

Teenagers at the Kelvin School in Pittsboro

By W. Davenport "Dav" Robertson,¹ April 2023

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Pittsboro was one of the primary educational centers of North Carolina. The well-known Pittsborough Academy obtained its charter in 1787 and continued for over a hundred years. There were as many as eight private



Kelvin ~ Pittsboro

academies in the Pittsboro area before the state authorized the establishment of public schools in 1839. Affluent families from all over the state sent their children to Pittsboro. Most of these academies were for boys, but of the several schools for girls in Chatham, the Kelvin School was perhaps the best known.

Mrs. Edward Jones' Private Boarding School for Young Ladies had its start in 1828, eight miles north of Pittsboro at Rock Rest, in the home of Edward Jones, long-time Solicitor General of North Carolina who had just retired. But it was his wife, the former Mary Curtis Mallett, who ran the school out of their home until they moved it into town in 1831. They called it Mrs. Jones' School at Kelvin, or simply Kelvin, or Kelvin Grove.² Located at the present-day intersection of West Salisbury Street and McClenahan Street, back then it was touted as being just "a few hundred yards from the town." The 10-acre tract extended to Rectory Street (the town boundary then) and included Little Creek (also called Hill Creek), at that time known as Kelvin Brook.³ The building survived for 163 years until 1994, when it partially burned and was subsequently demolished. Historians have written that the Kelvin School "enjoyed a most excellent reputation, the daughter of Judge Ruffin, Governor Manley, and members of other distinguished families being numbered among its pupils."⁴

One of those students was the writer of the letter described here, Elizabeth "Betsey" Pollock Devereux, the daughter of Thomas Pollock Devereux, a wealthy Raleigh attorney, recorder for the State Supreme Court, and owner of a large plantation in Halifax County. Devereux was one of the largest owners of enslaved persons in the state. Betsey's mother was Catherine Anne Johnson, a descendant of distinguished clergymen in Connecticut. Betsey, born in 1818, attended Kelvin in 1831 or 1832, soon after it opened in Pittsboro. It is clear from her letter of September 11, 1832, that she was not attending the school in the fall term but had attended it previously.

Betsey wrote this letter to another one of the students, Sarah Lenoir Jones, who came from even farther away: "Happy Valley" along the Yadkin River in Wilkes County (now in Caldwell County) in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Sarah was the daughter of planter, legislator, and head of the militia in western North Carolina, General Edmund Jones (no relationship to Edward Jones). Her mother was Ann Lenoir, daughter of General William Lenoir, hero of the Battle of Kings Mountain, former speaker of the state Senate, and first president of the Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina. Both men had large land holdings and fine homes in Happy Valley. Sarah was born in 1817 and attended Kelvin in 1832.⁵

**MRS. EDWARD JONES'S
PRIVATE BOARDING SCHOOL,
FOR YOUNG LADIES.**

THE School, which has for several years been conducted at Rock Rest, the family residence, is now removed to the vicinity of PITTSBORO, and the next session will commence on Monday, the 7th of February, 1831, and continue five months.

The very remote situation of Rock Rest rendered it on many accounts inconvenient for a School, while all the advantages of retirement, without any of its inconveniences are secured by the present commodious and pleasant situation a few hundred yards from the town. Pittsborough, and its vicinity, are remarkable for health, being the resort of many families from the low country during the summer months.— The young ladies will be chiefly under the instruction of Miss CHARLOTTE JONES, with a competent Assistant.

When it is desired, young ladies who have friends in town may be boarded with them. It is proper, however, to remark, that those who reside in the family must necessarily enjoy more opportunities of improvement, and that the customary attentions to them during the intervals of school hours, will not be abated or interrupted on account of the admission of pupils that may board elsewhere.

TERMS PER SESSION.

For young Ladies exceeding twelve years of age, Board and Tuition, \$75, including Books and Stationary with all other necessary expenses.— For children under twelve, \$70, or \$65 if Books & Stationary be furnished by themselves.

