boxed cornices and deep eaves, tall French windows and doors, and lath and plaster walls. The off-center, internal brick chimney had collapsed. An architectural survey done in 1984 described the structure as having a hip roof with a hip roofed porch and rear shed roof. We were told that members of the family had hoped to renovate the building as late as the 1980s, but for whatever reason, that plan was abandoned and the building continued to deteriorate.



*Guest house, 2014. Photo by Duane Hall.*



*Hand-dug well, 2014. Photo by Beverly Wiggins*

**Well.** Of particular interest to the CCHA volunteers were the hand-dug well and the nearly-intact smokehouse on the property. The well, approximately three feet in diameter, had a modern cement collar (square in shape) which rested on top of an upper course of field stones that were used to line the 50 foot deep hole.

The rock-lined well was a remarkable testimony to the craftsmanship of early settlers in the county—or perhaps of the enslaved people who served them. Peering down the well, one could imagine the toil and danger involved in creating this essential feature of the homestead. The well was located in an area that would be excavated in order to build the new Ag Center, so it could not be preserved in place.

**Smokehouse.** To the west of the well stood a largely-intact smokehouse. This structure measures 10.5 feet square at its base and approximately 25 feet at its roof apex. The sills are made of hewn logs, with mortised and tenoned corner supports. Vertical wall studs are spaced approximately two feet apart.



*Smokehouse front, 2014. Photo by Duane Hall.*

The foundation was approximately one foot in height and made of local fieldstones (with some recent brick visible as infill). The exterior is sheathed with lap-board siding—some boards missing—and has flush vertical board corners. The roof is gabled with an apex on a north-south axis. The roof is also cantilevered about one foot on all four sides. The smokehouse appears to date to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in style and construction (based on original square cut nails and its eight-inch wide hewn log sills). The roof likely has been replaced more recently (metal sheeting instead of wooden shingles).



*Smokehouse sill detail.  
Photo by Barbara Pugh.*

One vertical board entry door is located on the south elevation of the building. This door is approximately three feet wide and five feet tall, with a lock hole located on the left side. The exterior of this entry door is decorated with three rows of brads in diamond-shaped motif. The decorative nail pattern on the entry door is an excellent example of 19<sup>th</sup> century folk art which has survived. The hinges have been replaced with modern hardware which extends beyond the decorated doorframe edging. An unusual key, presumably to a former lock on the smokehouse door, was hanging on the outside when the building was discovered, and is now in the CCHA artifact collection.



*Smokehouse door detail, 2014. Photo by Beverly Wiggins*



*Smokehouse key.*



*Smokehouse door; hinge detail.  
Photo by Beverly Wiggins.*

The interior of the smokehouse had a “dropped” ceiling made of tongue-and-groove boards, equipped with several rows of iron hooks (presumably for hanging meat) and one centrally-placed chain (possibly for a cauldron). Extra pieces of cut tongue-and-groove boards used to support the dropped ceiling, are visible on the interior walls in several places. Two walls have a built-in shelf made of a single board fastened/braced to the wall.



*Smokehouse dropped ceiling and interior detail. Photo by Duane Hall.*

Above the dropped ceiling, the original ceiling of the smokehouse is intact at the top, complete with riven sticks or pegs (once used to hold meat) set directly into the upper rafters or building frame. While the square shape of this smokehouse is common (best design for uniform heat and smoke transfer) and tightly sided with few openings (a single door for security and access), the unusually tall design of this smokehouse with its cantilevered roof, makes it a unique vernacular structure.



*Smokehouse original ceiling detail. Photo by Duane Hall.*



The floor of the smokehouse consisted of a modern (recent) cement floor, poured over a layer of modern brick, apparently laid to level the surface. Below the modern brick and concrete, the subfloor hearth was made of local field stone arranged in a large “C” or “U” shape. It was laid on bare earth which was thermally-altered to a bright orange-red color by multiple years of pit fires (to provide smoke to the curing meats within it).

*Smokehouse hearth detail. Photo by Linda Carnes-McNaughton.*

Carnes-McNaughton and Webb used metal detectors to explore the area believed to be the location of the old kitchen near the smokehouse. The kitchen was likely removed when that part of the site was cleared to plant pine trees. They found no evidence of fire and no remains of the kitchen. They did find some small sherds of pearlware dating to the early 1800s and part of an iron snaffle bit (for a horse).

