

**THE DUFF MANSION HOUSE
ADDENDUM TO MY ESSAY ON
SCOTT'S STATION**

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A review of the history of the “Duff Mansion House” and land is that it was originally part of the series of land grants made to Archibald Scott and his wife, Fannie, in 1783. Scott had settled in Elk Garden, and Fannie was among the first settlers of Castlewood in 1769, being the sister of Humphrey and Henry Dickenson, Jr. Her brother Henry had been killed by Indians in 1778-1779 as he attempted to wade Gist's Ford at Upper Castlewood, and where he had crawled up on a rock in the middle of the river after having been shot, and where he died (1&2). Archibald and Fannie received land grants totaling a little over 1000 acres located at the head of Wallen's Creek in Lee County. On the evening of June 29, 1785 a war party led by Chief Bob Bengé knocked down their door, shot Archibald as he attempted to get out of bed, killed the Scott children, and carried Fannie off into captivity. She escaped and returned to the settlements on August the 11th. In the interlude she may have been declared dead, as the land passed to Archibald's brother, James, who was listed as Archibald's “heir-at-law”. Fannie refused to return to the land at the head of Wallen's Creek. James Scott sold the land to a ‘Thomas Johnson’ for 220 Pounds. What relationship the man or may not have had to the ‘Thomas Johnson’ who became Fannie's second husband is unknown, as the purchaser of the Scott land is listed in the deed as having a wife named “Susannah”. Thomas Johnson sold the Scott land to Robert Duff, whose wife was Mary “Polly” Powell Dickenson, who was the daughter of Henry Dickenson, Jr. (3). Her mother's father had been Ambrose Powell, who was a member of the Dr. Thomas Walker Expedition, and for whom the Powell River was named. Ambrose was also the grandfather of Confederate General Ambrose Powell (A. P.) Hill. Fannie's second husband, Thomas Johnson, founded Johnson County, Tennessee.

Robert and Polly had ten children, each of whom inherited about 110 acres at the head of Wallen's Creek from their parents (4). The line of descent to the Duff Mansion House is as follows: Robert Duff to William P. Duff to William F. Duff to William Powell Duff to “Joe” Joseph Newland Duff (1869-1962)*, who was the last Duff owner of the Mansion House, and who sold it to Fred Steel of Tazewell, Virginia, in the same series of sales of the entire Archibald and Fannie estate beginning about 1917. Eunice Laster's family through the female line of ‘Fields’ had worked as tenant farmers for the Duffs, and as the Lasters had hired on with Mr. Steel as his tenant farmer, they were shown around the Duff Mansion house as Mr. Steel took possession. It was Joe that showed Eunice's mother the secret compartment in the

drawer mentioned below (5). Bales (4) confirms that Joe was the last Duff to live in the Mansion House.



THE DUFF MANSION HOUSE AFTER THE STEEL MODIFICATIONS
NOTE THE BRIDGE ACROSS THE HIGHWAY TO THE BARN

A very interesting set of circumstances surrounds another person connected to the Duff Mansion House. William Powell Duff, by his second wife, had a son named Robert Cecil Duff, who married Martha Tompkins (6). The Tompkins family had acquired a Black 'Mammy' named 'Mammy Ease', which was short for 'Easter'. About 1884 the Tompkins family was living near Gadsden, Alabama, when one of the matriarchs of that family was sitting on her porch when she saw a wagon with 'Aunt Mandy' and her mulatto children coming down the street. The matriarch sent her younger brother, Will, out to stop the wagon and to tell Aunt Mandy that, "Sister would like one of your children to come and work for her". Aunt Mandy said, "Sure. Tell your sister she can have this'un, and have her Easter". Mammy Ease was about 6 at the time. Her real first name has long since been lost, but her surname was 'Tank'. Easter was taken in and raised by the Tompkins family, and helped raise their children. After the death of the elder Tompkins, Ease moved around among the homes of their children, helping raise the grandchildren. It was in this capacity that she came into the Duff family via Robert Cecil Duff and wife Martha Tompkins Duff. Cecil and Joseph Duff were, therefore, cousins. The Duff family was very close. Mammy Ease came to live for a while with the family of Joseph in the Duff Mansion

House. Eunice Laster's father met her several times there. He recalled seeing the 'Tompkins girls' (they must have been Cecil Duff's daughters) riding their horses across the farm standing in their saddles (5).



