Old Petersburg and the Broad River Valley of Georgia

Hebert, Keith, Coulter, E. Merton

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The Virginians of the Broad River Valley

GEORGIA LANDS appeared attractive to certain Virginians who had entered this region as Continental soldiers during the Revolution; and when the fighting was over, a small group of them headed by George Mathews returned and petitioned the legislature for a grant of 200,000 acres. The petition was granted on condition that 200 or more families would be brought in. Instead of settling in the new lands obtained from the Indians in 1783 and established the next year as two new counties, Washington and Franklin, the Virginians spread out up and down the Broad River Valley, which until 1790 lay wholly in Wilkes County. Beginning in 1790 this region was cut up into four counties, leaving Wilkes county with only a small frontage on the south bank. First Elbert County was set up, extending from the mouth of Broad River up the north bank almost to the end of the valley. In 1793 Oglethorpe County was taken from Wilkes south of the river and was made to include at least half of the upper valley. Then three years later the lower part of the valley beginning at the mouth of Broad River and extending up the south bank to the Wilkes County line and southward to Little River was erected into Lincoln County.

Not all of the Broad River settlers were Virginians. The remnants of those who had come in before the Revolution were largely North Carolinians or South Carolinians of short duration in South Carolina before passing on across the Savannah into Georgia—these latter having come for the most part from North Carolina. Such were the Doolys, the Harts, the Clarkes, the Lamars, and others whose names were less well known. These Wilkes County Carolinians were concentrated largely in the valley south of Broad River. Before the end of the Revolution they
had formed the nucleus of a settlement which became the county seat of Wilkes County. It was named Washington in 1780, being the first town to so honor the great Revolutionary patriot. With the breakup of Wilkes into three additional counties, courthouse towns of necessity were established—Lexington for Oglethorpe, Lincolnton for Lincoln, and Elberton for Elbert. In all of these the Virginia element dominated. In addition to these three towns there was another which in the period of its glory was to become, for that time only, the cultural and economic center of the whole valley. That town was Petersburg, at the mouth of the Broad River Valley.

These Virginians were a remarkable group, constituting an element in the population of the state, whose importance would be hard to overestimate. Concentrated to a large extent in Oglethorpe and Elbert counties, they provided four governors for Georgia and two for Alabama, besides United States Senators, Representatives, judges, and other leaders of lesser standing in politics and public life. For their leaders at least six Georgia counties were named.¹

George Rockingham Gilmer, one of these Broad River Virginians, writing in 1854 declared that it was “not known that any so small community of planting people, ever created so much wealth, and filled so many offices in so short a time.” He praised them for their “extraordinary industry, economy, and honesty, and the honors conferred upon them on account of their patriotism and integrity.”²

Not all of the Virginians who came to the Broad River Valley were of the elite. There were some who, either before coming or later, slid into that class known as “poor whites,” and settled “every poor vacant piece of land in the Broad River neighborhood.” According to Gilmer, “Most of them would cheat for six and a quarter cents, and sue each other for a quarter of a dollar”; and only one of them “rose to greatness even in rascality.” Some were good at horse swapping; but one less cunning and intelligent gained the name of Coony for having climbed a tree to capture a coon and sawed off the limb between himself and the trunk of the tree, with the result that Coony and the coon fell among the dogs and both were bitten.³

Also, Gilmer had no great respect for the North Carolinians, not for any feeling that they lacked intelligence but because they were rivals in politics. In the Old Dominion also the latent feeling of superiority of Virginians over North Carolinians was long
prevailed. Gilmer thought that some of the North Carolinians tried to escape that stigma by calling themselves Virginians since before coming to Georgia they had lived near the Virginia line.4

Apart from Gilmer's prejudices against those Broad River people who were not Virginians and the "poor white" Virginians, the prominent Virginian families who came to the Broad River Valley made up "the most intimate friendly social union ever known among the same number of persons";5 but Gilmer in making this statement should have included that kindred but more cosmopolitan group who made up the little Petersburg kingdom down the Valley at the mouth of Broad River. In both cases there was much intermarrying with the consequent formation of tribal interests in kinship and business. The families were generally large; ten and twelve members were not uncommon at this time.