### **Saving the Smokehouse**

The CCHA Board felt that the smokehouse offered a rare opportunity to preserve something of the county’s early agricultural past. The structure’s somewhat unusual design features—particularly its unusual height, cantilevered roof and decorative door—and the remarkable preservation of the original ceiling and functional pegs, along with its association with the Watters-Hill-Agricultural Center property, added to its significance. On-site preservation was explored but not possible given the extensive grading required to prepare the site for the new construction. The board voted to expend CCHA funds to move the smokehouse to a secure location while construction proceeded.



*Preparing the smokehouse for relocation. Dec. 2014. Photo by Duane Hall.*

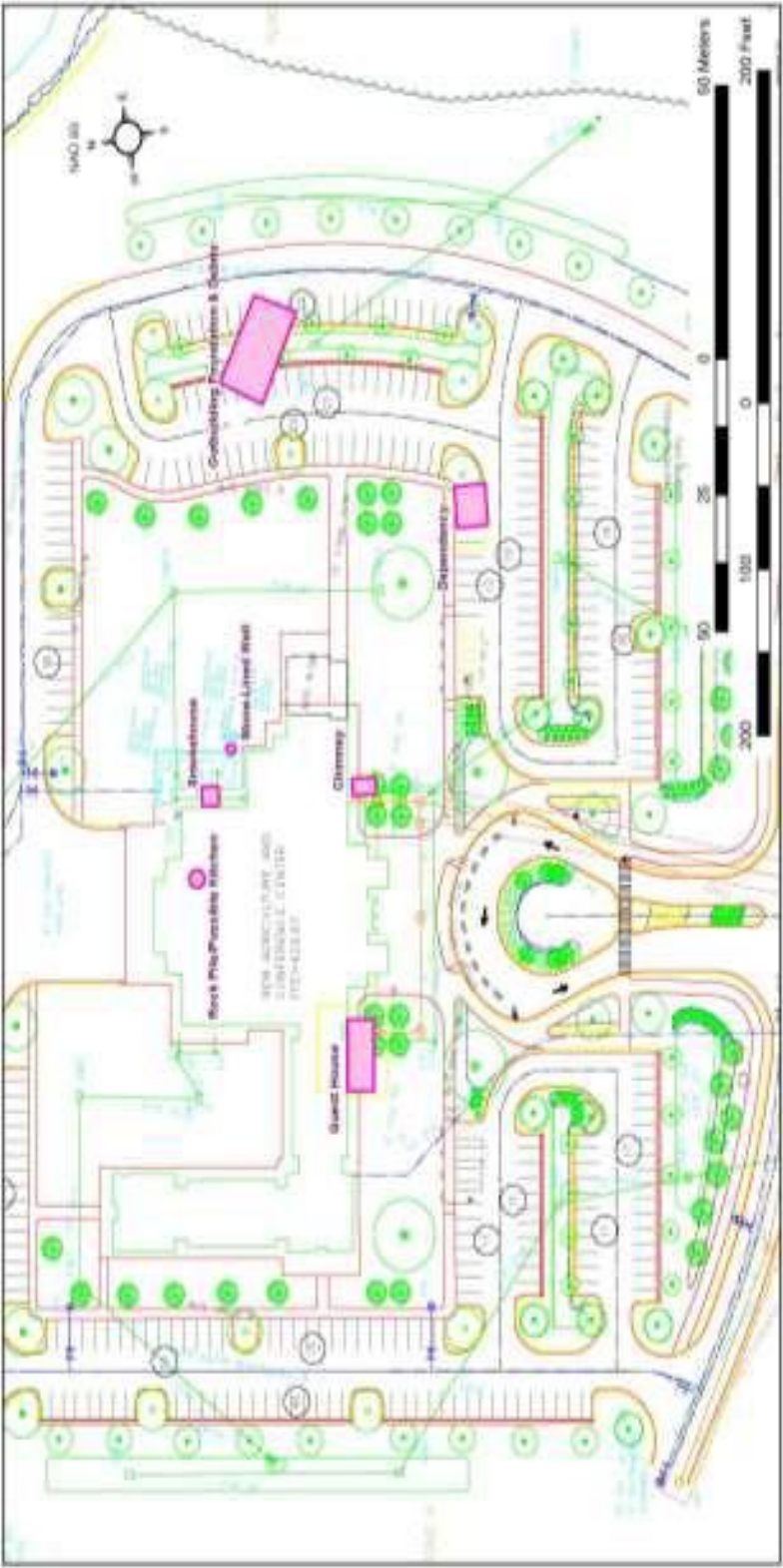
The smokehouse was moved in December 2014. The contractor for the site, Miles-McClellan Construction Company, assisted with the move by clearing a path to provide access to the structure. A professional mover was hired by CCHA to move the building. Because of its height, the roof had to be removed so that the building could pass under power lines. A protective cover has been placed on the building to shield it from the elements while it resides on a storage lot.