MAMMY EASTER
WITH SOME OF
THE TOMPKINS
CHILDREN

Back to my invitation to come down, the house had been abandoned for several years. Ground hogs had eaten up some of the floors. A window had been shot out, and the house had been broken into and used for illicit parties. An extensive remodeling of the front had been done. The original back porch had been enclosed and converted into a bathroom and another large room. We have no picture of the house in its totally original condition. The house had passed out of the

family, and the Lasters had just repurchased it. They have no concrete plans for the Duff Mansion House at this time.



A DUFF FAMILY AT THE MANSION HOUSE
NOTE THE STILE IN THE LEFT FOREGROUND
USED BY ELDERLY MEN OF WOMEN IN SKIRTS
TO MOUNT A HORSE

An analysis of the structure itself reveals a frame dwelling built in the Greek Revival pattern. It has a hipped roof. Instead of columns on the front it had framed lattice front upper and lower porches. The walls are too thin for any of them to have logs in the interior. Therefore the house is totally sawed frame. Where visible, the interior of the partitions are mill sawed 2X4's. The plaster is in two batches. The oldest is applied to split oak splines, and covered with plaster containing horse hair. Extensive newer plaster is applied to wooden sawed laths. It has spacious built-in chifferobes in three of the bedrooms. Another chifferobe is built in the living room, with tin punch design in some of the panels and glass panes in some of the doors. One of the drawers has a secret compartment in the back. There is a built-in flour bin in the kitchen that is filled from the floor above, and easily held a ton of flour/meal. It was accessed from the kitchen closet via a crank sifter. It has a spiral staircase built into a corner. It has a spring house built in to the back of the kitchen, fed via gravity by a pipe from a spring higher up on the mountain and whose location is specified in the deed surveys. This feature is known to have been built by

Steel. In the days before pipe was available, water was carried in a bucket from a spring located near the modern milking barn built in the hollow to the east. The house was heated by four fireplaces. The oldest nails I could find were the latest variety of machine cut nails made just before wire nails became available. They were hammered to have a square lipped head. The internal doors all match, and are factory made. They may not be the originals. The whole structure rests on split log sills. Under the southeast corner is a cellar that has both its sides and floor lined with brick. Behind the western corner stands the old smoke house. Made from logs fastened by half dovetail joints, and with the outside surface smoothed by having been dressed by either broad axes or by an adz, the interior has massive shelves for salt packing hams.

The original house is two rooms wide, and two rooms lengthways, with an open stairway and a spacious hall room in the middle. The original upstairs front porch had windows and/or screens, and was a 'sleeping porch'. The left hand of the rear was an open roofed two-story porch. The original configuration of the right rear contains a kitchen above which were the living quarters for the slave cook. Her quarters were accessed by a tight spiral staircase. The dining room is between the kitchen and the living room, which is in the right front right of the house, and connected to the added kitchen by both a door and a pass-through shelved cabinet. To the rear of the kitchen was a springhouse with a built-in concrete water trough to hold crocks of dairy products. In later years, perhaps the Steel configuration, the spring water was piped in from several hundred yards up the mountain.

After the Steels bought the property, Mr. Steel enclosed the rear porches, and added an upstairs room. It is not obvious what purpose the enclosed upstairs porch served. He enclosed the lower left rear of the porch as a bathroom. The sewer mainlined into the creek. Prior to that, the toilet facilities consisted of a 'Johnny' built over the creek.