Those first family Virginians in the Broad River Valley included, among others, the Gilmers, the Lewises, the Strothers, the Mathews, the Meriwethers, the Johnsons, the Crawfords, the Barnefts, the Harvies, the Taliaferros, the McGehees, the Jordans, the Marks, the Freemans, the Lumpkins, and the Barrows. Their origins before reaching Virginia were English, Irish, Scotch, Welsh, Dutch, French, and Italian. The peak of the influx of these families to Georgia was the period from 1783 to 1790.

Among the first to come was Thomas Meriwether Gilmer. His grandfather George Gilmer had been born near Edinburgh, Scotland, and had migrated to Virginia where he married a second and then a third wife, his first wife having died in London. His second wife was a sister of Dr. Thomas Walker, well-known for leading an exploring party to Kentucky for the Loyal Land Company in 1750, and his third wife was a sister of Dr. James Blair, founder and first president of the College of William and Mary. Thomas Meriwether Gilmer was descended through his grandfather's second marriage. The Meriwether in his name came by means of his father Peachy Ridgway Gilmer's marriage to Mary Meriwether of the well-known Virginia family of Meriwethers.6

Thomas Meriwether Gilmer was a fat boy from childhood, weighing 200 pounds by the time he was eighteen, and later almost 300. Living on the Shenandoah River about a mile or two below the school which he attended, he would in the summer months float and swim home down the river. Before he was of age he married Elizabeth Lewis and the next year he set out for Georgia. He settled on the south side of Broad River and built
on the hill above the river bottom lands a log house, which later he replaced with a two-story frame dwelling.

Bringing with him to Georgia little except his wife, Thomas Meriwether Gilmer at the time of his death in 1817 left a widow, nine children, a great many grandchildren, and a sizeable fortune. His chattels, including seventy-three slaves, were conservatively appraised by the administrators of his estate at more then $55,000. His cash on hand at his death amounted to $1,485 and notes due stood at $7,956. The value of his real estate was not appraised at the time of the settlement of his estate; but he had already given land to some of his children and he left the residue to his widow, who was to live many years longer. She was still living in 1854, being then 89 years old.7

The items found inside Thomas Meriwether Gilmer’s house and out in his barnyard and pastures should give some indication of the kind of life a Broad River grandee lived in the late eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth. Among the pieces of furniture and dining room and kitchen utensils in his house at the time of his death were 10 jugs and 17 butter pots, knives and forks, a cupboard, one caster and 5 dozen plates, a dozen silver table spoons, a dozen tea spoons, a dozen dishes and 4 pitchers, a lot of pots and saucers, a set of China and tea ware, waffle irons, a lot of glasses and candlesticks, 19 table chairs, 4 tea kettles, 2 flour barrels, a spice mortar, 4 tin kettles, 6 pine tables and a pair of birch tables, a walnut desk, a clock (valued at $100, probably a grandfather clock), a pair of field glasses, 2 shotguns, a powder and shot flask, a shot bag, 27 "sitting chairs," 4 pairs of fire dogs, shovels and tongs, sadirons, 8 beds with curtains, a dozen counterpanes and 4 coverlets, a "dressing glass," 10 trunks and a chest, and 320 yards of homespun (valued at $220), and many other items to be found in sitting rooms and kitchens. There were $70 worth of books, items notoriously undervalued by appraisers of estates.