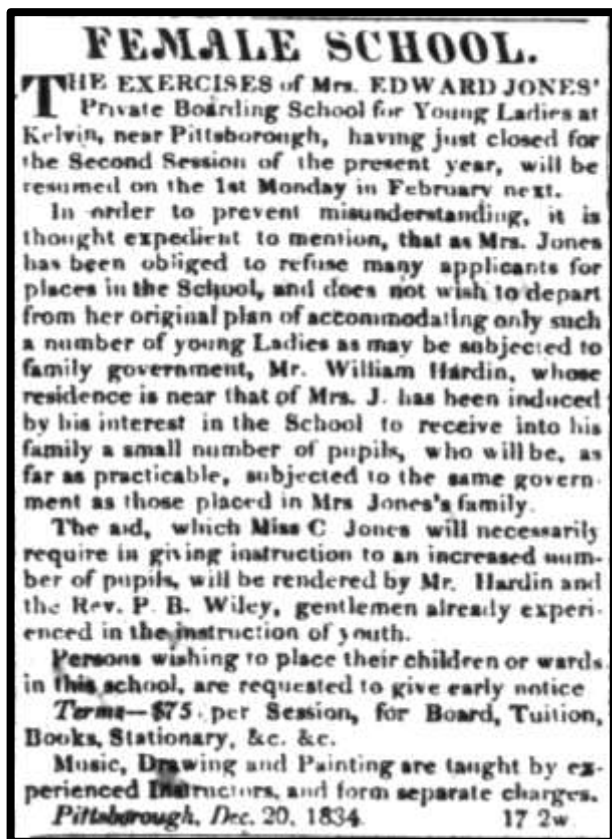
Mrs. Jones has much pleasure in stating, that in the Musical Department, she has obtained the services of Mrs. LE MASSURIEN, a lady well known as an accomplished instructress in Music. A practising Piano provided by Mrs. Jones without extra charge.

Obatham Co. Jan. 29, 1831. 12—4.

Weekly Raleigh Register 17 Feb 1831

The Kelvin School for Young Ladies

The Kelvin School had twenty to twenty-five students, some under twelve years old, but mostly teenagers. Board and tuition, including “Books and Stationary [sic] with all other



FEMALE SCHOOL.
THE EXERCISES of Mrs. EDWARD JONES' Private Boarding School for Young Ladies at Kelvin, near Pittsborough, having just closed for the Second Session of the present year, will be resumed on the 1st Monday in February next.
In order to prevent misunderstanding, it is thought expedient to mention, that as Mrs. Jones has been obliged to refuse many applicants for places in the School, and does not wish to depart from her original plan of accommodating only such a number of young Ladies as may be subjected to family government, Mr. William Hardin, whose residence is near that of Mrs. J. has been induced by his interest in the School to receive into his family a small number of pupils, who will be, as far as practicable, subjected to the same government as those placed in Mrs. Jones's family.
The aid, which Miss C. Jones will necessarily require in giving instruction to an increased number of pupils, will be rendered by Mr. Hardin and the Rev. P. B. Wiley, gentlemen already experienced in the instruction of youth.
Persons wishing to place their children or wards in this school, are requested to give early notice.
Terms—\$75. per Session, for Board, Tuition, Books, Stationary, &c. &c.
Music, Drawing and Painting are taught by experienced Instructors, and form separate charges.
Pittsborough, Dec. 20, 1834. 17 2w.

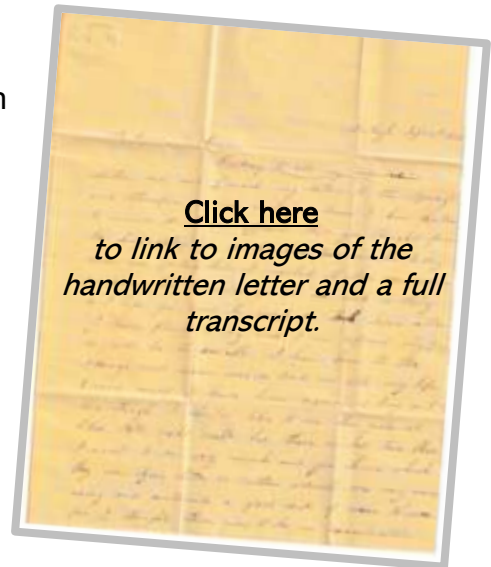
*From The Fayetteville Weekly Observer
30 December 1834*

