

THE FRANKLIN HOUSE

SURRY COUNTY

Surry Community College Library
Dobson, North Carolina 27017

THE FRANKLIN HOUSE IN ITS HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In 1790 his house was only a dream in the mind of Bernard Franklin. He had come to North Carolina more than a decade before, in the midst of the American Revolution. Now the Revolution was over and peace had come. Independence from England had brought the young United States financial troubles and threats of political disintegration. For Bernard Franklin and his family it was a time for recouping fortunes lost or delayed by the war. As Mr. Franklin gained property and status in his community, his sons, especially Jesse and Meshach, assumed positions of leadership in their county and state. The Franklins were doubtlessly involved as North Carolina first refused to ratify and then became the twelfth state to ratify the Federal Constitution in 1789. Therefore by 1790 it was evident that the nation was prospering and so was Bernard Franklin and his family.

Evidence of the Franklin's prosperity was their move to the Fisher River valley where more land was available for the ever increasing families. Shadrach Franklin remained behind on the Mitchell River, but Bernard, Jesse, and Meshach would build homes on the Fisher River. When these homes were completed Jesse's home was the largest and nicest and survived until the late nineteen sixties, when it was burned. Little is known about Meshach's first home but it was probably down-river from Jesse and Bernard. Today only Bernard Franklin's house stands as evidence of a family important to North Carolina and the nation and is illustrative of the men of that time and place and their

contribution to the nation which they helped build.

Building the Franklin House was no simple procedure and could not have been done without much careful planning and preparation. Plans had to be drawn, a site chosen, trees to form the timbers needed for the house's foundation had to be located, cut, and seasoned. Boards for the framing and the siding of the house had to be sawed, notched, fitted and planed by hand. Window frames and sashes had to be made and glass brought in from outside the area. Brick had to be laborously made and baked on the location. There were stair rails to be carved, doors to be made, hardware to be made or purchased, stones for the foundation to be gathered. All this and more had to be accomplished while Bernard Franklin, his family, and his slaves worked and harvested the crops and carried on the multitude of tasks necessary for life to continue on a substantial farm in Surry County, North Carolina, in the 1790's.

The Franklin House was completed in either 1792 or 1799. 1799 is presently painted on a brick near the top of the west chimney. Closer examination may prove this date (or 1792 as some insist) to be marked on the brick but even such a marking would be only circumstantial evidence of the precise date of the construction. Probably the building continued for more than a year and very likely no positive evidence will ever be uncovered as to the exact date. Surry County tax records for 1800, however, show Bernard Franklin's tax assessment to be high enough to indicate that a substantial and costly house sat on his lands by that year. So 1799 is the latest possible date for the house to have been

built.

The site for the Franklin House was chosen with care. The knoll on which the house was to be built overlooked fertile bottomland and rugged hillsides where a variety of crops could be grown. Bernard Franklin knew the area and its crops and knew the type of farming at which he was best. He planned to grow corn and flax and some cotton. He would raise sheep and shear them for their wool. Some of the corn would be ground into meal at a nearby mill, and some would be added to oats, rye or other grains to provide feed for his cattle and mash for his still. As he made plans to anchor his house firmly on the rock outcropping at the top of the knoll on Fisher River, Bernard Franklin must have seen these crops and many more growing on his nearby lands, at least in his mind's eye.

Probably the first structure to be built was the log house which would later serve as the kitchen. Next were the slave cabins, down the hill to the north of the main house site; then a barn and enough outbuildings to house the horses, tools, supplies, and food for the work crews. According to the Census of 1800 Bernard Franklin had twelve slaves. This number would have included house servants, those too old, and perhaps even those who were too young to do much work. This would provide only a small labor force to build such a large house. Jesse Franklin reported twenty slaves for the same year so he may have loaned his father some workmen, and he may well have assisted in the building himself. This was no plantation southland in which the master sat by idly as the house was being constructed by

his slaves, and the members of his family probably labored along with the slaves--although by this time there was likely a clear distinction between family and slave tasks, with only the easier, nicer jobs going to the family.

After enough outbuildings had been erected to sustain the main project, the gathering of materials for the house was intensified. Imagine the work it must have taken for oxen, horses, and men to pull the main house timbers out of the forest across the bottom and up the knoll to the house site. Then the laborious shaping with a broadax began. Meanwhile the foundation stones had been located and transported to the site and placed in position. Slowly the outline of the house began to emerge.

Sixty miles to the south at this time, the Moravian brethern of Salem would cut all the timbers for a house at one time, carefully marking each timber so as to indicate its position in the finished structure. Then when the timbers were completed, all the men of the community would gather and the house would be raised in a short time. Some of the timbers of the Franklin house are so marked and it may be that such a process was used in its construction. Or the markings may have been for the convenience of the builders, and the house framing may have been exposed to one of more winters before it was roofed with split shingles and the siding put on.

Skilled carpenters, joiners, and housebuilders were few in this region of North Carolina at that time. Probably the owner, Bernard Franklin himself, supervised the building. The basic house design was the standard "Quaker Plan" with three

rooms on the first floor and three rooms on the second. A few rough drawings, a visit or two to houses of similar design, and maybe an engraving or two would have been all the blueprint necessary for such a building project. This would account for the asymmetrically placed windows and some of the other rather rudimentary architectural errors. But at least a few skilled workmen were available as is indicated by the nicely carved stair rail, the chamfered porch posts, and many other such features. The original mantles and other decorative features show an attempt at beauty and style but a lack of knowledge concerning the latest architectural fashions. It is such facts as this which give the Franklin house its distinction and make it valuable in showing the architectural history of the nation.