Outside in the stables, barnlots, and pastures were 18 horses and a yoke of oxen, 107 cattle, 75 sheep, and 210 hogs. There were growing crops of cotton valued at $6,720 and of corn, at $3,600. On hand were 450 bushels of wheat, 400 bushels of oats, and fodder worth $200. In their appropriate places were a flax wheel, 9 spinning wheels, a loom and web, 9 pair of cotton cards, 3 bags of feathers and 7 of wool, 59 pairs of shoes (stored away for the slaves), 16 axes, wedges, frows, leather worth $25.00, raw hides,
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sythes and reaping cradles, 31 hoes, 26 plows, a dozen pairs of plow gears, wagons, carts, blacksmith tools, 300 pounds of iron, dairy furniture, and $228 worth of fat, tallow, and salt. There were 11 beehives, a cotton gin, and a riding chair.\(^8\)

Thomas Meriwether Gilmer's children intermarried with the Taliaferros, the Harvies, the Johnsons, the Barnettts, the Marks, the Mathews, the Bibbs, and the Jordans. Six of them did not find the Broad River country as inviting as the new lands opening up to the westward. Five moved to Alabama and the sixth continued on to Mississippi. Of those who stayed in Georgia, George Rockingham Gilmer was the most prosperous and famous. He had a short military career, after which he became a member of the United States House of Representatives and governor of Georgia. His fame was doubtless kept greener on account of the book which he wrote in 1854, entitled *Sketches of Some of the First Settlers of Upper Georgia, of the Cherokees, and the Author.*

A frank but loving reviewer of the book said in 1855: "We thank Gov. Gilmer for his book. It has been said by some of his friends that it has injured his fame,—there is too much gossip in it, too many hearts wounded, too much of the old man's infirmity. We dissent from these imputations. Of itself, and on its own pedestal, it is worthy of respect. It differs from all other books; it is the beginning and end of a peculiar freedom of the press, which, as an experiment, will scarcely be repeated. The author was full of images, and overrun with facts. He was besieged; he found no rest.

"Writing them down, by way of depletion, afforded some relief; yet the Broad River community, with their forests, fields, and cabins, log schoolhouses and rough hospitality,—with their whole issue of children and grandchildren, intermarriages, and associations thus formed, illustrated by pedigrees from English knighthood and Indian princes, including humbler degrees of ancestral reputation,—all had to be noticed; and nothing less than publication would answer. Gov. Gilmer is no voluntary author: the book was extorted from him."\(^9\)

Among the other Gilmers and their kindred who moved from Virginia to Georgia to grace the Broad River Valley was John Gilmer, an uncle of Thomas Meriwether Gilmer. He had been an officer under Lafayette in the Revolution. He had none of the business acumen nor acquisitiveness of his nephew, and it was his wife (who had been Mildred Meriwether) "whose industry and economy prevented her husband's generous wastefulness making
his children destitute." Of his nine children, five moved on westward—one each to Illinois, Kentucky, Alabama, Louisiana, and Arkansas.10

Another of the Gilmer kin to come to Georgia was Meriwether Lewis with his mother and her family and his step-father. Since her husband William Lewis had died, she married John Marks and together they decided to try their fortune in that promised land of the Broad River Valley. They arrived in 1784 or 1785, at the time when Meriwether would have been either ten or eleven years old, They acquired an estate and prospered. Meriwether was sent back to Virginia for his education, and, therefore, spent only his long vacations in Georgia. Traveling back and forth and communing with the deep forests and open fields of the Broad River country conditioned him to achieve that fame which came to him when he led the Lewis and Clark expedition to the Pacific Ocean in 1804-1806. On one occasion in the early 1790's when there was great alarm among the Broad River settlers over an impending invasion by Cherokee Indians, a group of the settlers fled for protection to a deep forest recess. In the midst of night while they were gathered around the campfire and momentarily expecting an attack, Meriwether had the presence of mind to dash a bucket of water on the fire and thereby restore confidence to the group. Meriwether's mother was again a widow before 1792, and in that year she decided to move back to Virginia. Meriwether, now in the army, came back to Georgia to supervise the return of his mother to the old homestead in Albemarle County, Virginia. Mrs. Marks still owned property in the Broad River country, for in 1797 she made a trip to Georgia to bring back in three wagons the slaves who had been working the plantation lands. In 1806 Mrs. Marks made another visit to the Broad River region, and the following year she was still collecting certain moneys due her; but probably by this time she had disposed of all her Georgia property.11

The most colorful of the Virginians to come down to the Broad River Valley was George Mathews, who with a few associates (as previously noted) was largely responsible for the migration of the Virginians to Georgia. He was a son of John Mathews, an Irishman, who migrated to Virginia in 1737. George Mathews took part in Lord Dunmore's War and was in the Battle of Point Pleasant on the Great Kanawha. He fought through the Revolution and was personally known to George Washington, whom he always admired and held to be the only American he would look up
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He was captured by the British and confined on a prison ship. On being exchanged he joined General Nathanael Greene's forces in the Southern Department, and in this way became acquainted with Georgia.