necessary expenses,” came to \$75.00 per session, or for those under twelve (“small girls”), \$65.00. The first session of the year ran from February until mid-July; the second session then commenced and lasted until mid-December. While the subjects taught were the basics such as literature, history and French, “Instruction in the Ancient Languages and Mathematics” would be given “when desired.” There were separate charges for painting, drawing and music, but Mrs. Jones provided a “practicing Piano” at no additional cost. Her daughter Miss Charlotte Jones was in charge of instruction, with an assistant for teaching music.⁶

The school was quite successful throughout the 1830s; even though Mrs. Jones added more assistants, the school had to turn away applicants. One of the assistants, William H. Hardin, gradually took on more responsibility, and by 1836, he assumed joint superintendency with Miss Jones, and the school was advertised as the “Kelvin School Under W. H. Hardin.” Mrs. Jones died in 1837, and a year later, Miss Charlotte Jones and Mr. Hardin married. Charlotte’s father gave the Kelvin School to Charlotte as a wedding present. Mr. and Mrs. Hardin continued to operate the school until 1846 when they moved to Cumberland County.⁷

The Letter

In this letter, dated September 11, 1832, it is clear that the writer and recipient are teenagers, about fourteen or fifteen years old. Betsey, prevented from returning to Kelvin due to ill health, desperately misses her friends who are at Kelvin, Sarah Jones and Susan Moore (whom I have not been able to identify). Betsey has been away at the [Virginia] Springs trying to recuperate.⁸ She says she is glad not to have been there at Kelvin to take the examination, but she congratulates Sarah for doing well. She mentions a student, Euphemia Brocket, who (I believe) was a somewhat younger girl by that name from the Wilmington area. Betsey has heard some gossip about her friend Sarah perhaps being ostracized by some of the other students to the point of crying, and she wants to hear all about it.⁹ Betsey commiserates she doesn't know what has "got into some of them." The letter reads as if it could have been written by teenagers today. Betsey continues, "Do the girls talk as much about the boy's as ever?" And then she mysteriously pleads, "I hope you have never told what hapened down at the creek that Sunday." Don't we just want to know what that was all about!



Betsey concludes the part of the letter to Sarah with a caricature of a (young?) man labeled "Bill Hopper" in his Sunday coat. I have not been able to identify Bill Hopper, but there was a young man about the age of Betsey and Sarah in Pittsboro at the time named William W. Hooper, son of a well-known preacher, William Hooper, who had married one of Mr. and Mrs. Jones' daughters. Betsey also notes, "Johnston no better," perhaps referring to the Jones' son Johnston Blakeley Jones who was also about their age. At the end of the letter to Sarah, she adds a note to her other close friend, Susan, and jokes, "Squash head must have looked like a stude [stewed?] witch with that coat on." Then she acknowledges her own sarcasm: "Oh! my. I am too bad." You can just see the teenage girl making fun of the slightly older young men dressed up for church.

But Betsey is not through. She folds her letter to fit in the envelope and, before sealing it, shows her affection for her friends by writing to Susan on the folded letter, "Tell Sarah to send me a piece of her hair. I have got some of yours." Then, realizing how open and at times

sarcastic she has been, she adds, "Dont for the world show this. Burn all my letters and never show one. I will do the same with all yours." And to emphasize that action, she adds "/promise/."

Betsey also inserts a sweet, sentimental love poem on a small piece of note paper into the envelope. She marks it "Kelvin," and titles it, "To A Friend," and at the end shows how serious she really is: "Keep This." (The name Emeline following Betsey's name probably was her pen-name. In her later life she used "Amelia," a derivative of Emeline.) What a fine example of the teenage affections between best friends, or as they would say today, Best Friends Forever!