The large double-shouldered chimneys on the east and west ends of the house show a blending of fashionable and rustic architectural techniques also. The brick were likely made at the site and fired there. When Meshach Franklin's estate was disposed of in 1840, one set of brick molds was among his effects. These very likely had survived from the time the house was built. The base of the chimneys was laid in a three to one Common or American bond pattern and the upper portions were Flemish bond. The smooth shoulders shed water and gave the chimney a polished appearance not usually found in this area. According to tradition, when the chimneys were finished a slave placed a board across the top of one of them and stood on his head to celebrate the event. One might suppose that on such an occasion some of the produce of Bernard Franklin's still would have been utilized

as a part of the celebration.

The substantial size of the house and its main timbers have already been noted. The house was well built in almost every way. The excellent site, a good foundation, well chosen timbers and framing, and quality construction techniques all reflect the position and wealth of the family. A good example of an instance in which more than customary care was exercised in the nogging of the walls of the house. It was not unusual for outside walls to be framed, filled with poorly fired brick, and then siding placed over the walls on the outside and plaster or some other finish applied on the inside. In the Franklin House this was done not only for the outside walls but for the inside walls as well. Only in the most expensive construction would this have been done. It not only was costly, it added weight to the interior of the house, and made it difficult to support. But it also made the house more soundproof, kept the heat from the fireplaces within the rooms and, most advantageous, it helped prevent vermin in the form of rats, snakes, squirrels, and other small animals and the insects which carried from entering the house. Quality construction, then as now, was costly and time consuming, but it was worthwhile in the end.

When the house was completed, the Franklin family doubtlessly moved in amidst great confusion and celebration. Again using the census of 1800 as evidence, only the youngest son, Abednigo, remained at home and he was soon to leave the state in search of a place to establish himself. Three daughters remained at home and there was probably a steady flow of visiting grandchildren and other relatives. In such circumstances

the house very likely saw many happy times.

Unhappy times came too as in 1805 when Mary Franklin spent several weeks in Salem seeing expert medical care for "a cancerous sore" which had troubled her for years. Neither the medical care nor the prayers of the Moravians could assist her however, and she returned home to die on November 12, 1805. Bernard Franklin continued to live in the house and farm the land until his death in January of 1828. He and Mary were probably both buried in the family graveyard across the road in front of the house and, when the property passed from the Franklin family in 1847, title to the graveyard was reserved by Bernard's grandson, C. B. Franklin.

The Franklin House had yet to achieve its potential in the way of life styles and gracious living, but the arrival of Meshach Franklin and his family promised better times. Meshach acquired the house in the settlement of the estate following Bernard Franklin's death. Meshach was the father of a large family, had spent several years in Congress in Washington, and was the most well educated man in the county. The social and political gatherings that naturally came to his home fitted nicely into the substantial house. Meshach's children were the hospitable leaders of the younger set in the community and balls and parties vied with the more sedate gatherings of the older members of the family.

As befitted his wealth and station, soon after he acquired the house, Meshach Franklin decided to renovate it according to the latest fashion. The Greek Rivival period of architecture had

had reached its peak on the American scene about the time that the renovation was begun. Many features of the house were modified along Greek Revival lines. Perhaps the most noticeable of these changes was the addition of panneling along the lower portions of the interior walls and the painting of this panneling in an attempt to simulate marble. This marbelizing and the accompanying wood graining was probably done by a local craftsman in an effort to reproduce a technique he had either seen elsewhere or which had been described by the well traveled Meshach Franklin. Fortunately most of the marbelizing remains intact today and will require little more than a careful cleaning and preservation. To find such an effect this old, and in such an excellent state of preservation, is most unique and in itself would make the preservation of the Franklin House worthwhile. Other changes made at this time probably included the replacement of the mantles in the downstairs rooms, the moving of the attic stairs, and the installation of a partition upstairs to make four bedrooms out of three.

Meshach Franklin presided over his estates from the Franklin House for about ten years until his death on December 18, 1839. His wife, Mildred, continued to live in the house until her death in 1843. Then the house and surrounding property became the possession of their son Columbus Bernard Franklin who sold the house and some of the property to Saint Clair [Sinclair] McMickle on May 6, 1847. The house remained in the McMickle family until the twentieth century when it was acquired by James Blevins. In 1972 the Surry County Historical Society purchased it from Sam

Blevins.

During the years from 1847, when the house left the Franklin family, until it was acquired by the Surry County Historical Society the Franklin House underwent few changes. It was wired for electricity, and its shingle roof was replaced by galvanized metal. Some interior walls were erected to further divide the first floor into additional rooms. The slave quarters, the kitchen, and the other outbuildings fell into decay and disappeared--not without leaving remnants to be seen within the memory of some still living neighbors and relatives of the Franklins, McMickles and Blevins. The main farming operations of the property were moved to other sites and the farmbuildings also disappeared.

The interior of the house was preserved remarkably intact. The occupants must have had much respect for the marbleized and woodgrained paneling and doors. These were neither painted over nor were they significantly damaged when the new walls were added and the electric wiring was done. This was indeed fortunate as it accounts for the preservation of significant architectural details which otherwise would have been forever lost. The Surry County Historical Society has merely to restore the interior to its original state by removing the few added features and does not face the task of reproducing long lost details.

Within a few years the preservation and restoration work on the Franklin House will be completed and the Surry County Historical Society will have a possession of which they may justly be proud. Thousands of travelers will pass within a few miles of the house on the newly completed Interstate Highway 77. Pre-

sumably, not only will the house be restored but at least some of the outbuildings will be reconstructed. Perhaps small farm plots can be planted to demonstrate early crops and agricultural methods. A lost and significant life-style will have been rescued thanks to the Franklin House and those who contributed to its preservation.

