

**Wedded to the Land, Nurturing Its People  
Women at Clermont**

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By

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## **Introduction**

Women stand out in the history of Clermont. Their lives and experiences can make us more appreciative of Clarke County in the past and present and more aware of our role in shaping the future of the land and community. This essay will focus on the extended McCormick family that occupied Clermont continuously from 1824 until the death of Elizabeth Rust Williams in 2004—180 years. In exploring the sources relating to white and black women at Clermont and those in relationships with them, three themes become apparent: nurturing, place, and lineage. The women cared for others physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually, although racial divisions acted as a social and energetic barrier. The women were deeply connected to place—their homes, the land and landscape, even the large trees that sheltered generations of ancestors. They also seemed deeply interconnected with the living and the ancestors that came before them. As life in the twenty-first century has become more fragmented and time-pressured, these three interwoven themes outline a mission for Clermont: to nurture members of the community in a holistic way that includes body, mind, and spirit; to help them connect with the land, landscape, and growing things; and to help them engage in the present and build the future in a conscious way that is sensitive to the needs and aspirations of the community.

The women who figure most prominently in this study and the history of Clermont are Ellen Lane (Jett) McCormick, Josephine Williams, and Elizabeth Rust Williams. Other women include Elizabeth Stribling Wright (Milton) Taylor—Edward McCormick’s “Aunt Bet”—because she was close to her sister Florinda Milton McCormick (Mrs. Dawson McCormick) and to Edward’s wife Ellen McCormick and a frequent visitor to Clermont. Her grandniece Harriot Hammond, who lived with her many

years, wrote a memoir of Aunt Bet's life that illuminates family life through most of the nineteenth century. A biography of Harriot Hammond's sister, Mary Mildred Sullivan, is also helpful. Josephine Williams, once enslaved at Clermont, stands as well for other women who shared her race and status at Clermont. Geneva Jackson, a current resident of Josephine Street in Berryville, lived at Clermont during the week and prepared meals for the Beardall family. The women of the McCormick/Williams/Beardall family continued to make pilgrimages to the old homeplace. Finally, Elizabeth Rust Williams' life will be studied in light of her ancestors. Clermont meant a great deal to her as it had her forebears, but she did not have benefit of their web of support and intimacy.<sup>i</sup>

Women's history grew from our desire to understand women's perspectives, issues, and roles in history, since they were often omitted or their role minimized in many narratives of change over time. While those motivations remain and our historical narratives have broadened and deepened, women's history has evolved into gender history. Gender history also is concerned with the way society proscribes roles and qualities to men and women in general, and the way that gender conventions often shape politics and policy as well as society. Scholars Nancy Cott and Drew Gilpin Faust explain that "the phrase gender history expresses the main intent of the field of women's history since it began: that is, to show that the past cannot be understood without exploring the constantly present but always changing patterns of differentiation between womanhood and manhood, masculinity and femininity." Therefore, gender history helps us find meaning for the present in the past.<sup>ii</sup>

In the Milton/Taylor/McCormick family, the women fulfilled gender roles quite admirably. Many of them expanded the possibilities for themselves, mainly by extending female roles of care and nurturing beyond what was customary. Over time, individual women expanded circles of caring to include more members of their families, their communities, and their region. This caring ran up against another social category—that of race. Although caring indeed flowed across the color line in both directions, the racial boundary created an energetic barrier that constricted the actions of white women more than black ones.

The women of the extended McCormick family loved the land and the ancestral homes that sheltered their ancestors. They derived nourishment from the land and its history that went far beyond the physical and economic; it gave them a sense of identity, belonging, and, for some, mission. For Elizabeth Williams and Ellen McCormick—a divorcée and widow, respectively, who clung to Clermont—the land held masculine as well as feminine qualities; it conferred dignity, status, income, and companionship. African American women had a deep connection to the land as well that transcended ownership but included ancestral ties. Because it had long been difficult or impossible for them to own land, their first foothold into property ownership held tremendous significance. Gender and racial boundaries have softened over time, and continue to evolve, but persist.<sup>iii</sup>

### **Colonial, Early Republic, and Antebellum Periods**

Generations of the Scots-Irish McCormick family lived at Clermont. The family traces its origins in the Lower Shenandoah Valley of Virginia to Dr. John McCormick, who settled there between 1730 and 1740. An early historian of the Valley observed that

“the early members of the McCormick family were singularly unobtrusive people, content in the happiness derived from their own family relations, being extremely clannish, and at least one branch of the family were evidently people of the strongest local attachments, for a large family settled and remained until death in the vicinity of their birthplace.” This observation appeared to hold true for the later McCormicks at Clermont as well.<sup>iv</sup>

But because we are focusing on the women of the family, this narrative will begin at Milton Valley, a little southeast of Clermont, when John Milton lived there with his first wife Ann A. Stribling. Their eleven children included three girls who remained particularly close as long as they lived: Harriot (1785-1824) and the two youngest daughters, Elizabeth Stribling Wright (1800-1883), and Florinda (1802-1836), who later married Dawson McCormick and became mistress at Clermont. While Elizabeth and Florinda were yet young, their mother became very ill and Harriot began managing the household. She was married briefly and widowed in 1808. She cared for her siblings after their mother died in 1811 and assisted after their father married Catharine Washington of Fairmont [Note: correct name, Fairfield; RWS] near Berryville. She was the daughter of Warner Washington, first cousin to the former president, and a good stepmother. Harriot Milton married William Taylor in 1812 and went to live in Clarke County six to eight miles away.<sup>v</sup>

Unlike their elder sister, neither Elizabeth (known as Betsy) nor Florinda Milton had experience in housekeeping. At age sixteen Betsy married William’s brother Bushrod Taylor in 1817 and went to live near Riverside on the Potomac. Suddenly in charge of domestic affairs and supervising an enslaved cook, chambermaid, and a mischievous

young houseboy named Joe, she found herself often at a loss as to what to do. At such times she rode her mare Snowdrop, with Joe behind her to open gates, to her sister Harriot's or her husband's sister Harriot Ware's homes for advice. Florinda married Dawson McCormick in 1824 and moved with him to Clermont. Being a gentle soul, the "most petted," and the baby of the family, she likely relied on older female relatives in similar fashion, as she managed her household and raised her children.<sup>vi</sup>

The early loss of their mother and the intervention of other female relatives were part of a consistent pattern in the extended family. Harriot (Milton) Taylor died in 1824, leaving a son and two daughters. Florinda died in 1836, also leaving three children: Edward, age 12, William, age 10, and Annie, age 5. Losses were deeply felt and shared, but their damaging effects were minimized by other family members, particularly women, who shared their love and willingly—even eagerly—assumed the burden of care.<sup>vii</sup>

Elizabeth "Betsy" Stribling Wright (Milton) Taylor, who came to be known as Aunt Bet, distinguished herself in care giving. Her husband William [Bushrod] Taylor established a prosperous hotel in Winchester and organized the private paving of the Valley Road, so their means were ample. They had only one child that died soon after birth. When her sister-in-law Harriet (Taylor) Ware died in 1822, a year after husband James Ware, Betsy Taylor fostered their four orphaned children. When her sister Harriot Taylor died two years later, she took in her two daughters: Sarah Ann, age 7, and Florinda, age 4. When sister Florinda McCormick of Clermont died in 1836, after Aunt Bet's other charges were grown and gone, she welcomed Florinda's youngest daughter Anne McCormick into her household. She cared for subsequent generations as well.

Sarah Ann Taylor, whom she'd raised, married George Washington Hammond of Happy Retreat in nearby Jefferson County. Sarah Ann died in 1847 and she helped care for her six children, assuming sole care of the youngest after George Hammond's death in 1859. In 1861, Annie (McCormick) Stribling, whom she had also fostered, died and left three children. Aunt Bet cared for the youngest, Ned, while Edward and Ellen Lane (Jett) McCormick at Clermont helped and managed the guardian accounts for the three. Aunt Bet Taylor became very close to Ellen McCormick and had great love for Clarke County and Clermont. Because of these close associations, Elizabeth Stribling Wright Taylor's story is closely bound to Clermont and its inhabitants.<sup>viii</sup>

Another reason her story is important to Clermont is that one of her charges, Harriot Hammond, the daughter of Sarah Ann and George Washington Hammond, wrote a memoir of her Aunt Bet that vividly depicts family life and culture in the region, along with the role that she and other women made in nurturing and raising children of character. Harriot Hammond observed of her Aunt Bet that, "Of great and brilliant deeds according to the world's standard she did none; but the simple retracing of her long life brings us into such an atmosphere of loving service that those who shared and witnessed it can never afford to let its memory fade and die." This loving service is crucial at the foundation of any society for producing people of character.<sup>ix</sup>

Aunt Bet Taylor's manner of childrearing is worth noting further, as described by Harriot Hammond:

In the largeness of her heart and the openness of her hand she found the means of making for them a family life that was broad and generous enough in its scope to allow the growth and development of individual character. We were all very different in disposition, and we were not repressed and curbed in a way to make us all of one pattern or form. We united, however, in one characteristic,—we had high spirits and loved fun, and were at times a little daring in pursuit of it;

but our liberty never became license, and the most enduring lesson we learned from the beauty and order of the daily round of life, and better still from the constant example of Aunt Bet's unselfish care for the good of all, was a consideration for the rights and happiness of others.<sup>x</sup>

While this recollection has the rosy glow of childhood memory, and one need only look at the standard costume for boys and girls at that time to question its veracity, but nonetheless, although times are relative, the observation still holds a timeless truth about childrearing.