Epilogue

Both Betsey and Sarah go on to lead colorful if tragic lives. Betsey and Sarah continue their friendship for at least a few more years. In another letter from Betsey to Sarah written three years after the Kelvin one, she maintains the tone of an intimate friendship. In this letter, she tells Sarah of her engagement! The following year, 1836, Betsey marries a lawyer, Thomas F. Jones (no relation to Sarah Jones or to Edward Jones), and goes to live with him in Hertford, Perquimans County. They have four children and things seem to be going well when, in 1846, Thomas accuses Betsey's doctor of having an affair with his wife and challenges him to a duel. He kills the doctor and is remorseful the rest of his short life, dying in 1857.

By the outbreak of the Civil War, Betsey and her two daughters have moved to Owego, New York. One daughter meets and marries a young man, and they stay in New York when the war breaks out. Betsey and her younger daughter, though, find their way through the lines back to North Carolina. Betsey is separated from her married daughter for the rest of the war. She alternately lives with her sister and diarist, Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, on the Halifax County plantation she describes in *Journal of a Secesh Lady*, or at her father's plantation also in Halifax County, or with another sister in Raleigh. Her older son is killed fighting for the Confederacy. After the war, she is reunited with her daughter in the North, and she and her younger daughter Rachel eventually settle down in Baltimore where her younger son and his family live. Rachel rounds out this story when she becomes a teacher at an exclusive girl's school in Baltimore. Betsey dies there in 1879. In addition to her sister

Catherine, Betsey had another sister who also becomes a well-known writer: Mary Bayard Devereux Clarke, one of the most influential poets in nineteenth century North Carolina and an early advocate for professional women.¹⁰

Sarah L. Jones goes back home to Happy Valley and lives at Palmyra, the beautiful home her parents built. About 1837, she marries her older cousin, William F. Jones, who lives in Rutherford County. Sarah's life is full of false starts and tragedy. Her husband never can seem to make a go of anything. They try moving to Mississippi in 1839 to seek their fortune in cotton but have to move back home when the cotton crop fails. In Rutherford County where William runs a wagon freight company, Sarah gives birth to several sons, but none survive past childhood. She does have three daughters who thrive. For a while, Sarah and her husband live in Hendersonville just across the Rutherford County line, but William isn't successful there, either. Sarah's greatest joy comes from spending extended periods of time with her sister who had inherited Palmyra in Happy Valley. When the Civil War breaks out, William is elected captain of the local company of volunteers, due to some military experience he had in Mississippi. But his health fails within a few months at camp, and he resigns and

returns home. Sarah dies during the war in 1862, and her husband dies two years later. Their oldest daughter marries shortly after the end of the war but dies a couple of years later. To end on a happier note, Sarah's two youngest daughters go on to live full lives and are quite successful raising influential families in Hickory, NC.



NEW MUSIC.

J. GALES & SON have just received the following New and Popular Music :

I'd be a Butterfly
Hurrah for the Bonnets of Blue
I've been Roaming
When you are Roaming
Oh ! never fall in Love
Let us haste to Kelvin Grove
Oh ! yes we often mention her
Oh ! no we never mention her
Here we meet too soon to part
The Butterfly; the Moth and the Bee
The dashing white Sergeant
Hey the bonnie breast knot
There's nothing true but Heaven
Oft in the stilly night
Your heart and lute are all the Store
Take this Rose
Though 'tis all but a dream
Farewell to thee Araby's daughter
And ye shall walk in silk attire
To Ladies' eyes
'Tis the last Rose of Summer
Oh ! come to me when daylight sets
Smile again my bonnie Lassic
Swiftly glides the Boat
The bonnie wee wife
The beautiful maid
Fancy dipped her pen in dew.
Raleigh, May 16, 1829.

The Jones family probably named the stream and school "Kelvin" after the traditional Scottish melody "Kelvin Grove," which was popular at the time
[https://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Kelvin_Grove_\(1\)](https://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Kelvin_Grove_(1)) .
Here is a version of "Kelvingrove,"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUKVG8iIErc> .
The song romanticizes the Kelvin Grove of trees along the Kelvin River in Glasgow, Scotland.

