

## McMasters Cemetery

Good afternoon. Thank you for inviting me to appear here today. My name is Bill Kivett – actually William Daffron Kivett. I was born 74 years ago in a farm house in far eastern Randolph County, the only child of a couple both with generations of roots in this part of North Carolina. For 12 years I rode or drove the bus to school at the old Ramseur High School building, now just a few bricks of it left, – graduating from there in 1957. I went on to get a degree in electrical engineering at NC State, which led to an exciting career and a life far different from my farm upbringing. But I never forgot that my life all started right here in Randolph County, a classmate of some from Ramseur many of you know.

I always knew that my name was Kivett, but only in recent years have I come to appreciate what that name stands for, and what growing up in this historic county means. As I have grown older I have come to understand my duty to try to give something back to those who left me that surname, and to help others better appreciate their past. For the last few years I have served as an elected official of a charitable historic organization that shares my surname, and like your commission, tries to help others know more of the history of this special part of North Carolina.

I ask you to overlook my lack of skills in presentation, as I am forced to read most of this, and for you to just try to feel what my heart wishes to say. I am here as Historian for the Peter Kivett Family Association to present what is known as McMasters Cemetery for its consideration for inclusion in the category of approved Local Cultural Heritage Sites.

I expect to show that McMasters Cemetery does have local significance, historically – so much so that it seems an injustice not to have introductory information about it on this Commission's web site available to those interested in history and research. I plan to further demonstrate that this site fulfills this commission's published criteria as a private cemetery, well over 200 years old, containing the remains of a DAR and SAR recognized American Revolutionary War Patriot, as well as those of a few others I hope to successfully connect to builders and servers of Randolph County and America.

Just because of those who are buried or memorialized there, this old cemetery itself is a library of stone volumes with lasting historic value. But also, the miracle that this quiet place of reflection still can be found out there in that far corner of Randolph County adds to its significance. I ask that you consider its appearance as a noteworthy example of unheralded preservation efforts by generations of ordinary citizens who sought no recognition. It is only because of their loving attention that I have something of value to bring before you today.

First, a thumbnail history of the time and politics of this site's beginning. No one knows exactly when the first person was laid to rest on this gently sloping hill side. One can only surmise that a McMasters family shared part of the land on which they settled with neighboring families as a place to bury their loved ones. There's a stone there with a carving chronicling a burial as far back as 1787. This may not have been the first to be laid to rest in what was becoming a community burying place in a wilderness not yet known as Randolph. In the late 1700's this was still a very new Country, and this part of North Carolina was sparsely settled by families with close ties back to Europe. After a bitter war, some felt betrayed and separated from the comforts of their British heritage. Others saw their struggles to preserve the freedoms they came

across an ocean to replant as rewarded. Although the fighting had officially ended, neighbors with Quaker beliefs, German speech, Scots Irish determination, and British legal system ideals still quarreled among themselves. Times were not at all peaceful 200 years ago along Sandy Creek. Many with British ancestry chose to be buried at the historic Baptist Church named after this Sandy Creek which has been recognized by this commission. But others with a variety of surnames – mostly those who saw renewed hope to be truly free in a new America - decided to bury their dead in this field that was already being called the McMasters cemetery. That's who were first buried there, and possibly why.

Now some description of this site: McMasters Cemetery is located just off Soapstone Mountain Road – a Staley address. I quote here from a 1981 Article published in the Courier Tribune: “More than half of the estimated 110 graves in McMasters Cemetery have markers, some with names and others without.” End quote. Anyone who visits can tell that the markers without names are just weathered “Rocks of Randolph”– the identities of those beneath them, like that famous tomb in Arlington – now known but to God. Those stones with still readable names, like in most modern cemeteries, are generally grouped in different sections by the surname they still proclaim.

Among the surnames still readable, a few are etched on simple slabs, likely quarried from the nearby old Soapstone Mine. In places, modern identifying stones have been added. Most numerous of the yet readable old engraved surnames found there are McMasters – that of the believed original property owners. One can still see stones bearing the names Aldridge, York, Stout, Foust, Craven, Scotten – all names still familiar to Randolph County residents. There are other surnames seen, including Kivett. Records to be found indicate that most of these earliest burials, and those who joined them later thought of themselves as just ordinary folks. Only a few will be highlighted today in this presentation, which I struggle to keep reasonably short and not too boring.