The Milton/Taylor/McCormick family valued education for their girls as well as their boys. Boys and girls often attended school together in their early years. For example, an Irishman named McNamara tutored the Milton children, a nephew, and William Meade, son of a neighbor, in an outbuilding at Milton Valley. Elizabeth and William Meade, even after he was ordained Episcopal Bishop of Virginia, remained lifelong friends, and he always called her Betsey. Two generations later, William and Harriot Hammond attended a primary school taught by Mary Augustine Smith.<sup>xi</sup>

As they grew older, boys and girls attended separate schools, often boarding schools. After Betsey Milton's father's marriage to Catharine Washington, she and her stepsister attended Presbyterian minister William Hill's highly regarded school for "young ladies" in Winchester. Florinda may have followed when she was older. Harriot Hammond attended an Episcopal school in Staunton established by William Meade.<sup>xii</sup>

Education was important to white elites in Clarke County throughout its history, and it was important to African Americans after they were allowed access to it in 1865. Clermont, like Milton Valley, was the site of an early private school. Men who valued education directed the larger private schools. Edward McCormick, son of Dawson and Florinda (Milton) McCormick also valued education; served as a trustee of the Berryville



Academy, at least when it was offered for sale in 1856. It remained open, however, until 1872.<sup>xiii</sup>

Florinda and Dawson McCormick's eldest child Edward inherited Clermont when his mother died in 1836, his father having predeceased her by two years. Edward, age 12, and William, age 10, remained at Clermont under the guardianship of paternal uncles Charles McCormick of nearby Coolspring and Cyrus McCormick. As stated previously, their sister Anne, age 5, went to live with Aunt Bet Taylor. Edward attended Princeton, as had William Meade. In 1847 he married Mary Elizabeth Stribling, and with her had three daughters, Florinda Taylor, Mary Stribling, and Ann Catherine. Little else is known about Mary E. Stribling, except that she died in 1853 after only six years of marriage. Three years later, in 1856, Edward McCormick married Ellen Lane Jett from Ellerslie in Rappahannock County. Ellen cared for her stepchildren as her own and together over the next twelve years she and Edward had an additional six children: Edward (1857), Elvira Jett (1858), Dawson (1860), Anne Herndon (1862), Albert Montgomery Dupuy (1866), and James (1868).<sup>xiv</sup>

Six letters that Ellen McCormick wrote to her husband Edward between 1859 and 1861 illuminate her personality, their relationship, and family life. Ellen wrote them when she visited her parents at Ellerslie. She missed him during these absences, urged him to visit Ellerslie, and relished his correspondence. For example, in November 1860 she wrote of two letters he had sent, "I need not tell you how much pleasure they gave me for you know too well how dear you are to me and how great the trial to be separated from you." Little Eddie's illness concerned them greatly in 1859 and 1860, and Vidy (Elvira) burned her face when she fell against the fireplace fender, though she recovered

fully. Ellen sent news of relatives and friends and asked Edward questions about his travel and conditions at home. Near the end of the letters or in postscripts she sent instructions for their enslaved servants. The letters indicate that Ellen was cheerful, social, affectionate and loving, not particularly religious, and concerned most with the welfare of her husband, their children, and her domestic duties. The busy household at Ellerslie, with its company and neighbors, seemed similar to those in the Milton/Taylor/McCormick family. Ellen, for her part, seemed to be fully accepted into her husband's family as well.<sup>xv</sup>

There is much yet to be learned about the black residents of Clermont, including their full names. Ellen McCormick wished Aunt Molly or Prig[?] to send clothing for the children, Helen to knit. Aunt Judy managed the poultry. Josephine [Williams] sewed and laundered. In one letter, Ellen warned, "Josephine had better finish your shirts if she has not yet finished them." Monticello's African American research historian Leni Sorensen, in interpretive programs there, has elaborated the level of knowledge and professionalism needed for domestic workers in elite families such as these.<sup>xvi</sup>

### **Civil War Era**

The Civil War brought much hardship to the people of Clarke County and looms large in historical memory. Primary and secondary sources are rich. While no narratives generated by residents of Clermont survive, some area women wrote memoirs and diaries that bring the war to life in readers' imaginations. Harriot Hammond's *Memoir of Aunt Bet* illuminates life in Clarke County during parts of the war and includes mentions of Clermont.<sup>xvii</sup>

Harriot Hammond (1838-1902), great-granddaughter of William and Harriot (Milton) Taylor described how desperately the women worked to support one another and their male relatives in the army. Harriot lived with Aunt Bet in Baltimore in 1861 when the war began, but stated that “we were one with our friends in Virginia.” At the time, Anne Stribling of Staunton, her three children and their enslaved nurse, Amy, were with them on an extended visit. Annie, as she was called, was the daughter of Dawson and Florinda (Milton) McCormick, sister of Edward McCormick of Clermont, and the foster daughter of Aunt Bet (her mother’s sister), was in poor health. The women kept in “constant communication with our friends in the Valley, and especially with our dear Willy,” Harriot’s brother William Hammond. He enlisted in the Clarke cavalry, 1<sup>st</sup> Virginia regiment, and was stationed at Harpers Ferry. Anne’s husband John Waite Stribling enlisted as well and was stationed in Lynchburg. Anne, “dreading the possibility of being cut off from him” by military occupations, desperately wanted to return to Virginia. Harriot agreed to go with her, since she was too weak to travel alone. The women journeyed by train to Harpers Ferry, where the Clarke Cavalry manned the outpost and received the travelers as “the first ‘refugees.’” There, to their delight, they saw Will, Harriot’s uncle William Taylor, then in command of the company, and cousin Edward McCormick, there advising the army on forming a quartermaster department. Again, in her account, the land appears as a benevolent presence. After scaling Bolivar Heights, they looked back upon “both village and camp in twilight repose, the great mountains shadowing them as with a mantle of protection, while the wavelets of the Potomac lapped the banks with a music as sweet as a mother’s lullaby.”<sup>xviii</sup>

The women spent the night with Aunt Ann Burnett at Burnley in Jefferson County. She escorted them the following day to Clermont, where Anne (McCormick) Stribling had been born in 1831, and which was still a “second home” to her. Aunt Bet and Harriot Hammond went on to visit Harriot’s great-grandmother, Hannah (McCormick) Taylor at Springsberry. Hannah was Edward McCormick’s aunt. J.E. Norris described her as “the embodiment of womanly virtues, beautiful in face and character, the consoler of her family in sorrow, and the sharer of their joys and pleasures. The children of the connection ever found in her that ready sympathy that calls them to give her the highest place in their affections, and so may well be remembered as the children’s friend.” This visit they did not stay long, however, and then returned by the same route. They checked on Anne at Clermont, stayed again with Aunt Ann Burnett at Burnley, boarded the train in Harpers Ferry, and returned to Baltimore.<sup>xix</sup>

The women supported their loved ones in the military with all the material and energy they could muster. Especially in the absence of an effective quartermaster system, they sent clothing, food, Bibles, and other supplies. They sent coats and winter underwear as the weather turned cold, sewed garments, and knitted socks. They prepared and sent food such as ham and ginger cakes that were shared and relished by the men. They withheld complaints about their circumstances, wrote frequent letters and tried to sound positive.<sup>xx</sup>

Refugees from eastern parts of the state stayed with friends or relatives in Clarke County during the war. Early in the war, Judith W. and John Peyton McGuire of Alexandria sent their two daughters to live with relatives in Clarke for their safety. John was a minister and principal of Episcopal High School in Alexandria. He was a member

of the venerable McGuire family in Winchester; Gertrude (McGuire) Taylor of Springsberry was his cousin, but which relatives the daughters stayed with is unknown. On August 26, 1861, Judith and John McGuire visited Dr. William David McGuire of Norwood, near Clermont. Judith kept a diary for the family that she published after the war. In her entry at Norwood, she reported that “the people of this neighbourhood [are] occupied as they are in the one I left. All hearts and hands seem open to our army. Four heavily laden wagons have left Berryville within a few days, for the hospitals below.” Besides information, Judith McGuire told what it was like to be a woman refugee during the war. “Home and its surroundings must ever be our chief joy,” she reflected, “and while shut out from it and its many objects of interest, there will be a feeling of desolation.”<sup>xxi</sup>