He removed to Broad River in 1784 and settled in the Goose Pond district, which got its name from the large number of geese and ducks which on their flights back and forth would rest for a time on a small pond made by the flood waters of the river. By 1809 the post office of Goose Pond had been set up to serve the many Virginians who had settled in this region.

 Immediately Mathews became a political power not only among the Broad River Virginians but also throughout all of upper Georgia. Before he had satisfied the three years residence requirement for governor, he was in 1786 elected to that office, but since the term did not begin until November, 1787, he was seated. Also he served another term from 1793 to 1796, and became involved in the so-called Yazoo Fraud, by signing the famous bill providing for the sale of much of Georgia's western lands. Being dubbed a Yazooist, he became so unpopular that he threatened to leave the United States and did leave Georgia to return only infrequently. In 1798 President John Adams sent his name to the Senate for confirmation as governor of the Mississippi Territory, but as sharp objection was raised in that body because of Mathews' connection with one of the Yazoo land companies, the President withdrew his name. In 1811-1812 Mathews as an agent of the United States Government became involved in the movement to seize East Florida. He occupied Amelia Island, but his action was disavowed on the grounds that he had misunderstood his instructions. Greatly incensed by this treatment, Mathews set out for Washington to get an explanation from President Madison with the determination that if he did not get satisfaction he would subject the President to personal chastisement. Since he was in this highly excitable state, his health broke when he reached Augusta, and there he died and was buried in St. Paul's Churchyard.

Mathews was a short thick man with a florid complexion, militarily erect with his head thrown back. His speech and pronunciation were picturesque; he spelled coffee *kauphy* and he was saved from these peculiarities in his public papers only by his secretary. On occasion he dressed in a three-cornered cocked hat, high-top boots, ruffled shirt in front and at the wrists; and sometimes he carried a long sword at his side.

George Mathews was married three times. His first wife died;
he got the legislature to divorce him from his second wife; he lived infrequently with his third wife. John and William, his first two sons, remained in Georgia; George, his third son, was appointed by President Jefferson in 1805 as an interim judge in the Mississippi Territory and the following year he was given an appointment as judge in the Orleans Territory; Charles Lewis, his youngest son, married a sister of Governor Peter Early and lived in Goose Pond until her death, after which he moved to Alabama. His daughter Anne married Samuel Blackburn, an Irish schoolteacher, and after a residence in Georgia, they moved to Virginia, where Blackburn became a person of some importance.12

No Virginia family which moved to the Broad River Valley was quite the equal of the Meriwethers in their connection through marriage with other important families, in the number of children who constituted this widespread tribe, and in the part they played throughout the state and nation. According to one of their number, "No one ever looked at or talked with one of them, but he heard or saw something which made him listen, or look again."13

Nicholas Meriwether along with his two brothers came to Virginia from Wales in the late seventeenth century and was the progenitor of the Meriwethers—there being no male issues from the families of his brothers. One of his daughters married Robert Lewis, whose descendants were most of the families of that name in Virginia, Georgia, and Kentucky. Descendants of Nicholas Meriwether were part of the great migration to the Broad River Valley, where they became outstanding in the development of that region and in the political life of Georgia. One of the children of Thomas Meriwether (a grandson of Nicholas), was Frank who moved to Georgia and of whom it was said: "He had no pride or vanity. His house was the collecting-place for the poor and ignorant, the rich and learned."14 Another, a daughter, Lucy, married William Lewis and became the mother of Meriwether Lewis. After William’s death she married John Marks and moved to Broad River, as previously noted. Others of these children married into the Gilmer family. David, a brother of Frank’s, married Mary Harvie, who was reputed to weigh from 300 to 400 pounds; Elizabeth, a daughter of Frank’s, married William Mathews, a son of Governor Mathews; and Tom, a son of Frank’s, married Rebekah Mathews, a daughter of the Governor.15