APPENDIX I

The Children of Bernard and Mary Franklin

Name	Date of Birth
Jeremiah	September 2, 1754
Bernard, Jr.	April 28, 1756
Jesse	March 3, 1758 died May 14, 1759
Jesse	March 24, 1760
Betty	March 10, 1762
Abner	April 28, 1764
Shadrach	April 20, 1769
Mary	May 14, 1771
Meshach	September 17, 1773
Abednigo	May 20, 1776

The above are as listed in the Bernard Franklin's Bible in the possession of Mrs. J. F. McNeely, a Franklin descendant, 350 W. Main Street, Elkin, N. C. Presently stored in the vault of the Northwestern Bank, Elkin, N. C., in the care of Mr. Franklin Folger.

To the Freemen of the 13th Congressional District of the State of North-Carolina.

GENTLEMEN:

I HAVE taken this method to inform you, that I have become a candidate for the honor of representing this district (composed of the counties of Surry, Iredell, Wilkes and Ashe,) in the next Congress of the United States.

From the year 1807 to the year 1816, the period for which I had the honor to be your representative, the times were excessively stormy: our country was involved in serious difficulties, growing out of the injustice and injuries done us by foreign nations; and to such a length were those abuses carried, that our government was driven from its peaceful policy, and war with the aggressors was the consequence. Your councils were steady; your soldiers, by land and sea, brave, firm and patriotic; and, under the blessings of providence, in two years and eight months a safe peace was obtained for our country with Great Britain.—Early in this contest with Great Britain, one of the Barbary powers on the Mediterranean, and the Indians on our borders, also made war upon us. They were soon made to feel the strength of our arms, and a safe peace was obtained for our country from both the Indians and the Turks.

Whatever difference of opinion there might have existed before the war, it seems there can be but one now, as to its consequences. Our rights are respected abroad by all the civilized world; our commerce extended and protected in every sea, a confidence in ourselves and in our civil institutions; so that we may have a well-grounded hope and belief that the impression made on foreign nations, both civilized and uncivilized, during the late war, is a better security for our future peace and tranquillity, than all the treaties we ever had written on parchment.

When hardest pressed by our enemy, whatever calls the government made upon the people, whether in taxes or for soldiers, they were promptly met by them. This was sufficient to shew our enemy, that he had a brave and determined people to deal with. And although we had some reverses, the result has, in our own estimation, and the eyes of the world, placed this country on high and safe ground.

No American statesman will ever seek occasions for quarrels or war with any foreign power, but prudently avoid, on his part, that half of the wars which grow out of the follies, weakness or wickedness of rulers. We are yet a young nation; all our interests point to peace; and peace should be maintained, as long as possible on honorable terms.

Our late President, Monroe, in his message to congress; the late Secretary of the Treasury, in his report, and our late representative in congress, all inform us that, in the year 1835, if peace continues, without any augmentation of the revenue, all the nation's debt will be paid off. This must be pleasing to every American; and his pleasure must be increased, in the belief that a conviction has been produced abroad, that it is the interest of all foreign nations to respect our rights, and carry on a friendly commerce with us.

The constitution under which we live, for good reasons, gives to the People the right to elect the President of the United States—to be by them elected every four years. You need not now be told, that this right in the constitution which the people have of electing the President, will scarcely ever again be exercised by them with any tolerable prospect of success. It is not probable that we shall hereafter have a less number of candidates for the Presidency, than in the late contest for that office, at any succeeding election for a President: with four, five, or six popular candidates, scattered over the country, in the North, South, East, West, and on the middle ground, it is hardly to be believed, by any one, that the people will so far agree on any candidate, as to give him more votes than all the rest receive; and if this is not done, as the constitution now is, the election passes from the people to the House of Representatives.

In my humble judgment, the election of the President can be placed no where so safely as with the people: it is impossible that the candidates for the Presidency can exercise any thing like intrigue or management with five millions of people; but confine the election within the walls of the Capitol, and, although the representative body may be as upright and honorable as any on earth, there will nevertheless be jealousies, suspicions and criminations, well calculated to weaken our esteem for a government we all so much wish to support and maintain. The safety and best interests of the United States require an amendment to the Constitution, which shall enable the People to elect the President thereof; and whoever may be your Representative, either in Congress or in the state legislature, if an amendment should be judged necessary by them, I am confident no time could be better selected for the purpose, than the present.

Respectfully, your most obedient,

M. FRANKLIN.

Introduction

Dear Readers,

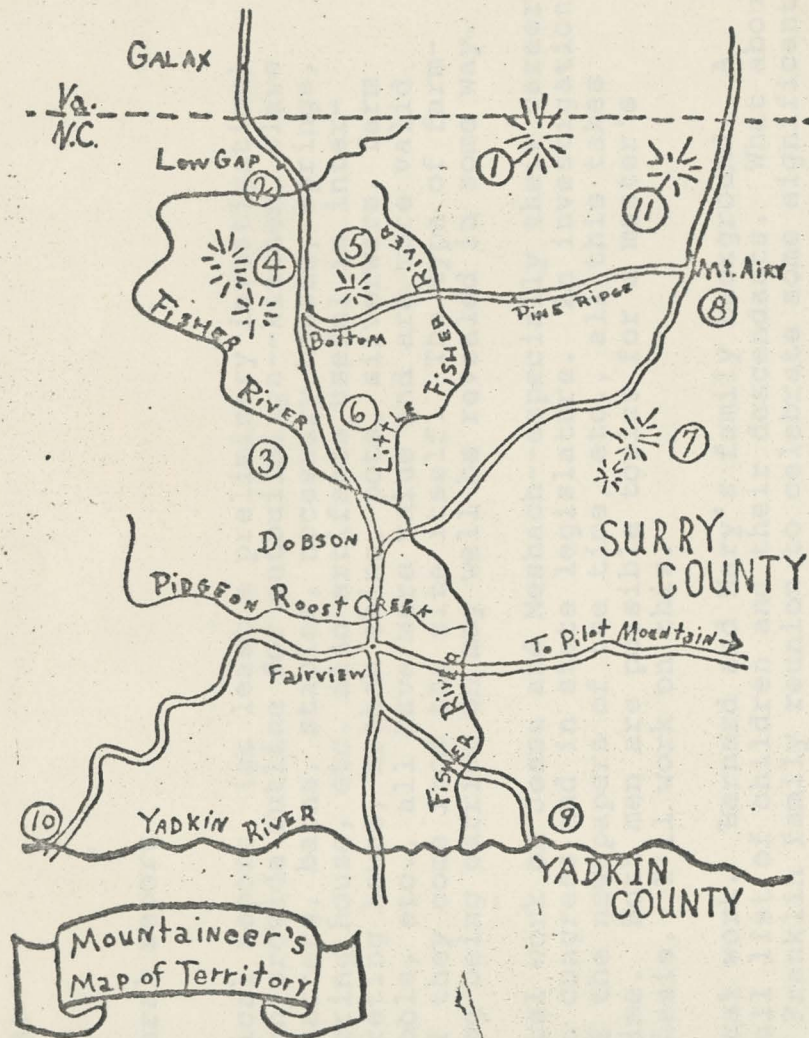
My primary purpose in reproducing this book is to preserve for posterity a record of a way of life and a dialect spoken only by the early settlers of this section of the country that would be lost otherwise.

