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William Baxter Harrill Family

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From Ocell A. Harvill to Mrs O. Max Gardner
BRILLIANT RECORDS ARE MADE BY DESCENDANTS OF WILLIAM BAXTER

In the days when Western North Carolina was, for the most part a vast wilderness; when her majestic forests seldom resounded with the ring of the woodsman's axe; when her mountains and scenic wonders were little known, except to a scattering group of hearty people who inhabited this section, the fertile fields in the vicinity of Second Broad River, in lower Rutherford County, were chosen as a home site by men of the earliest settlers. Among these who made their way into this region to build for themselves a home and domain in a then comparatively new land, perhaps none was more intellectual or more enterprising than William Baxter. Someone has said, "It is the man behind who makes the man in front," and this statement seems to be true in regard to this stalwart pioneer; for even down to the present the spirit of William Baxter has marched triumphantly on.

On a trading vessel William Baxter earned passage from Ireland to the United States. He landed at Charleston, S. C. in 1783 and settled in Rutherford County in the year 1786. Soon after coming to this county he married Miss Sarah Berryhill, built a log house not far distant from the rushing waters of High Shoals and settled down to the honorable job of tilling the soil.

This plain unassuming citizen in a very short time won a reputation among his fellow countrymen for his honesty, sterling character and industry. As time passed he prospered and grew to be a leader in his locality.

In 1812 his wife died. His second marriage was to Miss Catherine Lee of the old Virginia stock of which the great Southerner, Robert E. Lee, was a branch. From this marriage came a large part of the intelligence for which the Baxter family became famous.

William Baxter did not accomplish anything really remarkable in his career. He was of the pioneering type and belonged to that invincible clan which helped to mold the rugged principles upon which the nation was built. It is for this more than anything else that he is remembered. He was doubtless equal to any emergency which called for great strength of mind and heart but his environment did not call forth his great powers.

He was the father of 20 children; and of descendants there are thousands who have spread throughout many states. He became the owner of many thousands of acres of land in the southern part of Rutherford County, including the tracts upon which the towns of Henrietta and Caroleen now stand.

He died October 12, 1853, at the age of 93. The principal branches of his lineage are the Durhams, Suttles and Harrills, which are very numerous, scattered throughout this and many other states, many of whom became famous as lawyers, doctors, ministers, judges and governors. The descending generations are also famous for large families. The first Suttle family had 20 children and of these there are hundreds of descendants.

John Baxter, son of William Baxter, was a man of extraordinary intelligence. In 1837, at the age of 20, he began his career as a merchant in a small store half-way between Rutherfordton and Marion at McHans Midway. His nephew, John Baxter, Jr., son of Joseph Baxter, was his business partner. The old article of agreement that was drawn up by these early merchants is still in existence and the many misspelled words which are to be found on it indicate that John Baxter was somewhat lacking at that time in elementary learning.

In 1841, he entered upon the study of law, when it is said, he could hardly read. He plunged diligently into the study of Blackstone, mastered his chosen profession and became well grounded in all of its most important principles. In a very short time after being admitted to the bar he distinguished himself. He ranked with R. S. Gaither, W. W. Woodfin and John Bynum, able lawyers of that day. He represented Rutherford County in the legislature of 1842-44. Later he moved to Henderson County and was a representative from that county in the General Assembly; was speaker of the House and displayed much ability.

From old records we find that John Baxter once fought a duel during the time he was a resident of Henderson County. Some of his remarks during a heated campaign seem to have offended Mark Erwin and Erwin challenged him to a duel. Baxter, who was well known even at that time for his nerve and dogged determination, accepted the challenge and the duel took place in a certain secluded spot in the country in the presence of a number of friends of both duelists. Erwin proved to be the quicker of the two contestants and Baxter was shot in the hand.

From Hendersonville he moved to Knoxville, Tenn. and enjoyed a lucrative practice until 1879 when he was appointed United States circuit judge. He was widely known and a much respected character throughout the entire South. He died in 1897. Many eulogies were paid his life and character by the first men of the country. John Baxter's opinions as a judge appear in law books and are read as precedents in the courts of this country and England.

Elisha Baxter, another son of William Baxter, migrated to Arkansas in 1850. Like his brother, John, Elisha started his career as a merchant, but this step proved to be an unsuccessful venture from a financial standpoint, though such a small thing as a business failure did not in the least deter the determination of a man like Elisha Baxter. He began the study of law and was later licensed. His progress was rapid and soon he was elected to the governorship of Arkansas during the reconstruction period. He was elected the first time as a Republican; however, he did not please his constituents, because he did not help to loot the State Treasury. Because he refused to assist in looting the Treasury, he was nominated the next time by the Democrats. However unbelievable it seems, the Republicans nominated the Democrat whom he defeated in the previous election. Elisha Baxter made his second campaign on the slogan, "I believe a man ought to be reasonably honest." He won in the second election by a good majority. During one of Baxter's races for governor the man whom he defeated refused to surrender the office and a warfare followed in which artillery was brought into play. A great effort was made to put Baxter out of his office by main force, but he stuck firmly to his post. The great nerve and statesmanship which he exhibited at such a trying time as this aroused the patriotic citizenship of the state and excited their admiration. Thus Elisha Baxter was able to quell a serious outbreak and restore the state to normalcy.