Grimsley Hobbs, of Hobbs Architects, designers of the new Agricultural Center, served as liaison between the county and CCHA for the effort to save the smokehouse.

CCHA has requested that the county return the smokehouse to the Ag Center property in the future to serve as an example of an early 19<sup>th</sup> century agricultural building (and meat-curing practices) and to preserve a unique example of Chatham County's vernacular architecture.



Appendix 1: Layout of historical features on plan for Agricultural Center

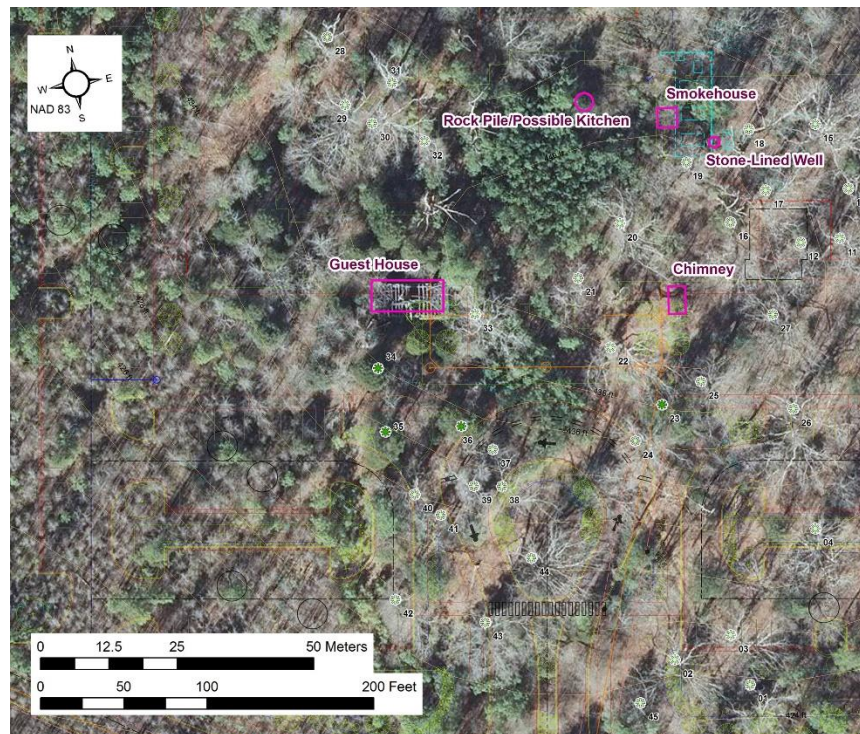


## Appendix 2: Documenting Historic Trees on the Property



*Large white oak on property.  
Photo by Beverly Wiggins.*

Because many of the trees on the property appeared to date from the time of its early occupation, the project team made two visits to record the locations of more than 50 trees using GPS technology. These points were then overlain on the Agricultural Center plans. Matt Paré, whose time and expertise were donated by TRC, used a GPS (Global Positioning System) mapping unit to piece-plot the locations of designated large trees and mapped the data using ArcMap software. Paré was assisted in the field by Linda Carnes-McNaughton and Beverly Wiggins. See below for an aerial photo of the site showing tree locations and historic features. The CCHA files on this project also contain maps of tree locations on Ag Center plans and a list of detailed coordinates for the largest trees.



The trees were also evaluated by Grand Trees of Chatham, a volunteer group whose mission is to increase public understanding and appreciation of Chatham County's valuable and irreplaceable trees. That group visited the site on August 1, 2014. They used the American Forests Champion Trees measuring guidelines to assess the trees. The height, circumference and crown-spread were measured and points assigned in accordance with the guidelines to determine how the oaks compared to county and state standards. One large oak was found to attain more than 75% of the points earned by the North Carolina State Champion tree of the same species, qualifying it as a Champion White Oak. Although only one tree was measured, a number of the trees on the property were of similar size and likely of similar age. A letter from the Grand Trees of Chatham Board can be found below.

Although there was much interest in trying to preserve some of the trees, the site design called for extensive excavation of the property where the trees stood, making preservation impractical. The contractor handling land clearing indicated that the trees would be used for lumber.