The most prominent refugee in Clarke County, Mary Anna Randolph (Custis) Lee, wife of Confederate General Robert E. Lee, stayed at Meade family homes of Annfield (where she was born) and Meadea, and at Audley, a Washington family home across the road from Clermont. Judith McGuire wrote that Mary Custis Lee was moved by an image of her home, Arlington, that she saw in a stray issue of the northern publication *Harpers Weekly*, although they had heard that its majestic trees had been removed for fortifications. McGuire lamented how difficult it was for women to protect their homes with no support, and how difficult it was to lose them and the “ancestral trees” that graced their grounds. Some said that if they would sign the oath of allegiance, the federal government would provide for them, but she exclaimed, “Can a southern woman sell her birthright for a mess of pottage?”, especially when their men were risking their lives in the cause. They felt that carrying on was their patriotic duty.<sup>xxii</sup>

Back in Baltimore, Harriot hoped to cheer Aunt Bet with the descriptions of the spirit and energy of the troops, but her only comfort was the “news of Cousin Annie’s contentment and her improvement from the change to the mountains.” She had no enthusiasm for war, and “the possible cutting short of lives dear to her and full of promise was too terrible to contemplate.” She, like her good friend Bishop William Meade, but unlike most contemporaries, suspected the war would be long and terrible. Since most of her income came from property in Virginia, she put furniture, books, and other household valuables in storage and moved with Harriet and Flo to a boarding house. She placed her enslaved servants in homes of their choice, but whether by sale or agreement her niece did not reveal. Mildred Sullivan and her infant son George came from New York for an extended visit. They cut and sewed a uniform for William, sending piece by piece with travelers to him in Harpers Ferry. They also sent their father’s greatcoat and their grandfather’s sword, both of which proved useful.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The women decided that Aunt Bet would remain in Baltimore but that Harriot should return to Virginia to support their family in Virginia, especially her brothers Will and Tom in the army and her cousin Annie at Clermont. Upon her arrival there, Annie seemed better, but she declined over the summer. A visit to Springsberry in September did not help her, so she returned to Clermont, “her brother’s home and her own birthplace,—where, watched and tended by most loving friends, she lingered with us until the late November, [1861]” and died, leaving three young children, Bushrod Taylor (known as Taylor), age ten; Alice, age six; and Edward (called Ned or Eddie), age two.<sup>xxiv</sup>

With added difficulty in wartime, the family arranged for the children's care. Annie, with her husband's approval, had appointed Edward McCormick guardian and established an account for their care. Aunt Bet desperately wanted to be with them and tend to them as she had done their mother and so many other children of the family. But because Virginia was enemy territory, she was unable for months to obtain passage there on any "sanctioned mode of travel," and the family considered "running the blockade" too risky. The children's father, John Waite Stribling, was in the Army near Lynchburg. He decided that Taylor would go with the McCormicks to Amherst County and attend a good school there. Alice and Ned would live with John's sister in Staunton. He hoped that there they would be far enough behind Confederate lines that he would be able to visit them often.<sup>xxv</sup>

The guardian arrangement reveals gender roles in the family and community. The men normally handled business arrangements and fiduciary accounts and the women looked to them for decision-making. The women provided nurturing and care for the family and others in the community. There certainly was overlap, however, as men also nurtured and Ellen at times handled disbursements and records in the guardian account for the Stribling children. She also helped Aunt Bet raise Ned Stribling, and Alice Stribling lived with Ellen at Clermont after the war. Aunt Bet and Ellen became very close, but it is not clear whether their relationship deepened during or after the war. The Milton/Taylor/McCormick family certainly accepted her among them, even though she was not originally from the Lower Valley.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Many lower Shenandoah families with Confederate sympathies left their homes when federal troops drove Stonewall Jackson's troops from Winchester after the Battle of

Kernstown in March 1862. The McCormicks left Clermont around that time as well. The household then included wife Ellen, a few months pregnant; fourteen-year-old Florinda Taylor McCormick, the only child who survived from Edward's first marriage to Mary E. Stribling; five-year-old Edward Jr.; three year-old Elvira; and toddler Dawson. Edward McCormick's nephew and ward, Taylor Stribling, also went with the family with plans to enroll him in school in Amherst. The family experienced another loss when Ellen's firstborn child, Edward Jr., died in mid-September. Ellen, probably accompanied by little Elvira and Dawson and an enslaved nursemaid, went to Ellerslie, her parents' home in Rappahannock County for comfort and assistance. It had already been touched by the war, as Union Major General Pope and his troops had occupied Ellerslie before the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Bull Run (Second Manassas to Confederates), which took place August 28-30. Safe enough, Anne Herndon McCormick, was born on October 29, 1862. (Anne's son Edward McCormick Williams (1903-1980) became the father of Elizabeth Rust Williams).<sup>xxvii</sup>

Existing sources do not indicate where Ellen McCormick lived during the rest of the Civil War. She could have lived in Amherst with her husband, stayed at Ellerslie, or returned to Clermont, or a combination of the three. With men off to war, many women headed households for the first time, including some near Clermont, such as Springsberry. Ellen's childbearing pattern indicates that she and her husband may have lived apart during most of the war. There are one or two year spaces between children except for the four years between Anne Herndon's birth in 1862 at Ellerslie and Albert Montgomery Dupuy's birth in 1866. At Clermont, she would have had much support from nearby relatives. Her presence at Clermont would have helped to maintain and



protect their property. It also would have helped prepare her for managing the estate during her widowhood after the war.

In Baltimore, Aunt Bet did not give up her efforts to reunite with the Stribling children. Finally, in early 1862, she and Florinda Hammond obtained passports and passage to Fortress Monroe in Hampton Roads. From there they traveled to Richmond and Staunton. The Virginia Hotel in Staunton became her temporary home. There she visited with Florinda's brothers Will and Tom Hammond on leave from the Army, and daily with little Ned and Alice Stribling. In April, Harriot Hammond joined her. Together the women made uniforms for Will and Tom. After the First Battle of Winchester on May 25th and General Banks's retreat, Aunt Bet decided they would return to the lower Shenandoah Valley. Many other refugees did as well, and stayed even when Stonewall Jackson left Winchester and Banks reoccupied the town on June 4th.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Meanwhile, Aunt Bet, Flo, Harriot, and three-and-a-half year old Ned Stribling rode in a stagecoach to Winchester with four soldiers. Alice must have stayed with her aunt in Staunton. Harriot described Ned as "the gayest, brightest, most rollicking fellow traveller that a war-worn party ever fell in with." He delighted his fellow travelers. In Winchester they stayed with two unmarried female cousins named Holliday. Harriot's description of Springsberry provided a vivid vignette of women in wartime.

"On leaving our affectionate hostesses in Winchester we drove immediately to Springsberry, joining the large family gathered under dear Grandmama's hospitable roof; for, like Aspen Hill, Springsberry always had room for "one more." This family, with Grandmama its head, consisted of Aunt Gertrude and her four children, Aunt Eliza Tucker and her two boys, and various cousins, friends, refugees; sick, wounded, and tired soldiers, who were fed, rested, nursed, and then helped onward out of danger of capture; and lastly a large force of servants, many of whom were old and infirm, many of them children, — all to be taken care of, trusted, and helped by that trust to be faithful. "Uncle Will" [Taylor], from the

first day of Virginia's secession, had been away in the army; he was now with Lee, tantalizingly near his home, and yet unable to visit it excepting for a short call.”<sup>xxxix</sup>

Harriot Hammond recounted military actions in the area and a church service she attended with General Robert E. Lee. She also described how “George Young, the most competent and faithful of servants, at the head of the others carried out the farming operations on the large and productive Springsberry estate.” Will visited for twelve hours to receive care for a flesh wound, and had a long talk with Aunt Bet. Even when federal troops returned to the area, Harriot reported that most families chose to remain in their homes this time. Aunt Bet, Harriot, and Flo stayed at Springsberry over the summer as did little Ned. Aunt Bet, age 62 and no longer in good health, decided that she and Flo would go to live with Mary Mildred Sullivan and her husband in New York City in the fall. She asked John Stribling if Ned could go with them. The boy’s father consented, as his duties kept him away from Staunton, and he knew the boy would be well cared for in the Sullivan household and with Aunt Bet. They must have also negotiated this arrangement with Edward and Ellen McCormick, who also helped raise the Stribling children and who managed their guardian account. In New York, Ned and the Sullivan’s son George, six months Ned’s junior, became very close.<sup>xxx</sup>

Just as Aunt Bet feared on the eve of war, the lives of relatives were likely cut short by the conflict. John Waite Stribling died of “camp fever” in Orange County on February 17, 1864. William Hammond died on July 4, 1864 from a wound sustained in cavalry action four days earlier in Dinwiddie County.<sup>xxxi</sup>