Let me first introduce you to William Ezekial Aldridge and his wife Elizabeth. The now barely legible 1787 death date on his stone puts him as the earliest identifiable burial at McMasters. Records show that his parents, of British ancestry, came from Maryland to settle near here around 1756 on lands granted by the Earl of Granville. We do not find William Ezekial Aldridge's signature among those present on Regulator Movement Petitions, but he chose to be buried at McMasters among some whose names were. Some think, but cannot prove, it was because his wife's maiden name might have been McMasters. Their offspring were many and their contributions varied. This Aldridge family's greatest contribution may have been siring and raising generations of responsible offspring in a place which became free from British domination. This included a son of his, another William Aldridge who would fight for the American cause in the Revolutionary War, but is not found buried with his parents. He's buried in Georgia – maybe on land received in the Land Lottery as payment for his War service.

Having a son to side against his British heritage may have been hard for this father to think about. Even more unthinkable for William Ezekial Aldridge was that his 4<sup>th</sup> great granddaughter might grow up, marry, and actually live in the residence of the President of this free Country. This 1946 Texas born lady still is likely not aware that her early American ancestor's grave site is preserved by relatives she has never met at a place she has never seen in far off North Carolina. Former First Lady Laura Welch Bush may not know about any of this, but we do.

There is a row of three prominent markers near the woods in the western part of McMasters dedicated to the memory of Randolph men who died fighting for their beloved Confederacy. I can only find evidence that one of these made it back home to be buried there – the wounded Lewis F. McMasters who died in 1866. Bodies of the other two, with Kivett names, died in places so far from Randolph that their bodies may have never made the journey back home. All these more modern design stones were probably placed there later as lasting tribute to these, and the other Randolph Hornets who died in the early 1860's.

We can learn by reading these McMasters stones that burials were still taking place there into the late 1880's. One marks the grave of a lady buried there in 1885, whose birth name was Dolly Graves. Her identified father, Boston Graves, served as a private in the NC Militia during the War of 1812 – one of a very few from the South who are documented to have taken part in this lesser known war. Why is he not there beside his daughter? Like many others with roots in Randolph who left in search of a new life, he moved with most of his family to eastern Tennessee and later died there. This War of 1812 “Real Daughter” found reason to stay behind and end up being buried there by the man she married, Daniel David Kivett. He joined her in McMasters in 1892. Other Kivetts are buried there, too.

Numerous researchers have verified that a well marked grave in McMasters Cemetery identifies the burial place of the first known person by that surname in America. Even though he most likely spelled and pronounced his name another way, he is the Peter Kivett from whom the organization I represent gets its name. There were 8 children of Peter and his wife Anna Barbara named in his surviving will. That's one reason we know so much about this family. One of those children was named Jacob. He was the father of the Daniel David Kivett I just mentioned who married Dolly Graves. Extensive research has documented that almost all Americans bearing the Kivett surname have blood line connections through these children back to Peter and Anna. So do thousands more who were children of Kivett daughters who assumed the surnames of those they married – beginning with Peter and Anna's own grandchildren who bore the names Foust, Scotten, and Wolfe. This family of Peter and Anna Kivett now extends into its 10<sup>th</sup> generation of life in the free land Old Peter helped create. Calculations estimate there are more that 200,000 of them – maybe 160,000 still living.

But that's not the only way he helped build America. Although he was too old to actually fight in the Revolutionary War, this first American Kivett farmer didn't just hunker down out there and till his land. For his other documented actions he is recognized by two National historic organizations as a true American Patriot. Peter Kivett's signature can be deciphered to be present on Regulator Advertisement No. 9, published about 1768. His signature is also there with many of his recognized neighbors on a 1779 petition to split then Guilford Co. in half, creating Randolph Co. At least two of his sons, neither proven to be buried at McMasters, are recognized as taking part in the fighting against oppressive British rule. Although I did not bring copies of any of this with me today, I have them, and more important, as PKFA Historian, know where to locate them.