## *Grand Trees of Chatham*

*Tell us about your favorite tree!*

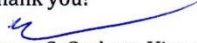
Hello Bev,

Thank you for taking members of the Grand Trees of Chatham Board to the site of the new Chatham County Agricultural Building! The many artifacts at the site were so interesting—hopefully the County will be able to preserve some of this site to help the citizens of Chatham County understand what agricultural life was like here long ago. If preserved, the beautiful old hand dug well and the smoke house would serve as a unique link between Chatham County's agricultural past, present and future--adding an extra dimension to our new agricultural center!

There is certainly a wonderful group of beautiful old white oaks at the site! As you know, the white oak we assessed qualified as a Champion White Oak. Champion trees are those that attain at least 75% of the points earned by the North Carolina State Champion tree of the same species. Several of the other oaks we saw were of similar size.

We hope the County is able to save some (if not all!) of these wonderful large trees. They likely date back to the early 1800's and are part of what remains of that very interesting old home site. In addition, the trees would add wonderful character to Chatham County's new Agricultural Building and would undoubtedly be greatly appreciated by both employees and visitors!

Thank you!

  
James C. Garbutt, Vice-chair  
Grand Trees of Chatham

**Appendix 3: Chain of title for “Kentucky” property of Frederick Jones Hill—new Ag Center property**

17 Oct 1825 Z/460 Mary Watters (mother of Ann Ivey Watters, Frederick Jones Hill’s wife; daughter of General James Moore; wife of Captain William Watters m. in Orange Co. 1788) To Frederick Jones Hill  References: Meadow Branch or Green(s) branch Intersects with Harland formerly Cotton line 99 ac  Where said Mary Watters formerly lived With all houses	16 Feb 1959 257/241 Maude E. Moore  To William L. Steele Tract 1 is Kentucky References book BN/310 27
6 Mar 1874 BN/310  Frederick J. Hill Estate by Cmrs  To William H. Moore, Chatham Co.  References: “Kentucky” Frederick J. Hill summer residence  Ref deed from Mary Watters 19 Oct 1825	Apr 1962 257/241  Inherited by will of William L. Steele  To Susan L. Steele
27 Dec 1930 GW/534 Mrs. Josephine Moore (widow of William H. Moore)  To Maude E. Moore (her daughter)  Tract 1 is Kentucky  References 1874 deed BN/310 to William H. Moore	15 Feb 1990 554/175  Edouard B. Steel and Anne W. Steele  ½ undivided interest in Kentucky property (same acreage) To William L. Steele III  10 Aug 2012 1635/431  William L. Steele III estate Harriett L. Steele  To Chatham County  References plat 2012-128  Old Stage Road (abandoned)

#### **Appendix 4: Notes of interest**

Mary Watters is listed in the 1820 Chatham Census with a fairly large household. She is also in Chatham in 1840, listed as one female, age 60-69 and owning 14 slaves. We have not found a Census record for her in 1850, but there are 9 slaves listed on the 1850 Chatham County Slave Schedule under Mary Watters.

Mary died in 1854 and is buried in the Davis Cemetery in New Hanover County. One of her daughters, Elizabeth Mildred Watters, married a Davis.

Frederick Jones Hill and his uncle Nathaniel Hill donated the land and commissioned the building of St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church in Pittsboro.

Frederick's father and three uncles also owned summer homes in or near Pittsboro: his father, John Hill owned Oakmont, about two miles northeast of Pittsboro; Dr. Nathaniel Hill's residence in Pittsboro, Chatham Hall, was on the former home site of Col. Mial Scurlock, south of town; William Henry Hill's Belmont was on the hilltop northeast of what is now Chatham Mills; and Thomas Hill's Hailbron was southwest of Pittsboro. All were within two miles of Pittsboro.

Little is known about Frederick Jones Hill's summer house, "Kentucky." Several photographs show it to have been an imposing structure. It is said to have stood until sometime in the 1970s, when owners deconstructed it and razed the remains.

The Kentucky property was surveyed in the early 1980s. The report from that survey [CH711] is archived in the State Historic Preservation Office, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Raleigh.

Artifacts in CCHA collection from the site include: possible key to smokehouse, handmade brick from Kentucky chimney, stoneware fragments, cut nails from guesthouse. Artifacts from the metal detection survey and the smokehouse hearth work, currently at TRC, will be added to the CCHA collection from this site.

Also in the CCHA collection are more than 300 photographs of the site taken by Linda Carnes-McNaughton, Duane Hall, Barbara Pugh, Paul Webb, and Beverly Wiggins.



*Old Stage Road on south side of parcel, looking east. August 2014.  
Photo by Paul Webb*