In the last year of the war, life became increasingly desperate for people living in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. A series of military actions in the Valley seemed like

mutual retaliation. Confederate troops, some from VMI, prevented Sigel from destroying the railroad center at Lynchburg; Union Major General Hunter reacted by burning VMI; Jubal Early led an attack and burning of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, then Grant appointed Major General Sheridan to command all Union forces in the Valley, which then became known as the Army of the Shenandoah. General Grant had ordered his Army to destroy the agricultural potential of Valley farms to supply and sustain the Confederate troops. Major General Philip Sheridan carried it out; his troops burned barns, mills, and crops, and commandeered livestock. Such “scorched earth” tactics would be used later that year in the War in General Sherman’s March to the Sea in the lower South.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Mary Mildred Sullivan felt so concerned for her extended family that she chose to leave her comfortable home in New York City and travel there to help. They packed “clothing and other necessities” for themselves and to give others in Virginia. Mary Mildred and her four-year-old son, George, and a maid rode the train to Shepherdstown. Once there, in order to blend in and travel more safely, they dressed in plain clothes, packed their goods into sacks, and loaded them onto a wagon. A negro man shared the driving with Mary Mildred Sullivan. As on previous trips they went first to her aunt Ann Newton (Hammond) Burnett at Burnley. From there they drove to Clarke County, dismayed that “want and desolation replaced the green field.” At each stop they brought “cheer and comfort” and left some goods to ease the inhabitants’ lives.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

The party stopped last at Springsberry, like many, a household of women. While there they experienced a more severe trial of wartime and Union occupation. Breakfast one morning was interrupted, first, when eleven-year-old Marshall McCormick rode his

brother's horse over on an errand. He lived across the road from Clermont at Hawthorne; his father, Province McCormick, was Edward McCormick's first cousin. When Marshall arrived, he prudently hid the animal in some large shrubs near the house before going inside. Shortly, a cry from a maid upstairs alerted the family to Union soldiers surrounding the house, guns drawn. Other troops went after the last of the family's cows. The women scurried to hide the silverware and other such valuables. From a side door, Marshall burst from the house and jumped upon the horse, spurring it on and over a fence, followed by shots from the soldiers. "Grandma" Taylor ran out onto the front porch, crying, "Don't shoot! It's only a boy!" When, in the confusion, someone yelled, "Mosby!", the officer regrouped his men and they left unencumbered by livestock. Following orders, one soldier torched the wheat stack on his way past. As the family watched it burn, Mary Mildred Sullivan grabbed a pitchfork, climbed the wheat stack, and pitched away the flaming wheat. According to one relative, the family kept the scorched pitchfork in the home as a memento of her heroism and their triumph over adversity.

Military behaviors on both sides often violated usual ethics of engagement. Sheridan reported on August 17<sup>th</sup> that "Mosby has annoyed me and captured a few wagons. We hung one and shot six of his men yesterday." He treated them as bushwackers instead of enemy combatants. The following day, Mosby killed one soldier, wounded another, and captured two pickets for the 5<sup>th</sup> Michigan Cavalry along the Shenandoah River. Major George Armstrong Custer, commander of this unit, retaliated by ordering them to burn the home of Province McCormick, who served at that time as Clarke County's Commonwealth's Attorney. Although the inhabitants left the house

before it was torched they were not allowed to take any belongings. The Cavalry unit also burned William Sowers's and Benjamin Morgan's homes nearby. The cycle of violence escalated further when a contingent of Mosby's men led by Captain J.G.L. William Chapman overtook and surprised the 5<sup>th</sup> Michigan Cavalry on Morgan's Lane (now Parshall Road) that borders Clermont. In what could be called a massacre, Chapman's unit killed thirty Union soldiers and took no prisoners. From a northern window at nearby Springsberry, as adults there scurried to gather precious belongings, Mary Mildred Sullivan's four-year-old son George Sullivan and his young friend Milton Tucker watched the Williams estate burning less than a mile away. He remembered it vividly in his later life. No doubt many of the civilians and surviving soldiers in the Berryville area on these mid-August days had gruesome scenes scorched into their minds.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Some women from Winchester and the surrounding area kept diaries of their Civil War experiences; these resources can supplement those relating more directly to Clermont. Mary Greenhow Lee, sister-in-law of Confederate spy Rose O'Neal Greenhow, and Cornelia Peake McDonald documented the war in Winchester. In neighboring Loudoun County, Catherine Barbara Broun of Sunnyside near Middleburg, Elizabeth Osbourne (Grayson) Lewis Carter and Catherine "Kate" Whiting (Powell) Carter of Oatlands also kept diaries. These two have not been published. Oatlands was like Springsberry, with the men away and mistress Kate Carter managing affairs and taking in relatives.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Drew Gilpin Faust, a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, has written extensively about women's experiences in and after the American Civil War. The absence of white men among elite slaveholding households brought about structural changes in society.

Women moved about, changing households, and even elite women were often required to accomplish tasks, from plowing to financial management, that only men once performed. The war brought about tremendous hardship, suffering and death, and women developed skills and ways of coping that made it impossible to go back to the way things were before. Yet, many cultural conventions regarding race and gender changed little.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Drew Gilpin Faust is herself a daughter of one of Clarke County's elite families, raised with the region's conventional expectations about gender and race that trace back through the times of Clermont and Springsberry. In her introduction to *Mothers of Invention*, she wrote how she was trained to use the word ladies instead of women, and explained, "I lived in a world where social arrangements were taken for granted and assumed to be timeless. A child's obligation was to learn these usages, not to question them. The complexities of racial deportment were of a piece with learning manners and etiquette more generally." For example, she learned to address "black adults with just a first name, whites as 'Mr.' or 'Mrs.'" As for gender, her mother warned her, "It's a man's world, sweetie, and the sooner you learn that the better off you'll be." She resisted such conventions from an early age, became a pioneering scholar, and, in 2007, was selected to become the first female president of Harvard University. That Drew Gilpin Faust was steeped in the history and culture of the region undoubtedly helped her to understand the war and its lingering aftereffects better than most. In *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, for which she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, she analyzed the behavior of, and displayed empathy for, those dealing with the casualties and consequences of the war, even long after it ended.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Clermont today can utilize these tremendous resources by and about women in the region during the Civil War to facilitate further study and understanding of race, gender, social change, and cultural evolution.

### **Post Civil War Era**

In 1865, Mary Mildred Sullivan, keenly aware of the suffering in the former Confederate States, organized the New York Ladies Southern Relief Society and raised money among her wealthy associates in New York City to assist women and children in the South. The organization collected \$20,000 and effectively rendered aid to places such as Winchester during that desperate winter of 1865-66. She and her husband also opened their home to young men from elite, but now struggling, families who flocked to the city in hopes of finding work. Mary Mildred learned how useful she could be in helping people in need and how gratifying it could be.

From there, she began serving the less fortunate in her community and in the mountain South. In 1866, noticing her philanthropic accomplishments, officials of the Nursery and Child's Hospital in the city invited her to serve on its board. She was elected secretary and, in 1880, when the director was ailing, managed the hospital, and managed it well. Her biographer, in an acknowledgement of prevailing gender norms, noted that "the possession of a skill so unusual as a feminine characteristic, did in no way overshadow Mrs. Sullivan's spiritual and loving nature." She resigned due to her age in 1909. Five years earlier, however, Martha Sawyer Gielow approached her about forming a branch of the Southern Industrial Educational Association in New York City, "to aid the uplift of the Anglo-Saxon race of our Southern Appalachian Mountains." With Mary Mildred Sullivan elected president, the organization built schools throughout the

Southern Highlands. Southerners in New York formed a second chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and elected her to serve as its first president.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

While Sullivan accomplishments were awe-inspiring and generally laudable, it should be noted that she seems not to have been interested in assisting the Freed people of the Lower Shenandoah Valley. Although a woman of great compassion and generosity, her charity apparently stopped at the color line. She was likely influenced by the prevailing sentiment of her peers at that time. For example, Winchester resident Mary Greenhow Lee wrote in 1865, “Political reconstruction might be unavoidable now, but social reconstruction we hold in our hands & might prevent.” Most of the aid for Freed people came from churches in the North—many of them African American—and Quaker Meetings.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Edward and Ellen McCormick and their family lived at Clermont after the war, resumed farming and, like others in the region, worked to restore their fields, fences, homes, and lives. When Edward died in 1870, Ellen chose to remain at Clermont, despite inheriting a debt of \$22,000 along with his assets. The times were still tough, and she sold other property, such as the Amherst County farm and parcels of land in Clarke County, along with livestock and farm equipment, to be able to pay taxes and maintain Clermont.<sup>xl</sup>