Coming down another line of descent from Nicholas Meriwether were General David Meriwether, well known in Georgia politics, a member of the United States House of Representatives
from 1802 to 1807, and often a commissioner to treat with the Creek Indians; his son James, a graduate of the University of Georgia, a Superior Court judge, and a member of the United States House of Representatives; and his grandson James A., a graduate of the state university, a Superior Court judge, and a Representative in Congress for several terms. Another son of David Meriwether's, William, was a graduate of the state university. Other sons moved on to Alabama and to Tennessee.\textsuperscript{16}

Probably the most prolific and certainly the weightiest of the Virginians who moved to Broad River were the Harvies. John Harvie came to Virginia from Sterling, Scotland about forty years before the Revolution and became the father of nine children. Since John was dead before the great migration, his widow and her children joined the exodus to Georgia. A physical characteristic of the family was their great weight. According to those who were reputed to know, the combined weight of the nine children was 2,700 pounds. They intermarried with the Taliaferros, the Moores, the Hulls, the Cosbys, the Harrises, the Wattses, the Davenports, the Meriwethers, the Jordans (reputed to be descendants of Pocahontas), the Bradleys, the Johnsons, and the Andrews (John Andrew, the father of James Osgood Andrew, the Methodist Bishop, whose ownership of slaves broke the Methodist Church into Northern and Southern divisions in 1845). As daughters of the Harvie name tended to predominate, the spread of that name was no indication of how extensive the original Harvies who came to Broad River had become.\textsuperscript{17}

Many of the Broad River Virginians had come from Albemarle County, but other parts of the Old Dominion provided their contributions. During early Colonial times two brothers from Italy settled near Williamsburg. They were Taliaferros. Thomas Jefferson referred to the Taliaferro clan which arose from this beginning as respectable and prosperous. George Wythe, signer of the Declaration of Independence and high judge in Virginia, married into this family. Zachariah Taliaferro, who lived in Amherst County, was the immediate progenitor of the Georgia Taliaferros. He did not go to Georgia, but several of his eight children caught the Georgia fever. The most prominent was Benjamin, who fought through the Revolution, first under Washington and then in the Southern Department under Benjamin Lincoln and Light-Horse Harry Lee, until he was captured at the siege of Charleston. Paroled, he returned to Virginia, married Martha Meriwether, and in 1784 set out for the Broad River Valley. He settled on the south
side of the river about ten miles above Petersburg. He raised a family of ten children, nine by his first wife, and a tenth "by marrying a dependent young woman of the neighborhood, . . . about whom any romance would have been ridiculous." His tribe did not become very extensive, though they intermarried with the Gilmers, Watkinses, McGehees, Barnett's, Bibbs, and Harvies. The only one to attain any particular fame was Benjamin, himself, who played an important part in state politics, becoming a member of the senate and its president, a delegate to the constitutional convention of 1798, a judge of the Superior Court, and a member of the United States House of Representatives from 1799 to 1802, when he resigned.

Nicholas Johnson was, doubtless, the most flamboyant and eccentric of all the Virginians who came to Broad River. As a young man in Louisa County, Virginia, while acting as a deputy sheriff he committed some deed that made it desirable for him to depart that region. His arrival in Georgia was talked about for years thereafter. He appeared on a blooded charger, accompanied by three servants. He wore a blue coat, red vest, and buff pantaloons; and he often remarked that such a dress would set a man off in good fashion, for bystanders would be led immediately to remark, "Who is that? Who is that?"