George Baxter, also a son of William Baxter, remained in Rutherford county, distinguished himself in many ways and became one of the famous lawyers in the county. He was equal to his brother John in intelligence and took an active and prominent part in politics. During the summer of 1854 he became ill while campaigning for a state office and died on the first of October of that year.

Two other sons of William Baxter became prominent in one of the western states and were candidates for governor.

William Baxter, Jr. with his small son, James, and his niece, Carolina, 13, were murdered on the night of September 30, 1838 in Georgia by a slave he had sold with a number of others to a white trader the day before, for which deed he was promised by his new master a share of the money he might obtain and his freedom. The negro was pursued and hanged the next day, but his new master, the real murderer, went unpunished because a negro's testimony would not be accepted in those days.

Miss Esther McDowell Baxter, daughter of William Baxter, married Micajah Durham, pioneer Rutherford County educator and soldier. Micajah Durham was a man much ahead of his times. He was a great believer in travel as a means of broadening one's education. He rode a horse to New York City to hear Jenny Lind sing. He also traveled on horseback to the Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, to Florida, and other distant points in the country. He represented Rutherford County in the convention of 1861. It is said that he made the first secession speech on the steps of the capitol of North Carolina. He was a volunteer in the war between the states and lost his life in the Battle of the Wilderness May 6, 1864. Micajah Durham was a cousin of Jefferson Davis, to whom, it is said, he bore a striking resemblance. On one occasion while in Richmond he was mistaken for the president of the Confederacy.

Mrs. Durham had some original and artistic candlesticks in her home, which were brought to this country by her father. It is said that these candlesticks were admired by Sir Walter Scott, and he later made mention of them in one of his novels.

After the death of her husband, Mrs. Durham managed the plantation in an efficient manner, characteristic of her early training. She was a charming and intelligent lady and taught her children the value of high and noble ideals in life.

There were seven daughters and six sons born to Micajah Durham and Esther McDowell Baxter Durham. The only living children are Mrs. A. B. Ware of Asheville and Miss Kate Durham of Durham. The remaining five daughters have been dead for many years. Plato Durham, one of the most distinguished sons of Micajah Durham and Esther McDowell Baxter Durham, at the age of 19 went to Knoxville, Tenn. to study law under his uncle, John Baxter, under whose able tutorage he learned many things which later helped to mold him into a famous lawyer and statesman. Plato Durham practiced law in Shelby for several years and was a captain in the war between the states. He and his men were credited with firing the last shots at Appomattox. He represented Cleveland County in the legislature of 1866 and also 1868 and also in the constitutional convention of 1868 and 1875. He was a leading figure in North Carolina politics in the period just after the war between the states and was instrumental in gaining pardons for many members of the Ku Klux Klan. His name is deeply imbedded in the history of North Carolina. For a time he was editor of the Shelby Banner and was always an ardent worker for any cause or movement which was beneficial to North Carolina and his native people. His death occurred on November 9, 1875. Taylor and Scipio Durham died in the war between the States. John and Crawford Durham died in the West. Columbus Durham, prior to his death a few years ago, was one of the States's most prominent Baptist ministers.

Betsy Baxter married Amos Harrill of Rutherford County. She was the mother of four sons, Lawson, John, Calvin and Samuel. Lawson was a prominent physician of Statesville. John was also a physician and died in Ellenboro.

All of William Baxter's children lived lives of service and were leaders in the civic, educational, and religious activities in their respective communities. Although all of the children could not achieve the ranks attained by their distinguished brothers, John, Elisha and George, nevertheless, their achievements and contributions to mankind were all worthy of commendation. In the old family cemetery about 200 yards from the original site of the Baxter homestead on the banks of Second Broad River are to be found the graves of William Baxter and about 30 of the immediate family. On May 8, 1904 a Baxter memorial service was held and a great many of the descendants from all parts of the country gathered at this spot to pay homage to one of Western North Carolina's most remarkable families.

GEORGE SUTTLE DESCENDANTS

George Suttle - Born Oct. 25, 1766 - Died April 10, 1832
Nancy Byers - Born Mar. 24, 1776 - Date of death unknown

Date of their marriage unknown.

Their Children:

<u>Names</u>	<u>Dates of Birth</u>
William	Dec. 25, 1787
Sallie	Dec. 12, 1793
Betsy	Mar. 5, 1796
Joseph	July 21, 1798
Benjamin	Sept. 6, 1800
Nancy	Aug. 6, 1802
George)-twins	June 25, 1806
Susanna)	June 25, 1806
John Byers	Oct. 16, 1810

Dates of deaths unknown.

George Suttle was a soldier in the Revolutionary War and was in various campaigns and battles.

Record in memoirs of Georgia by Dr. Lucian Knight - Vol. II - Page 963.

Also, record on tombstone in cemetery in Rutherford County, North Carolina.

WILLIAM BAXTER DESCENDANTS

William Baxter - Born -----, 1759 - Died Oct. 10, 1853

Sally Berryhill- Born -----, 1766 - Died Sept. 7, 1812

They were married in Oct. 1788.

Their Children:

Names

Thomas

Joseph

David

Andrew

William

George

John

Elisha

Taylor

Elizabeth

Jane

Esther

Sallie

Catherine

Mary

Susan

Married - Amos Harrill

" - Spencer Eaves

" - Cage Durham

" - Benjamin Suttle

" - William Hill

" - William Todd

William Baxter was a soldier in the Revolutionary War.

Application was made to Governor and Executive Council for bounty grants on account of services rendered in Revolutionary War.