By this time, a number of African Americans had saved money toward buying land. They sought autonomy and land ownership helped provide it. Already, in 1865, elite black people of Clarke County established Blackburn Town in Berryville. Five years later, many more potential buyers looked for suitable land and favorable terms. They preferred to establish settlements where families could enjoy community and support one



another. While white people preferred to build their homes within sight of busy roads, after centuries of slavery and surveillance, black people often preferred communities and home sites that were screened from prying eyes. Albert Elsea purchased Ellen McCormick's 21-acre parcel south of Milton Valley, then subdivided seven acres and sold lots to African Americans who established the Pigeon Hill community. Her 31-acre parcel on the south side of Berryville had no buyers until a group of twenty-four African Americans offered to buy it from her directly if she would subdivide it into one-acre lots and hold the mortgages. The deed, dated September 30, 1870 lays out all the terms for the timber rights, a 16-foot road down the center, and mortgages payable in four annual installments with an interest rate of six percent.<sup>xli</sup>

Because of her relationship with Ellen McCormick and the fact that she purchased the first two lots, Josephine Williams probably represented the group in their proposition to Ellen McCormick, her former owner. Perhaps she served as a go-between in negotiating the terms. Elizabeth Rust Williams wrote that "once the slaves were emancipated, [Edward McCormick], wanted them to own their own homes." While there is no documentary support for this oral tradition in the Williams family, many Princeton graduates at that time, such as William Meade and his cousin William Henry Fitzhugh, harbored moderate antislavery sentiments and supported the American Colonization Society. It is well-documented, however, that Freed people wanted to become landowners and worked and saved in order to do so. Ellen McCormick's views are unknown, but the loan arrangement suggests mutual trust between the buyers and the seller in a time when mutual trust did not come easy. For the community to bear her name, Josephine Williams must have been a remarkable woman with leadership qualities.<sup>xlii</sup>

Ellen McCormick managed Clermont for the next twenty years, until her death, but left little material to reveal what that experience was like. Other sources, however, such as Harriot Hammond's memoir, reveals much about family life and race relations in Virginia at that time. Aunt Bet chose to make her home in Clarke County after the war because of her business interests in Virginia, the many relationships she had there, and its central location to more distant kin. Her nieces Harriot and Flo were young women by then and still lived with her, and Ned Stribling was school age. They hired a cook who was a "worthy descendant" of the renowned enslaved chef at Milton Valley, and a waitress related to the Hammond children's mammy. In this arrangement they felt "a mingling of the respect and affection that marked the old order" and in some way preserved the status quo. The cook is later identified as Lucinda, and may have been Lucinda Alexander, who appears as married with children and keeping house in Berryville in 1880. The waitress was likely May Lovett, who appears in the Hammond/Taylor household in 1870, age eleven. Research into these and other African Americans mentioned in the memoir might well reveal genealogical connections to the enslaved people and post-emancipation domestic and farm workers at Clermont.<sup>xliii</sup>

William and Gertrude Taylor of Springsberry asked Harriot Hammond to start a school for their daughter Annie Moss Taylor. Harriot agreed and taught other students as well. Most were day pupils, but Annie Taylor and Rose McCormick, Edward McCormick's cousin, lived with them during the week.<sup>xliv</sup>

During these difficult times after the war, Harriot "often marveled at [Aunt Bet's] skill in overcoming the difficulties,—presenting always a comfortable and wholesome table, attractively spread and served, in a place where there was no market to order from,

and with but a small income for the outlay.” She and her cook, Lucinda, conspired in these efforts and took satisfaction in the results. Without the help of additional servants, Aunt Bet cared for little Ned herself, sewed his clothes and, perhaps as result, she was closer to him than her previous charges. His older siblings, Taylor and Alice Stribling, spent their summer vacations with them and probably also at Clermont. The school grew and, in 1868, Harriot Hammond, with the help of relatives, purchased the “Thompson House” in Berryville. Aunt Bet and her gardeners Tom Page and George Field planted trees, shrubs, produce and flowers. The following spring, and most summers to follow, Mary Mildred Sullivan and her son George visited from New York.<sup>xlv</sup>

The household of Aunt Bet Taylor experienced one significant transformation engendered by expanding notions of freedom and equality. Aunt Bet employed a young man named Walton Lovett and a young woman named Lizzie, both “children of old family servants” who Harriot Hammond thought deserved “honourable mention.” Walton was a butler who responded to Aunt Bet’s training. She realized “that while he was shining her silver or polishing her floors many of his own age and colour were in school or in college at Harper’s Ferry fitting themselves for their new status in life.” She felt that he deserved an education as well, and each morning tutored him in “reading, spelling, writing, and arithmetic, and Harriot noted that one rarely came across the implements of Walton’s trade without finding a slate or book lying with them. She recalled that “His progress was so rapid that he soon became a shining light on the coloured Baptist debating society.” Although some of Aunt Bet Taylor’s peers, such as Ann R. Page of Annfield, educated their slaves decades before, this is the first documented instance in which a Milton/Taylor/McCormick family member did so. Additionally, Walton became

close friends with Ned and George, who were then ten years old. They valued his company and counsel, and particularly looked to him for advice on style and behavior in relationships. Although not many interrelationships such as this were documented, this one between the young men was remarkably equal for its time.<sup>xlvi</sup>

“As for Lizzie,” Harriot recalled, “no plummet-line could be found long enough to sound the depths of her amiability and kindness. To see her make up a bed, puff out a pillow and then gently place it beneath an aching head, was to give a needed lesson to the graduating class an any training-school for nurses.” Her gift provides an example of how black people did a better job of extending care and compassion regardless of race and class than did white elites. Gender differences stand out in high relief in the example of these two young people, and it does not appear that Lizzie was offered an education. Lizzie may have been Lizzie Lovett, the daughter of William S. and Sarah Lovett of Winchester, born in 1852. Lizzie Lovett died in 1875 and was buried behind the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Berryville.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Except for these two individuals, however, Aunt Bet had trouble adapting to the new social arrangements and finding help to manage the household. Harriet explained that “she knew not how to be simply an employer and no longer an interested and responsible caretaker and friend. The want of proper ambition in and training for the younger colored people filled her with pity; and yet she was not able to help them, for they would not be helped her way.” Their ambitions were not for the old ways of slavery, and “her way” was likely more meddling and condescending than people of color would tolerate at that time.<sup>xlviii</sup>

Another relationship across the color line was maintained but subtly shifted. Aunt Bet became more frail, and in 1872 the growing boys left her household. George Sullivan was well enough to return to New York, and Edward McCormick decided that Ned Stribling should attend a boarding school. Harriot Hammond went to New York to head a school, and Aunt Bet went north with her to stay with relatives there. She first spent an extended visit with Flo, who had married John B. Tilson and moved to New Jersey. There, their “dear nurse, ‘Mammy,’ now quite an old woman,” was employed to care for Flo’s baby Frank. Aunt Bet and Mammy had long talks in the nursery that “made the link with the past a very close one, [and] helped to...brighten the many changes in circumstances.” Their advanced ages, the changing times, and the many common ties may have helped their relationship be more egalitarian than it had been in the past. It is likely that the woman identified only as Mammy died before 1870, as she does not appear in the household.<sup>xlix</sup>

Each summer, Aunt Bet would return to Berryville and Clermont, where she could spend time with Ned and other loved ones. Harriot wrote:

“She loved the dear mistress, her niece, Mrs. Edward McCormick. She enjoyed the young life around her made by the happy group of great-nephews and nieces. The old homestead of itself was dear to her from many tender associations with her young sister Florinda. Now, seated alone of her generation on the vine-draped porch where they had so often sat side by side in the old days, she never tired of the companionship of the “everlasting hills.” There they stood, bounding the fair picture of rich meadow and woodland stretched out before her, as they had stood from her earliest childhood; and now they seemed unchanging friends in her age.”<sup>1</sup>

This passage highlights the intimate and enduring connections with Ellen McCormick, Clermont, and the landscape itself.

As Aunt Bet Taylor entered her eighties, however, the visits became more difficult for her and, hence, shorter. During her last visit, in 1882, Ned Stribling told her of his engagement to Lydia Kownslar, a local girl, when it was yet a secret. She was delighted, but felt too frail to stay for the January wedding. Two days after their marriage, the newlyweds traveled to New York so that the family there, “and especially his dear Grandmama [as he called Aunt Bet], might learn to know and love” his bride. The bonds remained strong between members of this far-flung family. Few of them grew as old and infirm as did Aunt Bet, but those who did were taken in by other relatives, visited and cared for. Aunt Bet was surrounded by family when she died in 1893. Mildred and George Sullivan traveled with her remains to Winchester, and with many other relatives and friends in attendance, saw her buried alongside the body of her husband, Bushrod Taylor.<sup>h</sup>

Ellen Lane (Jett) McCormick continued farming at Clermont until her death in 1908. Her experience as a woman farming in “a man’s world” must be left up to the imagination, but some Pulitzer Prize-winning female writers from Virginia have done just that in a rich and illuminating way. Willa Cather, born and raised for the first nine years of her life in Frederick County, Virginia, near Winchester, moved with her family to Nebraska. That place provided the setting for *O Pioneers!* (1913), but the novel feels relevant to the Valley as well. In it, Cather wrote about a daughter of a pioneering family with more aptitude for farming than her brothers. As a single woman, she took over the farm herself, expanded it, and made it very successful. In a similar vein, Ellen Glasgow from Richmond (whose maternal uncle, Joseph Reid Anderson, was the engineer in the paving of the Valley Road and hence a business associate of Bushrod Taylor’s) wrote

about a successful single and innovative single woman farmer in *Barren Ground* (1925). Both deal with the challenges the women farmers faced, the exhilaration they experienced in their successes, and their deep connection to the land. In both novels, the land itself is a main character, and like a lover, but with greater power, richness, and depth than that of mortal men. In an important sense, the women were wedded to the land and nurtured those around them in their families and communities. Both novels, too, suggest a feminine way of relating to and appreciating the land, with the recognition that masculine and feminine qualities are part of each of us. Cather and Glasgow depict and challenge gender conventions—as well as those of race and ethnicity—and deeply engage readers in perpetually meaningful questions of life.