The first settlers in Surry County were a hardy lot, and a sense of humor was a must to withstand the hardships and privations that they were forced to endure.

It is my sincere hope that you readers will enjoy and appreciate every scene described.

Sincerely,

John A. Snow



Number References on the Next Page

Stories about Fisher River folk
or 1829-30.

References to Map

- (1) Fisher's Peak
- (2) Governor Jesse Franklin's Home
- (3) Meshack Franklin's Home
- (4) Skull Camp Mountain
- (5) Round Peak
- (6) Shipp's Mustering Ground
- (7) Little Mountains
- (8) Mount Airy (Called The Hollow in 1830)
- (9) Rockford
- (10) Jonesville
- (11) Sugar Loaf Mountain

Taken from "Fisher River Songs"
written around 1857 by Hadden Taliaferro

Work to be done:

Architectural report

Archeological report (at least a preliminary investigation) can provide outline for outbuildings--kitchen, slave quarters, barns, stables, necessary houses, springs, spring house, etc. also artifacts useful in interpreting house, broken china, pots, silverware, farm tools, etc., all have more value and are more valid if they come from the site itself. The type of farming being carried on may well be revealed in some way.

Biographical work on Jesse and Meshach--especially their careers in congress and in state legislature. An investigation of the newspapers of the time, etc., all this takes time. Both men are possible topics for a master's thesis. I'll work on this.

Geneological work. Bernard and Mary's family background. A full list of children and their descendants. What about a Franklin family reunion to celebrate some significant point in the restoration of the house.

Guides and suggestions for interpretation. (presently from estate inventories and tax lists, tec.) When the above reports are completed the material needs to be broken down in such a manner that the volunteer interpreters you will probably want to depend on can use the information.

THE FRANKLIN HOUSE

About fifteen miles west of Mount Airy, North Carolina, where Haystack Road crosses the Fisher River, The Franklin House, a Georgian-Federal, two-story frame dwelling, sits atop a knoll overlooking acres of rich, flat bottomland. Built in the 1790's the house was the home of Bernard and Mary (Cleveland) Franklin, parents of N. C. Governor and Senator Jesse Franklin, Congressman Meshach Franklin, and a host of other Franklins whose descendants now reside in all parts of the nation. After Bernard Franklin's death in 1828 the house passed into the hands of Meshach Franklin, known as "the most learned man in Surry County." Meshach, a man of substantially more wealth than his father, renovated the house adding the marbelized and woodgrained panneling and other nicer decorative touches which distinguish the house and give it much of its architectural significance.

In 1972 the house was acquired by the Surry County Historical Society, which began making plans for its restoration and instituted action which resulted in the house being entered on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973.

THE FRANKLIN FAMILY

Bernard Franklin's ancestors probably migrated to Virginia from England and Wales sometime in the seventeenth century. In 1700 Lawrence Franklin was born in Albemarle County, Virginia. He married Mary Paine, also of Virginia, and on May 26, 1731, she gave birth to a son, Bernard. No other descendants of this marriage

have been discovered.¹

Bernard married Mary Cleveland, sister of Col. Benjamin Cleveland, revolutionary leader and hero of the Battle of King's Mountain, and they apparently settled in Orange County, Virginia where their first son, Jeremiah, was born on September 2, 1754. With great regularity but with remarkable infrequency in a day before dependable means of family planning, the couple was blessed with at least ten offspring (one of whom, a first Jesse, died before he was fifteen months old). Nine of the children appear to have lived to maturity and to have married and produced large families themselves.² For a complete list of the children of Bernard and Mary Franklin see Appendix 1.

In 1769, Bernard Franklin's brother-in-law, Benjamin Cleveland moved from Orange County, Virginia, to what is now Wilkes County, North Carolina. The population of this region of Virginia was increasing and with the coming of the Revolutionary War, numbers of settlers located lands and moved their families into more unsettled regions along the frontier. In 1776 or 1777 Jesse, third son of Bernard and Mary Franklin, entered the Virginia militia as a lieutenant to serve with Washington and the Continental Army. At the end of his enlistment, he returned home to find that his father and a close friend and neighbor, Dr. John Taliaferro, had decided to move to North Carolina. Jesse set out in the direction of his uncle's home and located land for the families on the Mitchell River. According to tradition, the young Jesse erected cabins for the family and the Franklins and the Taliaferros were settled in North Carolina by 1779.³

Not much is known of either Bernard or Mary Franklin. The only clear evidence of the level of their education is the extremely costly and well worn family Bible which they possessed. Their most prominent son, Jesse, stopped his education at an early age although he apparently continued to educate himself in later years through extensive reading. A younger son Meshach was referred to as the most educated man in Surry County and his estate contained a library with enough books to have made him the most well-read man in the entire area.⁴

The Franklins' adherence to the cause of the American Revolution was already evident before they came to North Carolina. Jesse's service in the Virginia Militia and his close relationship to his legendary patriot uncle Ben Cleveland was a strong indication of the family's political inclinations. Although Bernard, whose family responsibilities by now included a wife, nine children, and a substantial number of slaves, did not actively serve in the revolution, several stories exist which testify to his and Mary's revolutionary fortitude.