Try as so many have, including DNA testing, no one can yet prove where in Europe Peter came from. But, one ship log record may show when and how. The name of his wife is shown on her McMasters soapstone monument just as Anna Barbara. Her birth surname and the when and where of their marriage remains as just speculation. Although a champion of freedom, he believed in the rule of law, as judged by two separate records of him taking required oaths of allegiance to his Colonial Government. This immigrant is

thought, by association with others taking these same oaths, to be of either German or Dutch origin. He was literate, and clever enough to obtain multiple land grants. I have records of several parcels he accumulated out there around McMasters, eventually totaling several hundred acres. He knew the importance of writing and signing a will – not with an “X”, but a script signature. This will signature closely matches one seen on a 15 September 1749 oath of abjuration of passengers from the ship Edinburg just after it landed at the port of Philadelphia, strongly suggesting his time and place of immigration. This fragile 218 year old paper document is now safely stored among the North Carolina Archives in Raleigh. Although some critical facts about Peter Kivett remain unknown, a lot about this McMasters Cemetery resident’s descendants is documented in the PKFA archives I maintain.

Census records show that some of the 64 children of Peter and Anna’s eight named children began to spread out with their families to other states, although most remained to help build Randolph and surrounding North Carolina counties. Those who stayed soon overpopulated their small inherited parts of grandpa Peter’s farmland. Continuing to tend their patches of and rocky soil became a struggle. Grandson Henry Kivett, along with an Allen neighbor, saw his future in the power of the Fall Line of nearby Deep River. Applying building skills, in 1840 young Henry became a successful corporate partner in Randolph Manufacturing Co. - a water powered textile mill in the little village of Franklinsville. Undoubtedly inspired by the 1836 news that an earlier mill near Cedar Falls had begun turning out cotton cloth, this Henry Kivett was the first in his family to expand from farming into industry. In 1850 Henry also later partnered to open the 5<sup>th</sup> such mill near Columbia, as Ramseur was then known. Taking its name from the town, it was the beginning of the long enduring Columbia Manufacturing Co. All this is well documented in publications about this era of Randolph County, including his fathering with one wife 16 children.

Henry’s unmarried son David Lawrence Kivett moved to Manchester, NC – near Fayetteville - around 1845 to manage a new cotton mill and bobbin factory there. Almost upon arrival, this second Kivett family industrialist married a Hendricks lady and began having children – always a high priority for Kivetts! Their first born was taken prisoner at the battle of Gettysburg, and still only age 17, died at Pt. Lookout, MD of smallpox – more loss to the family. But this great War was only followed in the South by the harsh period of Reconstruction. Then in his 70’s, Henry Kivett was forced to abandon his now worthless interests in these once profitable mills. Undaunted, he and wife Sarah Vestal moved downriver to apply his building skills on a bridge across the Cape Fear near Fayetteville. Another of his sons, Andrew Jackson Kivett, and his family went there to help him. For a time only a ferry operated by a McNeil family crossed this wide river there. This major project restored the bridge which had been purposely burned to slow the advance of General Sherman’s army. Too young to go off to war, David Lawrence Kivett’s second son - Henry’s grandson - named Zachary Taylor Kivett worked on this bridge project as a water boy, learning the trades of building from his grandfather and uncle in his late teens. After this huge new wooden bridge was completed, Henry and son Andrew Jackson brought their families back to Randolph Co. Henry was buried there in 1882 – no, not at McMasters, but in the graveyard of a new church he and Andrew Jackson had built ten years earlier. Because of Henry and his sons it was then called Kivett’s church. A modern building now thrives on the original site out there near McMasters Cemetery – now known as Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church. At this site the PKFA still holds its annual meetings – near another cemetery which probably contain the most “Kivett” stones in the world.

Henry Lawrence Kivett traveled around out West after his bobbin factory burned during the war, but his Water Boy son stayed on after the bridge was completed – grew up and married a Scots-Irish daughter of the man who had operated the ferry. Known in adulthood as “Mr. Z. T.” Kivett, with wife Lillian McNeil fathered 13 children. This prolific 3<sup>rd</sup> great-grandson of the McMasters Peter Kivett also came to be known as quite a builder and industrialist. He started Harnett County’s first telephone company – the first of many Kivetts to dabble with electricity. He built the Harnett County courthouse, but he is most remembered for leading 4 of his sons and a daughter to resurrected a burned down local private school. Exhibiting unique design and construction features, Campbell University’s iconic Kivett Hall endues today as testimonial to Kivett building skills and service to their community.