He later married Mary Marks, a daughter of James Marks, and raised nine children before his wife died in 1814 or 1815, after which he moved to Alabama. His eccentricities still remained with him. Living alone, he indulged his affections on dogs and cats, keeping about seventy of each breed. His children who remained in Georgia intermarried with the Jordans, Taliaferros (Betty marrying a son of Benjamin Taliaferro), and the Gilmers.

In his Georgia days he had been addicted to strong drink, and one day while in his cups, he very near let his wife drown in Broad River; however, after rescuing her, he never "touched another drop." His plantation adjoined that of Governor Mathews', and in giving advice to the Governor's son Charles on the best method to get elected to office, he specified traveling through the country talking to the women, inquiring the price of chickens and eggs, drinking a glass of cider at crossroads stores, and kissing the children of the neighborhood. Though truthful and honest, he was prone to exaggerate and to emphasize what he was describing, as when he told his wife that he had come upon a partridge nest with a bushel of eggs in it. When his wife expressed her doubts, he reduced the number to a dozen.
Colonel Johnson (a title by courtesy) owned a large plantation and thirty or forty slaves. When an organ-grinder with a monkey happened by, he would call his Negroes out of the fields to be entertained. His dinner table generally groaned under the weight of several hams, a large hunk of beef, dishes of fowls, and vegetables galore. His wife kept seven chicken houses, while the Colonel was reputed to own 500 sheep and uncounted hogs—probably some more of the Colonel’s exaggerations. Since his first children were daughters, he was so pleased with the arrival of his first son that he is said to have planted in his fence corners and at other likely spots 100,000 walnuts, expecting that by the time the boy grew into young manhood, the trees would be worth a dollar apiece for timber. This report might well be considered another exaggeration.\(^{20}\)

The Crawfords were originally from Scotland, but as other Scots had done, some came to Colonial Virginia. Among them were the ancestors of Joel Crawford, who lived in Amherst County, Virginia until in the midst of the Revolution he migrated to South Carolina. At the end of the war he moved across the Savannah into that part of Richmond County, which in 1790 became Columbia County. Here Joel’s sons William H. Crawford and Joel, Jr. grew up; but in the course of time both moved northward into the Broad River Valley. Although they were not of the Broad River Virginians, they were cordially received without any condescension. William H. Crawford became a resident of Lexington in Oglethorpe County, while his brother Joel settled farther down the river on the north side in Elbert County. In a short while William H. Crawford was entering a career of national importance which led him to the very verge of the presidency of the United States while Joel, on the other hand, seemed content to be a tobacco inspector in one of the warehouses in Petersburg.

Another family from Amherst County, Virginia, was headed by Nat Barnett, who had intermarried into the neighboring Crawfords before he set out for Georgia. They came about the time of the outbreak of the Revolution, and by-passing the Broad River Valley, they settled down the Savannah in the northern part of what later became Richmond County and which still later was cut off into Columbia County. Two of his young sons, William and Joel, played an important part in the Revolution, and later, like the Crawfords, moved up into the Broad River Valley. Joel became a planter in Oglethorpe County, which he represented several times in the state senate and then, like many other Broad River
people, moved on into Alabama where he became an even richer planter.

William Barnett settled in the Elbert County part of the Broad River Valley, where he became sheriff and thereafter was frequently elected to the state senate. He served in the United States House of Representatives from 1812 to 1815. Then, like his brother Joel, he caught the Alabama fever and moved to Montgomery County, where he died in 1834. The Barnetts intermarried with the Broad River Virginians as much as if they had been of that clan—the Meriwethers, Gilmers, Taliaferros, and the Mathews.21