The most complete account of the Franklin activities in the Revolution comes from Caruthers, Revolutionary Incidents. After relating the story of the family's arrival in North Carolina the narrative continues:

At that time the British forces having overrun South Carolina, and being on their way into North Carolina, the Tories, united in predatory bands, were ravaging the country and plundering the Whig families of every valuable thing upon which they could lay their hands.

So troublesome and dangerous had they become that the prominent Whigs were driven to the necessity of building a fort on a hill near the town of Wilkesboro, in which they secured themselves when not actively engaged. Jesse

Franklin joined Col. Benjamin Cleveland, his maternal uncle in his efforts to drive the Tories out of the county, or to restrain them from their predatory habits. Of Col. Cleveland's character as a partizan leader, the country is full of traditions, and his severity to the Tories who fell into his hands, is proverbial. Perhaps a few incidents that occurred to Bernard Franklin and his family, about this time, may somewhat illustrate the manner in which the Tory warfare was carried on. Choosing a time when they knew Jesse Franklin was from home, for they feared him, a band of Tories surrounded the house of his father and, while some kept watch on the outside, six or seven of them went in search for plunder. The cautious Mrs. Franklin had previously put all her best bed clothes and table linen into a large box and buried it in the garden, and had potato hills made over it and planted, in order more effectually to conceal the place where it was hidden. Those articles were then secure; but how to save the money and other valuables now became the question. There was an old maiden lady living in the family, called Aunt Betty Wells, who possessed more than ordinary sagacity and self control. While the Tories were preparing to enter the house, she went to the desk and took the gold and silver out of the drawer, where it was usually kept, and put it into a long stocking which she had just finished, and sat down on the chair, placing the stocking of specie on her apron. When the band entered, they found her very composedly knitting away as if nothing unusual was taking place. They soon commenced rummaging in the drawers of the desk, and in the chests, in search of the money which was concealed beneath old Aunt Betty's apron. During their stay in the house, she kept up a conversation with them continually, fearing they would suspect her and force her to give up her treasure. They finally left, however, without molesting her. The hidden box in the garden and the money was nearly all of their property that was now left. I have often seen a French crown in the possession of Mrs. Mary Graves, daughter of Jesse Franklin, now living at Mount Airy, which was saved in old Aunt Betty Wells' stocking. Not long after that occurrence the same party with some others, came to Bernard Franklin's again in search of his negroes who had escaped them on their previous visit. An unarmed man surrounded by a large party of ruffianly robbers, has sometimes to submit to very rude treatment. On this occasion Mr. Franklin happened to have a new hat to which one of the Tories took a fancy and, wishing to gratify his vanity, he snatched the new hat from his head and suddenly clapped his own old slouch on his head in its stead. Mr. Franklin's indignation was irrepressible and, dashing the old hat on the ground,

he stamped it exclaiming, 'I wish it was the heart of every Tory in the land.' The negroes which were carried off, all escaped from the Tories and returned in a few weeks to their kind master.⁵

Bernard and Mary were Baptists and were active church workers. For a time they were members of the Mitchell River Baptist Church, and in 1790 Barnet [sic] Franklin represented the church as it withdrew from the Strawberry Association in Virginia to join the Yadkin Association along with twelve other North Carolina churches. Sometime after Bernard moved from the Mitchell River to the Fisher River a new church was formed only a mile or so away, and for years this church was known as the Franklin Baptist Church.⁶

One source reports that Mary Cleveland Franklin "grew nearly as large as Col. Ben [Benjamin Cleveland, her brother] himself (over 300 lbs.)" Whatever Mary Franklin's size, she had survived bearing ten and raising nine children in a place and time in which many women died from far less. And the accomplishments of her children--their level of education and culture, their positions in the community, and their contributions to the nation--indicate that she was a woman of most extraordinary abilities. It comes as a surprise, therefore, to discover that for much of her life she suffered from another, more severe, and ultimately fatal affliction. On May 31, 1805, the leaders of the Moravian community of Salem, a flourishing community with its own physician, recorded:

A woman, Mary Franklin, who lives sixty miles from here in Surry County, came early in April for treatment of a cancerous sore on her cheek which she has had for some years. We learned to know this good seventy-year old mother as a person who knew her Saviour as her Redeemer. She and her husband, Barnet [sic] Franklin, who often visited her, belong to the Baptists. Her son, Mr. Jesse Franklin, was for the last six years

one of the Senators in Congress from this state. He visited his mother for two or three days in April. . . . On May 27 he came for his mother, who could not be cured entirely of her trouble which may well be the cause of her end. On November 16 of the same year, the physician, Brother Vierling, . . . met Major Jesse Franklin, at present a member of the senate of the assembly of this state, and learned that his mother, Mary Franklin, had passed away on the 12th of this month with great joy and longing to be with Christ. Last spring she spent a number of weeks here for treatment for a cancerous sore, and we had learned to know her as a true child of God.

The good brethern of Salem thus paid a fitting tribute to the memory of a remarkable lady.⁸

These few incidents in the lives of Bernard and Mary Franklin are all that are known. Their memory and their contributions live largely in the lives and records of their offspring. This is unfortunate because they must have been remarkable people. It was no small task to move into a frontier region, acquire large land holdings and a substantial amount of slave and other property. That they did so and at the same time produced a large and influential family including a governor and senator, congressmen, and community leaders for generations to come is striking indication of their uncommon ability. This makes it especailly fitting that the home in which they lived while much of this was being accomplished is being restored and maintained as a monument to them and their progeny.

