

## Red Hill Farm

Red Hill Farm at Pedlar Mills, Amherst County, Va., is one of Central Virginia's oldest upland plantations that still retains its historic identity and still is operated as a farm. It was settled by Capt. Charles Ellis in 1754 (sometimes given as 1752 or 1753) on a thousand acre land grant from King George II of England. Ellis, active in the French and Indian Wars, was Capt. of the Albemarle Militia under Col. Peter Jefferson, father of Thomas Jefferson. On the 6th day of June, 1756, Col. Jefferson wrote Capt. Ellis as follows: "The (e) are in his Majesty's name.....to..... apprehend the able bodied single men of your company whose names are hereunto subjoined, they being soldiers duly enlisted but failing to appear without sufficient reason... at a Council of War. Such able-bodied single men you shall deliver to some constable of the County until they be delivered unto Major David Lewis, the officer appointed to receive the drafted Militia of the County....."

(Signed)

P. Jefferson

(Amherst County was at this time still a part of Albemarle.)

Capt. Ellis himself is also mentioned in Henning's Statutes on one occasion when he is to be reimbursed for the expense of soldiers and Indians in his charge near Fredericksburg in 1757. However, at this late date it is difficult to find much information about the person<sup>al</sup> life of Capt. Ellis, altho his forebears are documented as having come to Jamestown in the "first or second draft" from England and were early landowners in eastern Va.

Charles Ellis himself was the youngest son of John Ellis of Peter's Creek, a branch of Tuckahoe, near Richmond. (The father and family were substantial landowners but Charles was the youngest of seven sons and it is doubtful if the family



estates were large enough for the support of so many sons. The military life probably offered Charles both the adventure and opportunity needed by a younger son in Colonial Virginia.

In the "hard winter" of 1739-40, at the age of 20, Charles Ellis was married by the Rev. John Stith to Susannah Harding of Henrico, and she proved a strong and remarkable woman who bore him two sons and eight daughters and established a family line that has continued its vitality and identity to the present. In 1755, the year after settling at Red Hill, Susannah bore the last of Ellis' children, Rosanna, when Charles was 35 and Susannah about a year younger. From 1755 until about 1760 we have little information as to Ellis' activities, aside from a few historical references to incidents in his military career. But by 1760 he had established his working plantation and presumably enjoyed his dual role as soldier and planter. In 1760, however, at the age of 40, the Captain fell ill and on the 8th of June he sent for his neighbors "Isaac Wright, Robert Cammell, and Rolan R. Atkins to witness my last will and testament" and on the 14th day of Aug., 1760, the will was "proved" at the Albemarle Court, and executors appointed.

In part the will read: " I give unto my son Josiah Ellis my tract of land I now dwell on....to him and his heirs forever. Also desire he may have a horse and saddle from my estate to be of value twelve pounds current money, which said land, horse, and saddle he may have when he attains to be age of eighteen years." Ellis then provides generously for his younger son Charles and then for his wife and the daughters of the family. "My will and desire is that my children before mentioned may have education according to the discretion of my executors."

On the 12th day of Feb, 1761, an appraisement of the estate was submitted to the Court as to the value of "four hundred & nineteen pounds current money of Virginia." The listing included virtually every item that one would find necessary to the frontier planter, as : " 35 head of cattle/



6 head of sheep/ 1 large horse/ 1 small horse/ one mare & colt/  
 some cooper tools/ five narrow hoes/ three broad hoes/ 2 bells/  
 some carpenter tools/ some shoemaker tools/ one old desk/  
 a parcel of books / a knife case/ and many other items, including  
 a listing of the family servants.

No other mention of the Ellis estate was found until 1769. At a Court held for Amherst, 6th of Feb. 1769, on the motion of Josiah Ellis, son and heir at law of Chas. Ellis, deceased, it was ordered "that the Sheriff summon a jury of twelve freeholders of the vicinage.....who being met are to assign unto John Bickley (usually called 'Bickley'), who intermarried with the widow and relict of said decedent, the said widow's dower." A subsequent Court assigned unto John Bickley on March 7, 1769, his right of said widow's dower in one tract of "143 acres on the south side and adjoining of Pedlar River...the mansion house included....." Despite the age of Susannah Harding Ellis Bickley (apparently 48 or more), this remarkable woman bore another daughter, Mildred, who died in infancy, then she herself outlived Bickley (died in 1792), outlived son Josiah (died in 1810), outlived most of her other children and survived to the age of 97. It had been her hard fate to live 57 years past the death of Charles Ellis but she did see the wilderness frontier transformed into a culture of church, schools, wealth, and planter aristocracy.

Both Ellis sons, Josiah and Charles, served in the Revolution against the English Kings ~~then~~ their Father had served. Also John Bickley's son Charles saw action as a private at King's Mountain and later became a prominent settler in Southwest Virginia. At least one of Bickley's other sons also served in the Militia during the Revolution, making a total of at least four sons from the Red Hill family who saw duty against the King.

After the War son Charles Ellis emigrated to Georgia, then to Kentucky, and finally died, a very old man, at his son's residence in Missouri, in 1828.

~~Sen Josiah~~, born on Tuckahoe, married in 1766, when he was only 20, ~~Jane Shelton of Amherst County~~, in the Harris Creek area. She like his Mother, proved a remarkable woman, producing eleven children for Josiah and these children, building on the strong family base established by Josiah and Jane Shelton Ellis, brought the family fortune and name to great prominence in Virginia. It is to this union that many of the more outstanding Ellis descendants still trace. Josiah would have been assured a place in Virginia history if only for the sons he produced but he was a man of wide achievement<sup>ing</sup> in his own right and his career had many facets. After his Revolutionary service, there is no sign of any interest on Ellis's part in the military life, tho he was variously called "Major" or "Colonel" to the end of his life. He did serve, however, as "High Sheriff" of Amherst at a time when that office was the foremost in local government.

Always he was active in the affairs of the Episcoapl Church, and that activity and loyalty did not ~~dimish~~ diminish after the War when the Church was so unpopular because of its association with the English Crown. In ~~1786~~ 1789 it is recorded that "Major Josiah Ellis" was a delegate from St. Luke's at Pedlar Mills to the Diocesan Council. The lands at St. Luke's were carved from the Red Hill Plantation and it is thought that Josiah was both an organizer and benefactor of St. Luke's.

For years Josiah struggled against floods and a shortage of labor and material but finally succeeded in establishing "a merchant mill at Pedlar Mills," meaning a mill of such size as designed to serve the needs of the area rather than a smaller mill for plantation use only. Josiah also gave substantial financial backing and served unofficially as a local representative for the merchant firm "Ellis and Allen" of Richmond, of which ~~Charles~~, the ~~second son of Josiah~~, was senior partner. However, Josiah's central interest always seemed the development of his home farms in Amherst.