

Watlington Family Papers

Repository: Rockingham Co. Historical Collections
Gerald B. James Library
Rockingham Community College
P. O. Box 38
Wentworth, NC 27375

Title: Watlington Family Papers

Accession No.: 84-040

Extent: 1 box

Provenance: The family papers were stored in a tin box at the Watlington homeplace in Caswell County until Mary Lily Watlington became concerned about their future preservation. In 1995, she contacted Rockingham Community College about the possibility of donating the papers to the Rockingham County Historical Collections. It was agreed that she would donate the original papers in exchange for copies. The original papers are stored in the closed collections and copies are in the family files for public use.

Inclusive Dates: 1765-1948

Subject Headings: Adelphi Society
Agriculture – Caswell County (N. C.)
Agriculture – Rockingham County (N. C.)
Caswell County (N. C.) – Genealogy
Caswell County Philanthropic Society
Powell, Anna Watlington, 1834-1914
Richardson, Mary Watlington, 1827-1903
Richardson, Robert Payne, Sr., 1820-1909
Rockingham County (N. C.) – Genealogy
Scott, Elizabeth Wilson, 1762-1844
Watlington, James, 1797-1885
Watlington, James Scott, 1836-1904
Watlington, Jane Scott, 1795-1863
Watlington, John Francis, Sr., 1871-1937
Watlington family -- Genealogy

Items Separated:	<p>1 large horsehair buggy or lap blanket, labeled "Chase." Gold, brown and teal pattern, with black on the reverse</p> <p>1 quilt, handmade, crazy quilt pattern, multi-colored</p>
Related Collections:	<p>R. P. Richardson Collection 80-010</p> <p>Richardson-Millner Collection 95-033</p>
Preferred Citation:	<p><i>Watlington Family Papers. 84-040. Rockingham Co. Historical Collections, Gerald B. James Library, Rockingham Community College.</i></p>
Descriptive Note:	<p>The Watlington Family Papers cover the period 1765-1948, but mainly relate to James Watlington (1797-1885) and his son James S. Watlington (1836-1904). Both of these men lived in Caswell County, but there were a number of ties with Reidsville and Rockingham County through marriage and business connections. The oldest document in this collection is a Caswell County deed dated 1765 to Joseph Scott who was the grandfather of James S. Watlington.</p> <p>The collection includes deeds, bonds, tax receipts, store accounts and receipts, papers concerning farming operations, and other miscellaneous papers dating from the 1830s to the early 1900s. The collection also contains some personal correspondence dating from the late 19th century through 1948 when the widow of James S. Watlington died. Two unusual documents in the collection are the constitution of the Caswell County Adelphi Society dating from the early 1800s, and a membership list of the Caswell County Philanthropic Society dated 1811.</p>
Family Sketch:	<p>The Watlington Family of Caswell County were planters and owners of large tracts of agricultural lands in both Caswell and Rockingham counties. In March 1826 James Watlington (1797-1885) married Jane Scott (1795-1863), the daughter of Joseph Scott (1768-1835) and Elizabeth Wilson Scott (1762-1844). "Col." Joseph Scott purchased much of the present Watlington homeplace between 1765 and 1797 and later most of his property passed into the hands of his daughter Jane Scott Watlington and her husband James. James was a well-known planter and slave</p>

owner in Caswell County and it was probably he who remodeled and overbuilt an early 19th century house into the present 2-story Watlington homeplace. The house, located on US 158 between the crossroads at Casville and the Rockingham County line, is an excellent example of the Greek Revival style dwellings built in Caswell County during the boom era of 1850-1860. The house is in one of the most beautiful settings in Caswell County, being surrounded by cedar trees over a century old. Many of the original dependencies still stand on the grounds of the home including the kitchen, smokehouse, ice house, corn crib and stables.

James Watlington and wife Jane had four daughters; Mary, Elizabeth, Jane, Anna and one surviving son James Scott Watlington. The daughter Mary (1827-1903) became the second wife of Robert P. Richardson (1820-1909) a prominent Reidsville merchant, land owner and tobacco manufacturer. Their children, all leading citizens of Reidsville, were: Marion R. Watt; R. P. Richardson, Jr.; Ed E. Richardson and Anna R. Redd.

James and Jane Scott Watlington's daughter Anna (1834-1914) married a Reidsville physician, E. M. Powell, on 8 January 1857. The Powells lived on the eastern outskirts of Reidsville where they owned a 1,200 acre plantation. The Powells had no children, but Mrs. Powell raised her nephew John Francis Watlington, Sr. who later inherited the Powell homeplace then consisting of 672 acres of land.