JESSE AND MESHACH FRANKLIN

Two of the children of Bernard and Mary Franklin had an especial relationship with the Bernard Franklin House and merit

particular attention in this report. Jesse not only brought the family to this section of North Carolina and helped prepare the cabins into which the family moved upon its arrival, but he also led the family's move to the Fisher River from the Mitchell River valley. According to well established tradition he assisted in the construction of the Bernard Franklin House itself. Meshach probably also assisted in building the house. It is certain that he gained possession of the house upon his father's death in 1828 and lived there until his death in 1839. The evidence indicates that it was he who renovated the house, probably in the 1840's and gave it many of its Federal/Greek Revival architectural features.

Jesse Franklin

There are many biographical accounts of Jesse Franklin, most of them brief and unsatisfactory in some way. Since the purpose of this account is primarily to show his relationship to the Bernard Franklin House, the story of his rather full public and private careers will be told only in the barest outline. Hopefully some future biography will supply the missing details and provide the full record which Jesse Franklin deserves.⁹

Jesse was born in Orange County, Virginia on March 24, 1760. At sixteen or seventeen he entered the service of the Virginia militia and served with George Washington's Continental Army for at least a year. Upon his return home he found his family ready to leave Virginia and was sent to North Carolina to locate a place

for the family to settle. Passing through the "Hollow" [present Mount Airy], probably on his way to his Uncle Benjamin Cleveland's home in what is now Wilkes County, he moved west and found a suitable site on the Mitchell River.¹⁰

The "small though beautiful valley" was described by Jesse's grandson as follows:

This little valley is surrounded on three sides by mountains; Mitchell's river, a crystal stream, at that time abounding in trout, running through it. The coves of the mountains were covered with pea vines, which afforded the best pasturage for horses and cattle, and chestnuts and acorns supplied the hogs instead of grain. Game of all kinds abounded. Deer and turkey were very plenty,¹¹ and bears and wolves were neither few nor shy.

Here the family settled and within a short time both Jesse and his father had substantial landholdings in the Mitchell River headwaters.¹²

This account from the Dictionary of American Biography adequately sums up Jesse Franklin's military career in the Revolution:

The region swarmed with Loyalists, and in a short time Franklin was captain and adjutant in a patriot regiment commanded by Benjamin Cleveland, his maternal uncle. He distinguished himself at the battle of King's Mountain, and received the sword of Capt. Ryerson who took command of the British when Ferguson fell. Afterwards he continued in service in the partisan warfare of the period, and was intensely hated and feared by the Loyalists who finally captured and hanged him with his own bridle, only to have it break and allow him to escape. He was a volunteer at Guilford Court-House where he again displayed dashing courage. The close of the war found him a major of militia.¹³

The story of Jesse Franklin's hanging by Tories has many versions and each account has its own setting. If all the stories could be trusted, Jesse Franklin miraculously escaped hanging at King's Mountain, Guilford Court-House, and in Surry County on the Fisher

River, within sight of the Bernard Franklin House!¹⁴

The story of Jesse Franklin's public career spans the revolutionary and early national period. He was a justice of the peace in Wilkes County in 1785. From 1784 to 1787 he represented Wilkes in the state house of commons. About 1790 he was instrumental in having the Wilkes/Surry county line redrawn to include his homesite in Surry County. He was back in the state house of commons in 1789 and served until 1791. He served again in 1793, 1794, 1797 and 1798.¹⁵ The remainder of his public career seems accurately covered in the Biographical Directory of the American Congress:

Served in the State senate in 1805 and 1806; elected as a Democrat to the Fourth Congress (March 4, 1795-March 3, 1797); elected to the United States Senate and served from March 4, 1799, until March 3, 1805, serving as President pro tempore from March 10, 1804; trustee of the University of North Carolina in 1805; again elected to the United States Senate in 1806 and served from March 4, 1807, until March 3, 1813; was not a candidate for reelection; appointed a commissioner to treat with the Chickasaw Indians in 1817; Governor of North Carolina in 1820 and 1821; died in Surry County, N. C., August 31, 1823; interment in the old National Park at Guilford Battleground, near Greensboro, N. C.¹⁶

What the account does not reveal is the quality of Jesse Franklin's service in the state and federal legislatures and in the Governor's office. This was a time of intensely partisan politics in North Carolina and Franklin was a staunch member of the Jeffersonian party. His service as President pro tempore of the Senate came at the time when Nathanael Macon was Speaker of the House of Representatives. North Carolina Jeffersonians were in a good position to direct the nation with each house

of Congress headed by one of their representatives. Like Macon, Jesse Franklin performed his service well.

Prominent in committee work, Jesse Franklin is given credit for insuring that the Ordinance of 1787 remained in force under the Constitution adopted in 1789. The Ordinance, which provided a means whereby the western territories could become states, prohibited slavery in the Northwest Territory. Jesse Franklin wrote the committee report which assured that the Ordinance would remain in effect. He was an ardent Jeffersonian, supported Jefferson's various moves to impeach Federalists, and supported the War of 1812 until he left the national legislature. While Governor of the state he was a strong supporter of public education, although he was not able to secure legislation to this end. His address to the legislature contains an eloquent plea for public education and is otherwise noted for its excellence. At the end of the address he declined election for another term of governor on the grounds of ill health. He returned home to Surry County where he died in 1823. He was buried near his home at Low Gap but late in the nineteenth century his remains were removed to the Guilford Courthouse Battlefield where a monument had been dedicated to his memory.¹⁷

It is not known why the Franklins moved from the Mitchell to the Fisher River area, but one can conjecture that the larger, more easily accessible Mitchell River area did not contain enough unclaimed land to provide for the Franklin sons as they reached maturity. Again it appears to have been Jesse who led the way and he acquired property here in the late 1780's and

early 1790's. Bernard and sons Meshach and Abednigo followed suit, — and sometime in the 1790's Jesse reputedly assisted his father in the construction of his new home.¹⁸

Around 1790 Jesse Franklin married Meeky Perkins of Rock-bridge County, Virginia. About 1795 he built a home up the Fisher River from his father's house, and he and his family occupied it until his death. The house fell into decay and was burned deliberately in February, 1968.¹⁹ The Jesse Franklin home was apparently built on the same lines as the Bernard Franklin house with a wing extending from the rear to provide more room. With the destruction of this house the preservation and restoration of the Bernard Franklin home became even more important since it is one of the few remaining links with Surry County's most famous son.