Another non-fiction work compliments these novels and the life of Ellen McCormick beautifully. Mary Gold owned and operated Ellwood, and was another of those amazing aunts such as Elizabeth Stribling Wright Taylor. Her niece edited and published her letters from a time when farm income seriously declined and the Great Depression seized the nation. The book is called  *Holding On: A Woman and Farm: Shenandoah Valley, 1920's-1930's, Letters of Mary Gold*. The letters are very engaging and illuminating, and could be effectively used for educational programs or reading groups in conjunction with the novels and the life of Ellen McCormick.<sup>lii</sup>

### **The Twentieth Century**

Rose Mortimer Ellzey MacDonald embodied, lived, and breathed history, geography, and biology, but she also looked to the future and expanded possibilities for women as she lived her way into it. Her grandfather Francis McCormick was Dawson McCormick's brother, Presiding Justice of the Clarke County Court from 1856-1860. Her

father Marshall MacDonald served the Confederacy as a Colonel of Engineers, and after the war joined the faculty at Virginia Military Institute, married Mary Ellzey (or Eliza) McCormick, and welcomed Rose in 1871. As U.S. Commissioner of Fisheries in Grover Cleveland's administration, he traveled the world, took Rose with him, and taught her what he knew. She published a comprehensive bibliography of publications on fish. With an education from Norwood Institute, Shepherd College, and the College of William and Mary, she chose a career in education, teaching, then supervising Clarke County's rural schools. Seeing the need during the Great Depression, she developed a free hot lunch program. She was appointed judge in Clarke County's Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court without a background in law, and Virginia State Board of Education in 1930, and was reappointed until her death in 1953. She had many other interests as well, including antique collecting, which she turned into a business. At age 75, she married Washington, D.C., resident J. Lewis Skogg.<sup>liii</sup>

Another significant aspect of her career as an educator is that Rose MacDonald wrote history books for young people. She first wrote *Then and Now in Dixie: A History of Virginia for Boys and Girls* (1933). Despite the title, it avoids Lost Cause mythologizing and instead focuses on geography and the predominant crops in different regions of the state as well as cotton and rice further South. Narrated as a story, two children travel to different places, watch crop production and harvesting, and learn about the history of that region and their own ancestors. McDonald avoided the topics of slavery and race, although at times slaves are mentioned and African Americans are shown in photographs performing the often-complicated tasks she describes in the text. An active member of the State Board of Education's textbook committee, she heavily



revised the old standard *History of Virginia for Boys and Girls* by John Walter Wayland in 1943 and 1950. Library of Virginia staff mentioned her in an exhibition on women's history in Virginia. She followed in the footsteps of Mary Tucker Magill, who first published "*Mary Tucker Magill's History of Virginia*" in 1871. According to the exhibit text, these women, like other writers of the time, "reinforced the traditional themes of Virginia history that celebrated heroic white men conquering and civilizing a wilderness, winning independence, and fighting valiantly in the Civil War."<sup>liv</sup>

She also researched and wrote two biographies: *Nelly Custis: Daughter of Mount Vernon* (1937), and *Mrs. Robert E. Lee* (1939). She also wrote *Clarke County, A Daughter of Frederick: A History of Early Families and Homes* (1943). Her book on Mrs. Robert E. Lee, whom she and her parents knew personally, is laudatory, but she interviewed people who knew Mary Custis Lee and amply supports her contention that she was a cheerful person of character who bore the severe trials of war well, rather than as the complaining invalid that other writers have emphasized. In both books, Rose MacDonald showed intelligence and originality. MacDonald championed teaching local history in the schools and was a member of the Clarke County Historical Association.<sup>lv</sup>

Meanwhile, at Clermont, upon the death of Ellen Lane (Jett) McCormick, her son Albert Montgomery Dupuy McCormick bought the other heirs' interest and inhabited the property. In 1932, the time of his death, six heirs assumed control of the property. For much of this time, the house lacked modern conveniences and no McCormicks lived at the property. Members of the extended family took vacations there, however, that had the character of pilgrimages. Edith Beardall, granddaughter of A.M.D. McCormick, wrote:

During Grandma McCormick's lifetime, all the little Williamses and McCormicks spent their summers there together as I understand it, and Nancy Williams Peyton

and my mother, Edith McCormick Beardall as very small girls shared a trundle bed in “the Big Room.” ... My grandfather, A.M.D. McCormick...was able to spend summers at Clermont. As a child I have recollections of my grandparents rising very early—about 5 a.m.—and going out to the large vegetable garden beyond the lilac bushes and the grape arbor to gather all the vegetables or berries that would be needed during the day. About ten o’clock in the morning the children sat on the “back steps” leading down to the then-dining room and drank milk fresh from the cows and ate bread and butter and brown sugar. My grandmother churned the butter herself in the always cool cellar under the back porch right by the great rock that was the foundation of that part of the house.<sup>lvi</sup>

In 1946, Edith’s parents, John R. and Edith Jett (McCormick) Beardall, renovated Clermont, added two bathrooms, and adjoined the kitchen with the dining room. She added, “During the ten years my parents lived there, 1947-1958, all branches of the family came to visit when possible, and our visits—my husband’s and mine—were so regular that all our children were able to know and love ‘Clermont’, and for that I am deeply grateful.”<sup>lvii</sup>

When the Beardalls lived at Clermont, they employed an African American cook named Geneva Brown. She was only fourteen years old, in the seventh grade, when she accepted the position, but she loved to cook and appreciated the opportunity to earn some money. She had lived with her family in Warren County and learned to cook while helping her mother; while there they primarily ate foods they grew themselves. Then the family moved to Clarke County near Berryville where they lived on the Smallwood Farm. Geneva Brown worked at Clermont for three years, preparing breakfast and dinner for John and Edith Beardall and their grown son, Geoffrey, who lived with them. Some fresh produce came from the garden, but most provisions Edith Beardall purchased at the grocery store in town. While employed at Clermont, Jackson lived during the week in the detached apartment that once served as slave quarters, although she was unaware of its prior use at the time. On weekends she returned to her own family.<sup>lviii</sup>

Geneva Brown married Palmer Jackson around 1949 and moved with him to Josephine Street in Berryville. The couple had five children, and they finished raising two of Geneva's brothers and a sister after their mother died on September 25, 1959. Jackson also raised one of her grandsons.<sup>lix</sup>

In her home on Josephine Street, Geneva Jackson continued to cook and serve her community, and still does today. She caters special events prepares baked goods such as cakes, pies, and rolls for Berryville's Farmer's Market on Saturday mornings. Her ham biscuits are particularly popular—each week she prepares 30-40 plates of five large ham biscuits per plate and sells them all. Judges at county fairs and Virginia State Fair have awarded her over 500 ribbons for her baked goods and preserves. Jackson, herself, serves as a county fair judge in Loudoun, Jefferson, Shenandoah, and Prince William counties in Virginia and Jefferson County in West Virginia. She is a living link to Clermont's past, an embodiment of the state's culinary traditions, and she sometimes caters for special meetings and participates in special events at Clermont.<sup>lx</sup>

Jackson is also a volunteer extraordinaire. She has served Blue Ridge Hospice, where she particularly liked working with people with HIV-AIDS; Helping with Housing, which helps senior citizens stay in their homes; Laura's Center in Winchester, which assists rape victims; is on the boards of FISH, which provides transportation and other aid to low income people, and Downtown Berryville. She has been a Team Captain for the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life and an usher and "many other things" at Zion Baptist Church. In 1994 the community honored her with Citizen of the Year. Geneva Jackson embodies the spirit of love and care, especially for people in need, regardless of gender, race, or sexual orientation.<sup>lxi</sup>

In another connection to Clermont, Elizabeth Rust Williams served Geneva Jackson and her husband as their attorney, and Jackson was pleased with her service.<sup>lxii</sup>