From the Raleigh Register, 22 May 1879

References

- ¹ I thank Eliza Robertson and Beverly Wiggins for their assistance with editing this paper.
- ² Find a brief history and photographs of Kelvin that I collected in conjunction with this paper on the CCHA website:
<https://chathamhistory.org/resources/Documents/PDFs/ResearchArticles/KelvinBriefHistoryandPhotographs.pdf>
- ³ Chatham County, NC, Deed Book AE, 1837-1840: 93; Charlotte C. Jones and William H. Hardin to Isaac Hall and Woodson Lea, 6 January 1838.
- ⁴ Wade H. Hadley et al, *Chatham County, 1771—1971* (Chatham County Historical Society, Durham, NC: Moore Pub., 1976), 268. See 266-274 for more on the educational institutions in Chatham County in the first half of the nineteenth century. Also, see Jane Pyle, “A Brief History of the Schools of Chatham County,” (Pittsboro, NC: Chatham County Historical Association, 2009).
<https://chathamhistory.org/resources/Documents/PDFs/ResearchArticles/ABriefHistoryoftheSchoolsofChathamCounty.pdf> . For more about the Edward Jones family in an earlier time, see “A Nineteenth-century Soap Opera: Eliza Lutterloh’s Memoir,” transcription and comments by Jane Pyle, *The Chatham Historical Journal*, Parts I and II, v. 19, no. 2 and 3 (September 2006),
<https://chathamhistory.org/resources/Documents/PDFs/Journal/CHJvol19num2.pdf> and
<https://chathamhistory.org/resources/Documents/PDFs/Journal/CHJvol19num2.pdf> .
- ⁵ Sarah L. Jones was my second-great-grandfather’s sister. This 1832 letter and one written by Betsey to Sarah in 1835 are in my possession.
- ⁶ For a reproduction of newspaper ads for Kelvin, see Charles L. Coon, *North Carolina Schools and Academies, 1790-1840, a Documentary History* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, State Printers and Binders, 1915), 43-47.
[https://www.carolana.com/NC/Education/North Carolina Schools and Academies 1790 1840 Charles L Coon 1915.pdf](https://www.carolana.com/NC/Education/North%20Carolina%20Schools%20and%20Academies%201790%201840%20Charles%20L%20Coon%201915.pdf)
- ⁷ Ruth Selden-Sturgill, “Kelvin,” *National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form* (Raleigh: North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, 1982), 5.
<https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/nr/CH0077.pdf> .
- ⁸ The “Virginia Springs” was the collective term for a dozen or more medicinal springs situated around present-day White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. The Greenbrier is the best-known resort now, but the Devereux family preferred the Salt Sulphur Springs and eventually leased a cottage there. See “*Journal of a Secesh Lady*,” *The Diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, 1860-1866*, edited by Beth G. Crabtree and James W. Patton (Raleigh: N. C. Division of Archives and History, 1979), 2, Footnote 5. In 1832, the year of Betsey’s visit, many planter families from the lowlands sought refuge from cholera and yellow fever epidemics at the Springs. See Eugene D. Genovese, *The Sweetness of Life: Southern Planters at Home*, edited by Douglas Ambrose (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 193.
- ⁹ All was not peaches and cream at Kelvin. Another student, writing earlier that same year, was homesick, too, and complained of the food: “we have bread and molasses for breakfast meat and bread for dinner and molasses and bread for supper.” Susan Bryan Martin to Elizabeth S. Bryan, May 11, 1832, Capehart Family Papers #1494, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, as quoted in Rachel Osborn and Ruth Selden-Sturgill, *The Architectural Heritage of Chatham County, North Carolina* (Pittsboro, NC: Chatham County Historical Association, 1991), 61.

¹⁰ For more information about Betsey's siblings and the entire Devereux family, see the "Introduction," *Journal of a Secesh Lady*, xi-xviii. and *Live Your Own Life: The Family Papers of Mary Bayard Clarke, 1854-1886*, edited by Terrell Armistead Crow and Mary Moulton Barden (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).