Meshach Franklin

Considerably less is known about Meshach Franklin than about his brother Jesse.²⁰ Meshach was born September 17, 1773. He had no opportunity to fight in the Revolution since he was only ten years old when the war ended. Family tradition led him into public service and in 1800 he was elected to represent Surry County in the State house of commons. Chosen again in 1801, he turned his eyes toward the national legislature and was a Jeffersonian candidate for the House of Representatives in the elections of 1803 and 1804 and was elected in 1806. He served in Congress until 1815. In 1824, the year after Jesse's death, Meshach

Franklin was chosen a member of the Council of State and remained until 1835. In 1828, 1829, and again in 1838 he was in the State senate. In 1835 he was chosen along with William P. Dobson as a delegate to the convention which rewrote the state constitution. Here he continued his advocacy of Jeffersonian principles, worked for the removal of inequalities between the eastern and western portions of the state, and urged the extension of the right to vote to those freemen of little or no property.²¹

A good example of Meshach Franklin's democratic leanings can be gathered from an 1825 broadside from an unsuccessful campaign for a seat in the national House of Representatives. In the broadside "M. Franklin" proclaims himself a candidate for Congress from the thirteenth Congressional District (composed of Surry, Iredell, Wilkes, and Ashe Counties). He referred to his years of service in Congress and commends the people of the district for their support of him and the War of 1812. He commended President Monroe for his statement that the national debt would be paid off by 1835. He then came to the purpose of the broadside. He condemned the decision of Congress which gave the Presidential election of 1824 to John Quincy Adams rather than Andrew Jackson. He stated that the will of the people ought not to be ignored by Congress. (Jackson had received more popular votes than Adams). He promised also that he would support an amendment to the Constitution calling for the direct election of the President by the people of the United States. The effectiveness of his broadside notwithstanding, he was defeated in this as in many other bids for Congress.²²

Although his quest for public office was not always successful, Meshach Franklin remained a leader in his community and in Surry County. He generally is credited with keeping Surry in the Democratic camp. Shortly after his death the rising aristocracy of the county led it away politically from the Jacksonians and into the hands of the aristocratically inclined Whigs. But so long as Jesse or Meshach Franklin remained on the scene, Surry County remained Democratic.²³

In addition to his political leadership, Meshach Franklin was the undoubted intellectual leader of the Surry region. In Fisher's River Scenes and Characters, published in 1859, "Skitt," [H. E. Taliaferro] who had left the Fisher River area by 1829 spoke of the people:

They had no use for grammar nor for grammarians; they had no dictionaries; what few literary questions arose among them were decided by Meshach Franklin, for he was the only well-educated man in the community, and had been to Congress.

The author's purpose was to poke gentle fun at the rustic traits of his homeland and he exaggerated the backward quality of life to a degree. But he apparently did not exaggerate the position of respect and leadership occupied by Meshach Franklin.²⁴

The inventory of Meshach Franklin's estate made at his death in 1839 reveals a library of astounding size and quality. The number of books and the erudition of one who had read even a small part of them reveals Meshach to have been a man of remarkable intellect. The rest of the estate inventory and the thousands of acres of land which he possessed during his lifetime reveal also a man of considerable property. That he was able to

maintain even a small degree of loyalty among the small land-holding voters of the region was a tribute to his ability.²⁵

Meshach became a principal character in the story of the Franklin House when he acquired the house upon the settlement of his father's estate in 1828. At this point in life he had returned from Washington for the last time as the representative of the people of his district although he was to continue to be active politically on a local and state level for years to come. He was almost fifty-five years old and all or nearly all of his ten children had been born. A partial tax listing for 1828 shows that Meshach was the owner of more than two-thousand acres and at least twenty-four slaves.²⁶

Family tradition says, and it is reasonable to assume, that Meshach renovated his father's home and moved his substantial family into it within a short time.²⁷ Architectural evidence in the house itself indicates that most of the renovation was done by local craftsmen but under the direction of someone who knew of the latest styles and modes. By all accounts this was Meshach himself. His lengthy service in Washington had acquainted him with the latest in decorative styles and methods. To the somewhat austere Georgian home which his father had constructed Meshach brought the latest Federal and Greek Revival details. Mantels, wainscotting pannels painted to resemble marble, etc.--all these indicate that the house was renovated in the 1830's or thereabouts by someone with taste and knowledge not to be expected in this region during this period.²⁸

When Meshach Franklin died on December 18, 1839, the house and neighboring lands remained the property of his wife, Mildred Edwards Franklin, as a part of her life estate.²⁹ On her death a few years later, the house and property went to their son Columbus Bernard Franklin.³⁰ From his hands the property passed out of the Franklin family in 1841.³¹ At this point the account of Bernard Franklin and the members of his family most closely associated with his house must come to an end. The family and the house played important roles in the life of Surry County and North Carolina. The restoration of the house and its interpretation will portray an important chapter in the region's history.