Another family of Scottish descent which migrated to the Broad River Valley was that of young Micajah McGehee, who had married into the Scott family to which Winfield Scott belonged. At first looked upon by the Scots with unfriendly eyes, Micajah and his wife moved to Georgia, where in the course of time they reared a dozen children, said by one chronicler to have numbered fourteen. They intermarried with the Gilmers, Taliaferros, Watkinses, the Olivers, and, of course, with many others in succeeding generations. The Broad River Valley was not broad enough to hold all of the second generation, of whom some moved to Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and to Texas. Micajah built a frame house in a time when log houses were the style. It had four rooms on the first floor and several upstairs. The house was painted red and became a great gathering place for frolicks, consisting of dancing by the young people and card-playing by others—principally whist. The older ones enlivened their temperament with a touch of brandy, but not enough to befuddle the brain. Micajah was the first to plant an extensive peach orchard in the Broad River Valley. He turned most of his fruit into brandy which he sold for at least $1,600 a year. Drinking brandy was customary, but not to the extent to which Micajah consumed it. It was said that when he was young he could drink brandy all day without becoming drunk. In his old age he confined himself to a quart a day.22

As has already been noted, others besides Virginians mingled into this kingdom of the Broad River Virginians, and some, even Virginians, were hardly a part of the close-knit clan. There was John Lumpkin, who settled on Long Creek, a tributary of Broad River, and who was important in Oglethorpe and Georgia officialdom. His son Wilson became governor of the state, and another son Joseph Henry became the first chief justice of the State Supreme Court. There were also the Barrows, coming down from Virginia but not until later establishing great land-holdings on
Syls Fork across the Broad River watershed, which drains into Little River and thence into the Savannah. The Barrows intermarried with the Lumpkins, the Popes (who had come directly from North Carolina), and various other families forming a kinship of great proliferation.

From far-away Italy came Ferdinand Phinizy, who settled on the upper stretches of Long Creek. Everything he touched seemed to turn to gold. He became a merchant prince, first in Lexington, and after 1800 in Augusta, where he had moved in 1800.24

Coming to Georgia as a clerk in Phinizy’s store in Lexington was George Paschal, a North Carolinian, who had fought in the Revolution. In 1802 he married Agnes Brewer, who was a member of a little tribe of North Carolinians who had settled on Long Creek. George Paschal later ran a store of his own, became an unsuccessful farmer for a short time; and being an extremely well-read man, he taught school at various times. About 1812 he left Oglethorpe County to engage in a paper-making project at Scull Shoals on the Oconee River, in Greene County; and after failing in this enterprise he returned to Oglethorpe County, where he died in 1832. The admiration he gained for characters in some of the books which he read and for living acquaintances he showed in naming some of his children: Augustus Burrell Julius Nicholas, Isaiah Addison Sanders Goode, Franklin LaFayette Warren Greene, and Lorenzo Columbus George Washington. His wife Agnes became the grand lady wherever the family happened to live, and after her husband’s death she moved to the gold diggings in North Georgia and spent the remainder of her ninety-four years in Auraria, as “Grandma” Paschal to a thousand miners who needed her administering kindness. Her sons spread out to the West and became important in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas—and one in the nation’s capital after the Civil War.25

A lone Irishman, a bachelor then and always, Francis Meson, wandered into the Broad River country and settled in Lexington about 1800. He ran a store, became wealthy, and left his fortune to the Oglethorpe academy, which immediately changed its name to Meson Academy, which for the next century was the outstanding educational institution in the Broad River Valley, drawing its students and headmasters from a much wider region. As a New Yorker said of it, “I would rather have the fame of Meson than of Alexander [the Great].”26

Coming from Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, about the end of the Revolution and settling in the Broad River Valley was
James Jack. According to tradition, he had carried to the Congress in Philadelphia a copy of the famous though disputed Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence of May 20, 1775. He was probably celebrated in his Georgia home for this exploit, but he seemed not to have capitalized on it politically, for no record indicates that he even reached a position as high as membership in the state legislature, though his son Patrick attained that position.27

Although the Virginians dominated the Oglethorpe and Elbert parts of the Broad River Valley, they were not the exclusive inhabitants of these parts; and although they were sprinkled in the Petersburg kingdom in the lower Valley and in the Wilkes County part, they controlled neither one of these regions. As will be seen later, Petersburg was more cosmopolitan than any other part of the Valley, and from Long Creek eastward through Wilkes County the North Carolinians were largely in charge.