James and Jane Watlington's only surviving son was James Scott Watlington who was born 28 August 1836. He graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1858. On 5 March 1862 he enlisted in Company C of the 41st Regiment of North Carolina State Troops and served in this unit for two years. Following the war he concentrated his attention to improving his farm and making it one of the most productive in the state of North Carolina.

James S. Watlington married Ella F. Redd, a member of an old Henry County, Virginia family, on 21 September 1870 and the couple's son John Francis Watlington, Sr. was born on 6 September 1871. Ella Watlington died on 9 December 1871 and was buried at the Wright-Richardson family cemetery in Reidsville. Three-month-old John F. was taken by his paternal aunt Mrs. Anna Powell and raised as her own son. John F. Watlington attended UNC-Chapel Hill. He began his professional career in 1892 as a

bookkeeper by the Bank of Reidsville. In 1920 he became the president of the bank and served in that position until his death on 28 December 1937.

In September 1907 Mr. Watlington married Frances Byers who was born on 7 August 1884 in Cooperstown, Pennsylvania. The Watlingtons had three children: Frances Watlington (Wilson); Ellen Booth Watlington (Wellman) and John F. Watlington, Jr. Mrs. Watlington continued to reside at the Powell-Watlington homeplace until her death on 2 March 1972. John F. Watlington, Jr. is a graduate of Washington and Lee University and began his banking career with Wachovia Bank in 1933. He served as CEO of Wachovia from 1956 until his retirement in late 1976. John's sister, Frances W. Wilson, continued to reside at the Powell-Watlington homeplace until the spring of 1981. In 1993 the Schlegal Corporation became the owner of 60 acres of the Watlington farm which included the family home.

James Scott Watlington (father of John F. Watlington, Sr.) continued to reside on his Caswell County farm and remained a widower for nearly eleven years. On 28 November 1882 he married Mary Carolyn Blackwell of Caswell County. Three children were born to this marriage: Mary J. Watlington (Robertson) of Danville, VA; James Bracken Watlington who married Lucy King; and Annie Watlington (Matton) of Winston-Salem, NC.

In early 1904 James S. Watlington, now in declining health, went to St. Augustine, Florida in the futile hopes of recovering his health. He died at St. Augustine on 21 February 1904 and was buried in Greenview Cemetery in Reidsville. The Reidsville newspaper *Webster's Weekly*, 25 February 1904 noted in his obituary that:

While his home was in Caswell, his interests were largely in this county, and he was a frequent visitor to our town. He was a successful planter and a man of influence in his section. Of commanding presence and genial manners, he attracted attention in any circle in which he chanced to be. His stalwart form, strong face and white locks combined to give him an impressive appearance and his familiar figure will be missed.

His widow Mary C. Watlington died on 10 May 1948.

James Bracken Watlington, the only son of James S. and Mary C.

Blackwell Watlington, was born 5 December 1888. He graduated from Reidsville High School and attended Homer Military School in Charlotte and UNC-Chapel Hill. He also studied farming at North Carolina State College. As the only son in the family he became the owner and operator of the Watlington farm in Caswell and resided there until his death on 25 February 1953 at age 64. He and his wife, Lucy King, were the parents of four daughters: Ms. Mary Lilly Watlington; Mrs. James G. Reed; Mrs. John Justice; and Mrs. Carolyn Fagan. Mrs. Lucy King Watlington died in September 1983 at age 92.

A member of the family still resides at the Watlington homeplace which has been occupied by descendants of James Watlington since he built the antebellum dwelling.

Bibliography

Carter, Robert Wray, Jr. "History of the Powell-Watlington House and Its Occupants, Reidsville, North Carolina." 1981, typescript on file in the Historical Collections Room at Rockingham Community College, James Library. (This history appeared in the 19 August 1993 issue of the *Reidsville Review*.)

_____, personal papers.

Little-Stokes, Ruth. *An Inventory of the Historic Architecture Caswell County, North Carolina*. Durham, NC: Seeman Printery, 1979, p. 98.

North Carolina: Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth. New York: American Historical Society, 1928, Volume III, pp. 242-43. (Sketch of James Francis Watlington, Sr.)

Reidsville Review, 23 February 1953 (J. Bracken Watlington obituary), 3 March 1972 (Mrs. John F. Watlington, Sr. obituary), 15 October 1976 (data on John F. Watlington, Jr.), 22 September 1983 (Mrs. Lucy Watlington obituary).

(R. P.) Richardson Bible and Family Tree.

(James and Jane Scott) Watlington Family Bible.

Watlington Family Papers, Rockingham County Historical Collections Room, James Library, Rockingham Community College, Wentworth, North Carolina.

Webster's Weekly, 25 February 1904 (J. S. Watlington obituary).

Robert W. Carter, Jr.
Historical Consultant
Rockingham
Community College
20 September 1995

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