FOOTNOTES

1. W. R. Edwards, "Sketch of Jesse Franklin," The University of North Carolina Magazine, O.S. Vol. 41, N.S. Vol. 28, (March, 1911), p. 6; Thomas F. Hickerson, Happy Valley, History and Geneology, (Chapel Hill, 1940), p. 20.

2. Happy Valley, pp. 20-21; Bernard Franklin's Family Bible [a handsome volume presently owned by a Franklin descendant, Mrs. J. F. McNeely, 350 W. Main St., Elkin, N. C. and kept by Mr. Franklin Falger in the Northwestern Bank, Elkin.] See Appendix I.

3. Happy Valley, p. 21; Edwards, "Sketch of Jesse Franklin," p. 709; Willie Catherine Ivey, Ancestry and Posterity of Dr. John Taliaferro and Mary (Hardin) Taliaferro, (, 1926), pp. 24-25, 68. See also the account of the life of Jesse Franklin written by his grandson J. E. Graves, of Mount Airy and printed in E. W. Caruthers, Interesting Revolutionary Incidents and Sketches of Characters Chiefly in the "Old North State". Second Series (Philadelphia, 1856), pp. 198-200.

4. Caruthers, Revolutionary Incidents, p. 199. Estate Inventories of Bernard Franklin and Meshach Franklin, Surry County Records, State Library, Raleigh, N. C.

5. Caruthers, Revolutionary Incidents, pp. 200-203

6. Johnson J. Hayes, The Land of Wilkes, (Wilkesboro, N. C., 1962), pp. 111-112.
7. From the Layman C. Draper Papers, microfilm. XX - Tern. Vol. 3, p. 18, as cited in "Random Items of Information on Bernard Franklin, March 26, 1973." Compiled by Ben R. Franklin, Jr. (a descendant of Abednigo Franklin).
8. Records of the Moravians in North Carolina, edited by Adelaide L. Fiess, et. al., VI, 2807, 2814, 2819, 2887.
9. J. G. de R. Hamilton, "Jesse Franklin," Directory of American Biography, edited by Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone. VI, p. 600. J. T. Alderman, "Jesse Franklin," in N. C. Booklet, VI (1906-1907), pp. 185-203; Beth G. Crabtree, North Carolina Governor (Raleigh, 1968), pp. 70-71. Biographical Directory of the American Congress. (Washington, 1971), p. 968. Caruthers, Revolutionary Incidents, pp. 197-212. Samuel A. Court Ashe, Biographical History of N. C., IV, pp. 133-138.
10. Caruthers, Revolutionary Incidents, p. 199; Happy Valley, p. 20.
11. Caruthers, Revolutionary Incidents, p. 200.
12. Land-grant Book, Wilkes County Courthouse, Wilkesboro, N. C.; N. C. Landgrant Records, Land grant office, Raleigh, N. C.; Surry and Wilkes County Tax records, State Library,

Raleigh, N. C.

13. Hamilton, "Jesse Franklin," D.A.B., VI, p. 600.
14. Ibid. Caruthers, Revolutionary Incidents, pp. 205-206; Ashe, IV, p. 135.
15. Hamilton, "Jesse Franklin," D.A.B., VI, p. 600. "Wilkes Surry County Line Mixup Begun by Franklin Bacy in 1790," Winston-Salem Journal, September 14, 1955.
16. Biographical Directory of Congress, p. 968.
17. J. C. Holingsworth, History of Surry County, (1935), passim, especially pp. 118-119, 178-179. D. H. Gilpatrick, Jeffersonian Democracy in North Carolina 1789-1816, with bibliographical supplement by J. Edwin Hendricks, reprint edition (New York, 1967), pp. 101, 135, 155, 193, 195, 216, 226.
18. Tax and Census Records, Surry County, State Library, Raleigh, N. C. The story that Jesse assisted his father in building the house presently being restored may well stem from Jesse's construction of the cabins occupied by the family at the time they moved to North Carolina.
19. Arlene Edwards, "Franklin Home Burned," Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel, June __, 1968.

20. The only biographical account of any significance is in the Biographical Directory of the American Congress, p. 968.

21. Ibid. Hollingsworth, History of Surry County, pp. 120-124.

22. 'M. Franklin, "To the Freemen of the 13th Congressional District of the State of North Carolina," in the North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, N. C. See Apendix II for the Broadside in full.

23. Hollingsworth, History of Surry County, p. 122. Gilpatrick, Jeffersonian Democracy in North Carolina, pp. 202, 222, 244.

24. [H. E. Taliaferro], Fishers River Scenes and Characters, (New York, 1859), pp. 17-18. For an account of the "quality" level of society which the Franklin daughters occupied and the grace with which they handled their position see also pp. 105-106 and a condensed version in Harpers New Monthly Magazine, XXV (1862), pp. 178-179. N. C. Booklet, VI, p. 201.

25. An Inventory of the Property of Meshach Franklin, Estate Records, Surry County Records, State Library, Raleigh, N. C.

26. An account of the Sale of the Property of the late Bernard Franklin, Estate Recrods, Surry County, State Library, Raleigh, N. C. Tax and Census Records, ibid.

27. Tradition, tax records, and the later sale of the house by Meshach's son are supplemented by "Mountaineers Map of Territory," enclosed in John A. Snow's 1958 reissue of Fisher River Scenes.

See Appendix III.

28. Nomination Form, Bernard Franklin House, National Register of Historic Places. March 28, 1973.

29. Meshach Franklin's Will, probated February 1840, Book 4, p. 161, Surry County Courthouse, Dobson, N. C.

30. Will of Mildred Franklin, probated 1843, Book 4, p. 200, Surry County Courthouse, Dobson, N. C.

31. Jesse D. Franklin to Saintclair McMickle, May 6, 1847, Deed, Book 5, p. 95, Surry County Courthouse, Dobson, N. C.

Preliminary report. See The Franklin House: The House, the Family, and their Historical Perspective. J. Edwin Hendricks