In summary, the house is hard to date due to its many alterations through the years. However, the style is pretty specific in this area for the years surrounding 1840 plus or minus ten years. This tends to be confirmed by the style of the cut nails used, and by the horse hair plaster and split splines. The Steel modifications were made about 1918 when Steel bought the property. The wooden laths are a mix of split splines and machine sawed. The current plaster is a mix of original quick lime / horse hair, and gypsum done by Steel. The doors and their locks are of the Steel era. The exterior siding is held in place by mostly the machine cut nails, which had been hand headed, plus repair work done with modern wire nails.

In summary Robert Duff was born in Belfast, County Antrim, Ulster, Ireland June 23, 1759 and died by suicide June 20, 1820 in Lee County, Virginia, United States. He is buried in the Duff Cemetery in Stickleyville, Lee County, Virginia. He got his first land grant in Wallen's Creek Valley in 1789. The Lasters have a deed with the metes and bounds of this property giving ownership of it to Robert's widow, Polly, and it specifies that it is the "mansion house".

This reference to “mansion house” existing on this property at the time of Robert Duff’s death presents a couple of problems. First of all, such a house probably could not have been built in this region in the period 1798-1820. Machine sawed lumber did not exist here during that time period. The cut nails that I found were not of this period, but indicate the period compatible with the architectural style ie. 1840 plus or minus 10 years. The half dovetail joints of the smoke house cannot go back before 1820 more than a couple of years. Construction prior to that time was done utilizing the ‘V’ notch. All this suggests to the author that there was an older “mansion house” standing on this property before the existing structure was built about 1840. There are two general suitable sites on this tract of land. The first possible site is a couple of flats near the upper spring, where the springhouse is located. These flats are within a hundred yards of the best spring in this section on the valley. When plowed lots of worked flint is turned up, indicating that there had been an Indian village here. The pioneers frequently just moved in on old Indian villages, and built their homes. The second possible site for an earlier mansion house is the site of the current one. Eunice points out that the split log sleepers used for the present house could have been used for an earlier one. If the earlier mansion house had been on the site of the present one, that circumstance would have required the family to have lived somewhere else while the old house was being replaced.

The next issue is that there was an older Duff home built between Scott’s Station and Scott’s Branch, and whose owners (Tankersleys), and Eunice Laster, identify as the original home of the Duffs. It was a weather boarded two-story log home, and was in every way period compatible.

Following the deed transfers this log home was first owned by Robert Duff, Sr., and then went to his and Polly’s son William P., and then to his son William F. Duff. A construction date of about 1840 could suggest that the current mansion house was built by either William P. or William F.

Fred Steel bought all of the Duff / Scott property in 1918. He lived in Tazewell, Virginia, and he did extensive remodeling of the frame house. He came to visit his farm for short periods and lived in this house. He is the one that enclosed the back porch and made the indoor bathroom. He may have been responsible for the lath plastering and the factory made internal doors.

Eunice’s father, Hal Laster, managed the 1600 acre farm for Steel for 14+ years. Steel sold the farm in tracts in 1948 at which time Hal Laster bought the Duff Mansion House and 283 acres. Eunice lived in the house with his parents from age 11 until he married in 1964. His parents lived there until the death of his mother, Callie Laster, in 1984. The Laster children sold their interest in the house to Dexal Laster Greer who owned the home until the early 2000’s. The house was later sold, but the owner never resided there or made any improvements. This left about a 25 year gap during which someone else managed the farm and lived in the frame

house. Eunice and Mary Ruth built a house on the farmland in 1974 about two hundred yards to the northwest.

The Lasters note that an early Duff home was built of logs at the headwaters of Wallen's Creek near the foot of Kane Gap. This house burned when Hubert and Beulah Lawson, Eunice's first cousin, were living there. The surveys of the original Scott grants reference only three springs on the entire 1,000 acres – one at Scott's Station, the one at the Indian fields above the current mansion house, and the one at the head of Wallen's Creek. The Duff family built houses at each of these springs.