### **Elizabeth Rust Williams**

From the time Elizabeth Rust Williams entered the world in 1945 she imbibed Virginia history. Her father Edward McCormick Williams grew up at Airlie, adjacent to Clermont, and knew his grandmother, Ellen Lane (Jett) McCormick from his birth in 1903 until her death in 1908. Rose Mortimer Ellzey MacDonald, born in 1871, provided another living link to the past. She taught Elizabeth to read before she even attended school and shared stories of local family history. Rose died in 1953 when Elizabeth was eight years old.<sup>lxiii</sup>

Elizabeth Rust Williams followed the family pattern in some ways, but the times were very different. A young adult during the civil rights movement, the introduction of birth control pills, the sexual revolution, and the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s, she lived during times that were as turbulent as those of her great-grandmother Ellen McCormick. This social unrest seemed particularly threatening to old elite families that had once held slaves. Elizabeth recalls one cousin who, feeling alarmed for her own safety, "threw away everything she could get her hands on that related to the slaves we once owned." Elizabeth did not share this anxiety, but neither did she take up the civil rights cause.<sup>lxiv</sup>

Elizabeth Williams embraced the freedom afforded women in her era and, perhaps curious about the changing times, studied journalism at George Washington University. Upon graduating in 1968—a particularly tempestuous year, with the TET Offensive in Vietnam, student protests around the world, and the assassination of Robert

Kennedy—she became a reporter and freelance journalist for the Washington Post and the Philadelphia Daily News. She wrote a series of articles on the phenomenon of swinging couples, for which she attended gatherings, interviewed participants, and quoted authorities such as academic authors on the topic. The series was popular enough that she wrote a follow-up article for the newspaper's Philadelphia Magazine. She revealed that she attended the gatherings undercover with a male reporter posing as her husband. The readers' biggest question, however, was How far did she go? Just as she was about to reveal this information, however, the column ended with "continued on page 17," but there was no page 17. From journalism, Williams then segued into public relations, serving the City of Philadelphia as a consultant during the Bicentennial.<sup>lxv</sup>

Elizabeth Rust Williams married Toby Talbot of Middleburg in 1979, but for her the marriage was untenable. The personal difficulties she had regarding relationships and alcohol were due in part to the changing times in which she lived and weakening of the family and kinship network that had supported young people in previous generations.

Not successful in following the life script of most of her female ancestors in marriage and children, however, she quickly and resourcefully diverted course to another role familiar to her family but only newly open to women. She entered law school at American University and graduated a doctor of jurisprudence (J.D.) in 1981. She and younger colleague Mary Ellen Kerr became the first female attorneys in Clarke County. When she was appointed a substitute General District Court and Juvenile Domestic Relations Judge in 1986, she became Clarke County Circuit Court's first female judge. She served the county with such distinction that her peers selected her as Outstanding Woman Attorney of Virginia in 1986, for Exceptional Pro Bono Service in 1993, and

President of the Clarke County Bar Association from 1983-1988. Elizabeth's cousin and first teacher Rose Mortimer Ellzey MacDonald would likely have been particularly proud of, and honored by, her career.

At least as dear to Elizabeth Williams as her work in law was the ownership and management of Clermont. She employed a farm manager, but participated in decisions such as stock sales and purchases. She researched and wrote about the history of the farm, even though she found writing history "pure agony." She valued the past so much that it sometimes prevented her from moving forward. For example, she held on to aging breeding cattle because they had belonged to her father, resulting in an "old herd." She wanted to preserve Clermont for posterity, and used her legal expertise to draft her will with an interesting arrangement that would ensure its continued preservation. She willed the property to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and made provision for the Clermont Charitable Trust to administer it with the stipulations that it be kept in agriculture and used for the public good. In an important sense, we the public, and especially the people of Clarke County, are her heirs.

The women's history of Clermont suggests many possible ways that Clermont can serve the public good. It can continue to nurture and educate the people of Clarke County and beyond today, especially our young people, physically, mentally, and spiritually. The farm allows visitors to connect with the land, landscape, and the abundant life in the soil, on the ground, and in the air. A community garden, not one that allows people to plant and tend private plots, but a true community-shared garden would foster connections to the land, to neighbors, and encourage good nutrition. Chickens delight people of all ages and would particularly draw families with young children to visit and toss them bread

crumbs. Programs on culinary history that bring together local farmers, restaurateurs, and chefs would promote appreciation for the past and present. Geneva Jackson could provide expertise and is a living link with the past. Foodways is a topic, as well, that easily bridges the racial divide; doing so should be an aim in programming generally. Clermont could be a place that supports questioning such as What is our relationship to place? How much do we shape place and how much does place shape us? How does it shape our identity? What does it mean to be the descendant of slaveholders, of slaves, of immigrants? As a site of conscience, the slave quarters at Clermont has great potential for a place of retreat and reflection. Fellowships could foster research and writing.

Programming for children and youth should be a particularly high priority. Day camps and field trips with themes such as history, archaeology, farming, and biology would be very valuable to the community. Jennifer Busbee Lee, who grew up in Clarke and now teaches preschool in Berryville, explained that “growing up in a rural area has a lot to offer, but [children] don’t all get that experience. People assume that if you are from Clarke County you know about farms,”—and nature, for that matter—but it is less and less the case. Her mother, Barbara Lee, a member of the Clarke County Board of Education, reported that school officials have expressed an interest in having farm animals easily accessible to students at the school. Clermont is perfectly positioned to provide opportunities for those experiences and knowledge to go along with it. Children should be encouraged to discover the responsibility and joy in raising things.<sup>lxvi</sup>

Some of this programming is already underway at Clermont. Archivist Mary Thomasin-Morris is herself a remarkable repository of knowledge about the history of the region, and provides valuable assistance to curious researchers. An annual festival

attracts hundreds of people to Clermont to celebrate local agriculture, history and culture. Scout troops and 4-H members have visited and farm manager Sam Monroe works with Future Farmers of America. Last year, he hoped to find a young man in the club to work with him at Clermont part-time. Instead, he found two young women, Colleen Bowers and Stephanie Herring, who were very eager to work and learn. He taught them how to repair fences, make hay, tend the cattle, and tag the ears of newborn calves. When, suddenly, Monroe had a heart attack and bypass surgery, the two young women managed the farm. They communicated with Monroe or his wife daily by cellular phone and did what needed to be done. Colleen Bowers no longer works at Clermont, but Stephanie Herring still does. She says that the experience has changed her. Always a hard worker, she now better understands its importance and value. Once anxious to grow up and leave Clarke County, she now realizes what a special place it is and what a strong sense of community it has. She is a new woman of Clermont and a harbinger of others to come.<sup>lxvii</sup>

Willa Cather could have been writing as well about Virginia in this passage from *O Pioneers!*: “Fortunate country, that is one day to receive hearts like Alexandra’s [here, Ellen’s or Elizabeth’s] into its bosom, to give them out again in the yellow wheat, in the rustling corn, in the shining eyes of youth!” Clermont can share its remarkable resources, as well as the love and energy and shortcomings and successes of those who once lived there, to foster strong bodies, bright minds, caring souls, and a vibrant community today.

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<sup>i</sup> Harriot Milton Hammond, *A Story of a Long Life: A Memoir of Elizabeth S. W. Taylor, “Aunt Bet”* (New York: The Marion Press, 1900); Anne Middleton Holmes, *Mary Mildred Sullivan: (Mrs. Algernon Sydney Sullivan): A Biography* (Concord, New Hampshire: Rumford Press, 1934).