At any time in the history of our country there was always a Kivett to be found in military service. One of particular note was born far from Randolph County, but had solid roots back there. His NC born father Walter Raleigh Kivett had been inspired by own grandfather Henry Kivett’s success in industry. He found his place in the lumber industry of the Pacific Northwest. It was there in Idaho that a future Naval aviator was born. He rose through the ranks to retire in 1961 as Vice Admiral Frederick Norman Sr. Kivette. The last 4 of his 36 years in the Navy was spent as Commander of the 125 ship and 60,000 man US Navy’s 7th fleet. Wouldn’t Peter and Anna have been proud?

Yet another of Peter’s descendants, born in Burlington in 1935, was there in that 1963 Dallas motorcade as a Secret Service Agent in a car speeding toward Parkland Hospital behind the one carrying the dying President Kennedy. He was there also, but hidden from view in this inauguration photo. Agent Jerry David Kivett was then assigned for several years to protect Lady Bird Johnson. He confessed of his great pride, but an aching back, which lingered with him long after having personally planted so many flowers with her at her beloved LBJ ranch. True to his pledge, this was about the only secret of his service he ever shared with me. His father and mine were 1<sup>st</sup> cousins who grew up together where I also did out there east of Ramseur. It was an honor for me to know him personally as just cousin Jerry.

This father of mine, Everett Kivett, was one of several of Peter Kivett’s descendant who became builders. As monuments to this 7<sup>th</sup> grade educated quiet man, numerous private homes around this region, and even the gymnasium he built at old Ramseur High still stand.

The stories first told on those stone books in McMasters Cemetery, stories of builders with a duty to serve, did not end there. Many are still playing out today. Consider this 9th generation descendant of Peter Kivett, Saylor James Sutton. Just last week he was presented the Boy Scouts of America’s highest honor for his service – the title of Eagle Scout. His mother – my first born – has spent most of her career in medical care to Veterans. This link of Old Peter Kivett’s service endures, and our pride cannot be restrained.

No, none of these later – famous or ordinary - Kivetts are buried out there in McMasters. So, why did I choose to take up so much of your valuable time here today telling about them. These other real people all came from one ordinary couple who chose to be buried over 200 years ago out there. Just ordinary folks? Maybe not. These first American Kivetts were probably proud to see before they died their efforts to establish a free new American Country become a reality. But, I want you to also consider what many believe to be the most lasting contribution of those buried on this grass and weed covered red dirt hillside. I

see in the more available records of Peter and Anna Kivett's offspring a thread of genetic traits and values which lived on in the generations that followed.

Just as I believe it's important to better understand the times of its beginning, I think these Kivett stories are equally vital to our understanding of the historical and cultural value of McMasters Cemetery. Those first buried there left what many see as repeated inherited skills to build, a sustained inborn spirit to serve, and the resilient will to succeed – even in difficult times.

McMasters Cemetery has long been kind of a silent museum, waiting patiently for so many of the descendants of those buried there to even learn that it exists. Over several generations an unheralded few have succeeded in preventing it from being lost to nature or modern development. Others, including me, have tried to keep stories about the legacy of its residents from being forgotten. With the wider recognition your commission can bestow, it could be transformed into a teaching laboratory for generations to come. Whether they be descendants of those buried there or not, more from far and near may find another reason to come to Randolph for a first visit - to discover the charm of this site – actually walk among the stones – touch them - try to make out the names and dates etched into them – ask who they were, and what they did – wonder if and how they were related to them – and then go back home determined to find answers to these first thought about questions. The Peter Kivett Family Association can help answer some.

The action I ask you to take can cause this to be another better known place where an unknowing generation might be inspired to learn and appreciate the history and the cultural values handed down to them. Those who already know about this place, and appreciate that their first American ancestor's resting place is being lovingly cared for will be delighted to learn that this Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission acted so honorably by demonstrating that they also recognize this as a special place. They will thank you, as I today thank you for your time and consideration, on behalf of the Peter Kivett Family Association, and as a grateful old former resident of this historic County.

If any remaining time permits, I'll do my best to try to answer questions any of you might have.

### **CREDITS**

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