Therefore, it seems to have been established that the Duff's first home on Wallen's Creek was the log house at Scott's Station. They gave this home to their son Robert after having moved to a home on the tract of land of the present frame home. The deed referencing this tract as containing the "mansion house" does not specify where on the tract this house was located. Either there was an earlier mansion house on the tract, or the estimate on the age of the present frame home is off by about a quarter of a century.

Which of these houses was referred to as "Duffield" is unknown. The SA&O RR named their depot at Little Flat Lick after this venerable local landmark.



"JOE" JOSEPH NEWLAND DUFF
THE LAST DUFF TO LIVE
IN THE MANSION HOUSE

The Lasters say that during Steel's renovations the bones of a baby were found wrapped in a saddle blanket and buried in the downstairs bedroom fireplace hearth. It was covered back up, and concreted in.

The upstairs porch, or the 'sleeping porch', has been converted into a sunroom entered from the upstairs hallway. The original arrangement was the old timer's answer to trying to sleep at night in the absence of air conditioning. The nocturnal insects did not get that high off of the ground.



THE DUFF FRAME HOUSE ON 5-2-17 AFTER THE REMODLING OF THE FRONT

The cabin built on the hill near the present Eunice and Mary Ruth Laster house was built from logs from the Mansion House barn, which was across the road from the Mansion house, and accessed by the foot bridge shown in the photograph on page #2.



THE DUFF MANSION HOUSE SPRING BOX

* - This genealogy is confirmed by a succession of deeds documenting the legal line of transfer of the Duff Mansion House, collated by Eunice Laster, present owner of the Duff Mansion House, and reviewed by the author, and found to be accurately interpreted. The oft quoted Early Settlers of Lee County, Virginia and Adjacent Counties vol. II by Hattie Muncy Bales has a slightly different line, with the difference being that the “F” recorded in the deed as the middle initial of the second William is given as “P”, thus leaving out a generation. Bales admitted confusion over the children of the first William Powell Duff.

The satellite photograph below is taken from Google Earth, and shows the property under discussion. Using the highway number 612 as a reference point, look to its east and see the darkened outline of the old grown up road that runs first to the northeast to a place between the spring and the old Indian Field, and then turns to the northwest. At one point in time it was fenced on both sides, turning it into a lane. It used to access the head of the hollow now served by Todd Laster Drive, including at least two tenant houses. The author believes that a reasonable site for the original Duff Mansion House could have been near the angle in that road, between the spring and the Indian Field, now a cornfield (5).



Bibliography:

This entire work is a functional addendum to my essay of 2001 documenting the site of the murder of Archibald Scott and his children, currently available at <http://www.bigstonegappublishing.com/SCOTTS%20STATION.pdf>

1- Fleenor, Lawrence J. – “Moore’s Fort” in the “Appalachian Quarterly”

2 – Hamilton, Emory – “The Killing of Humphrey Dickenson”
<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~varussel/indian/28.html>

3 – genealogy Polly Duff
<https://www.geni.com/people/Mary-Duff/6000000008416516041>

4 – Bales, Hattie Muncy – Early Settlers of Lee County, Virginia and Adjacent Counties vol. 2

5 – Eunice Laster directly to the author, supported by a series of deed copies substantiating the lineage and relationships in general – Eunice later grew up in the Mansion House, and is now its owner and restorer.

6 – connection between the Tompkins family and the Duffs
https://books.google.com/books?id=c1hlAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA276&lpg=PA276&dq=Cecil+Harold+Duff&source=bl&ots=3VQ6lbW61N&sig=i9QkAVs9-r-dLNzPm0WdJBTe1fA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi087aK_u_UAhVr0oMKHT8vDPQQ6AEIKjAB#v=onepage&q=Cecil%20Harold%20Duff&f=false

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