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- <sup>ii</sup> Nancy F. Cott and Drew Gilpin Faust. “Recent Directions in Gender and Women’s History,” in *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History* 19, No. 2 (March 2005): 4-5. Issue devoted to Gender History.
- <sup>iii</sup> Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South From Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2003), 135-36.
- <sup>iv</sup> J. E. Norris, ed. *History of the Lower Shenandoah Valley Counties of Frederick, Berkeley, Jefferson and Clarke* (Chicago: A. Warner & Co., 1890), 629-30.
- <sup>v</sup> Hammond, 1-8.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-32.
- <sup>vii</sup> For a useful genealogical chart, see “The Family of Thomas McCormick and Ann Frost,” [http://www.trakwest.com/zmcc302\\_3b.htm](http://www.trakwest.com/zmcc302_3b.htm)
- <sup>viii</sup> Hammond, *passim*; for Ware family genealogy including images Bible records with transcriptions, see Ware Family Genealogy. <http://www.bigballoonmusic.com/Ware/JamesWare2-Chapter6.htm>
- <sup>ix</sup> Hammond, 177.
- <sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.
- <sup>xi</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 71. William Meade or Bishop Meade is mentioned on 2,6, 51-52, 98-99, 102.
- <sup>xii</sup> *Ibid.*, 16, 102.
- <sup>xiii</sup> George Henry Pope, “Education in Clarke County to 1946,” in “Education in Clarke County, Virginia,” *Clarke County Historical Association Proceedings* 25 (2003): 1-100; see p. 23.
- <sup>xiv</sup> In her manuscript, “Clermont: The McCormick Family Farm, 1750, at Berryville, Virginia: A History of the People and the Place” (Unpublished manuscript in possession of the Clermont Charitable Trust, 2004), Elizabeth Rust Williams incorrectly states Florinda McCormick’s death date as 1847. Eilerslie, near Little Washington, is marked by a historical highway marker. The house has not survived, but the Rappahannock Historical Society has a photograph, and boxwoods from the site were relocated to the National Cathedral grounds. *Rappahannock News*, Sept. 2, 2010.
- <sup>xv</sup> Ellen Lane (Jett) McCormick to Edward McCormick, July 16 and July 20, 1859; November 15 and 25, 1860; February 13 and 16, 1861. Clermont Charitable Trust, Berryville, Va.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Ellen Lane (Jett) McCormick to Edward McCormick, November 25, 1860 and February 16, 1861; Dave McNair, “Back of the House: Monticello’s Kitchen Works, *The Hook*, May 25, 2010, <http://www.readthehook.com/67542/back-house-monticellos-kitchen-works>.
- <sup>xvii</sup> See, for example, Mary Greenhow Lee Diary, Handley Regional Library; Cornelia Peake McDonald, *Diary with Reminiscences of the War and Refugee Life in the Shenandoah Valley, 1860-1865* (1873; Nashville: Cullom & Ghertner, 1934, c1935); Garland Quarles, *Occupied Winchester, 1861-1865* (Winchester, Va.: Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society, 1991).
- <sup>xviii</sup> Hammond, 113-115.
- <sup>xix</sup> *Ibid.*, 115; and J. E. Norris, ed. *History of the Lower Shenandoah Valley Counties of Frederick, Berkeley, Jefferson and Clarke* (Chicago: A. Warner & Co., 1890), 630.

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- <sup>xx</sup> Hammond, *Memoir*, 118; McGuire, *Diary*, 118; Will Hammond to Harriot Hammond, August 3, 1861, Algernon Sydney Sullivan Collection, Stewart Bell, Jr. Archives Room, Handley Regional Library, Winchester.
- <sup>xxi</sup> McGuire, *Diary*, 9, 50-51, 66.
- <sup>xxii</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Hammond, 116, 118.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-22.
- <sup>xxv</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-23.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-71.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> “Ellerslie,” Virginia Department of Historic Resources Historical Highway Marker, 1997; Hammond, *Memoir*, 122-23.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Hammond, 122.
- <sup>xxix</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.
- <sup>xxx</sup> *Ibid.*, 133, 136-39. Stribling Guardian Account, Clermont Charitable Trust.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Hammond, 140, 142.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Military tactics to destroy food grown by civilians was banned in 1977 in the Geneva Conventions, Article 54 of Protocol I.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Holmes, 61-64.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Thomas D. Gold, *History of Clarke County, Virginia* (1914, 1968; reprinted by Clearfield Co., 2009), 124-25; section reprinted as “Col. Morgan’s Lane, Aug. 19, 1864: Mosby’s Attack on Custer’s House Burner’s [sic]: No Prisoners,” in *Proceedings of the Clarke County Historical Association XV* (1963-1964): 46; John F. Wukovits, “John Mosby and George Custer Clash in the Shenandoah Valley,” *HistoryNet.com* <http://www.civilwar.org/battlefields/thirdwinchester/third-winchester-history-articles/john-mosby-and-george-custer.html>; and Holmes, 64-69.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Sheila R. Phipps, *Genteel Rebel: The Life of Mary Greenhow Lee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); McDonald, *Diary*; Catherine Barbara Broun Diary, 1855-89, 1862-69, and 1885, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia; Oatlands, “Photo Gallery: A Pictorial History of Oatlands.” <http://www.oatlands.org/photog/list.asp?ID=2>
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) 33-34.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, xi; Sara Rimer, “A ‘Rebellious Daughter’ to Lead Harvard,” *New York Times*, February 12, 2007; and Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008). <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/12/education/12harvard.html?fta=y>
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Holmes, *Mary Mildred Sullivan*, 73-87, 94, 98-99; and Kathleen Curtis Wilson, *Uplifting the South: Mary Mildred Sullivan’s Legacy for Appalachia* (Johnson City, Tenn.: Overmountain Press, 2005). This book includes a folded insert with very helpful family trees of the Milton, Taylor, Hammond, and Sullivan families, and an appendix with transcriptions of Civil War letters.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee Diary, September 13, 1865, Handley Regional Library; quoted in Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 248. According to the United States Census for 1870, the Sullivans employed Irish servants in their New York home.

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- <sup>xi</sup> Kyle Ainsworth, "Restoration, Resistance, and Reconstruction: Liberty at Last in Clarke County, Virginia, 1865-1879" (M.A. Thesis, University of Southern Mississippi, 2010), 116; and Ellen Lane McCormick to Herbert Hudson, Amherst County Deed Book JJ (1894): 297.
- <sup>xlii</sup> Ainsworth, 109-110, 114, 116-117. There is a map of black settlements on p. 113. Matthew B. Reeves, "Reinterpreting Manassas: The Nineteenth-Century African American Community at Manassas National Battlefield Park," *Historical Archaeology* 37, no. 3 (2003): 133-34.
- <sup>xliii</sup> Williams, "Clermont," 5; Hahn, 141-42, 245, 365, 457-458.
- <sup>xliiii</sup> Hammond, 144; United States Census, 1870 and 1880.
- <sup>xliv</sup> Hammond, 144.
- <sup>xlv</sup> *Ibid.*, 148, 154.
- <sup>xlvi</sup> Walton's surname is not given in the memoir, but he (at age 18) appears in the Harriet [sic] Hammond and Elizabeth Taylor household in the United States Census for 1870, as did May Lovett, age 11. In 1900 he is listed as a 48-year-old widowed servant in the household of Marin and Margaret Maloney of Spring Lake, Monmouth, New Jersey. He must have had light skin; in 1870 he is identified as mulatto and in 1900 as white.
- <sup>xlvii</sup> Hammond, 157; United States Census, 1870; Mary Morris, "Black History-Lovett & McCleary," Genealogy.com Forum, June 28, 2005.
- <sup>xlviii</sup> *Ibid.*, 161-62.
- <sup>xlix</sup> *Ibid.*, 164. Household servants listed in the 1880 United States Census are Rachael King, mulatto, age 32, born in Maryland, and Frances Lee, black, age 21, born in Virginia.
- <sup>l</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-171.
- <sup>li</sup> *Ibid.*, 171-73.
- <sup>lii</sup> Mary Gold, *Holding On: A Woman and Farm: Shenandoah Valley, 1920's-1930's: Letters of Mary Gold*, edited by Mary N. Woodrich (Chagrin Falls, Ohio: Treehouse Press, 1985).
- <sup>liii</sup> Robert Stieg, "Rose Mortimer Ellzey MacDonald Skoggs (1871-1953)," Clermont Charitable Trust.
- <sup>liv</sup> Library of Virginia, "Shaping Public Opinion: Writing Virginia's History," in "Working Out Her Destiny: Women's History in Virginia, 1600-2004," [http://www.lva.virginia.gov/exhibits/destiny/public\\_opinion/writing.htm](http://www.lva.virginia.gov/exhibits/destiny/public_opinion/writing.htm) (accessed July 29, 2011).
- <sup>lv</sup> Stieg, "Rose Mortimer Ellzey MacDonald Skoggs (1871-1953)."
- <sup>lvi</sup> Edith Beardall Hardcastle to Elizabeth Rust Williams, September 29, 1998, Clermont Charitable Trust.
- <sup>lvii</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>lviii</sup> Interview with Geneva Jackson by Deborah Lee, June 8, 2011.
- <sup>lix</sup> Telephone interview with Geneva Jackson by Deborah Lee, October 7, 2011.
- <sup>lx</sup> Jackson interviews, June 8 and October 7, 2011.
- <sup>lxi</sup> List of volunteer activities made during follow-up interview with Geneva Jackson by Deborah Lee, June 21, 2001; *Clarke County Courier*, December 28, 1994.
- <sup>lxii</sup> Jackson interview, June 21, 2001.

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<sup>lxiii</sup> Robert Stieg, “Edward McCormick Williams (1903-1980)” and “Elizabeth Rust Williams (1945-2004),” Clermont Charitable Trust.

<sup>lxiv</sup> Williams, “Clermont,” Foreword.

<sup>lxv</sup> Ibid., 1-2. *Philadelphia Daily News*, December 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 1971; *Philadelphia Magazine* 11, no. 1 (January 1972).

<sup>lxvi</sup> For more information on community gardens, see [www.communitygarden.org](http://www.communitygarden.org). Leni Sorensen, African American Research Historian at Monticello and an authority on Virginia foodways and interpretation, is very enthusiastic about potential programming along these lines at Clermont. She can be contacted at [lsorensen@monticello.org](mailto:lsorensen@monticello.org).

<sup>lxvii</sup> Interview with Stephanie Herring, June 21, 2011.