

The Life and Times of

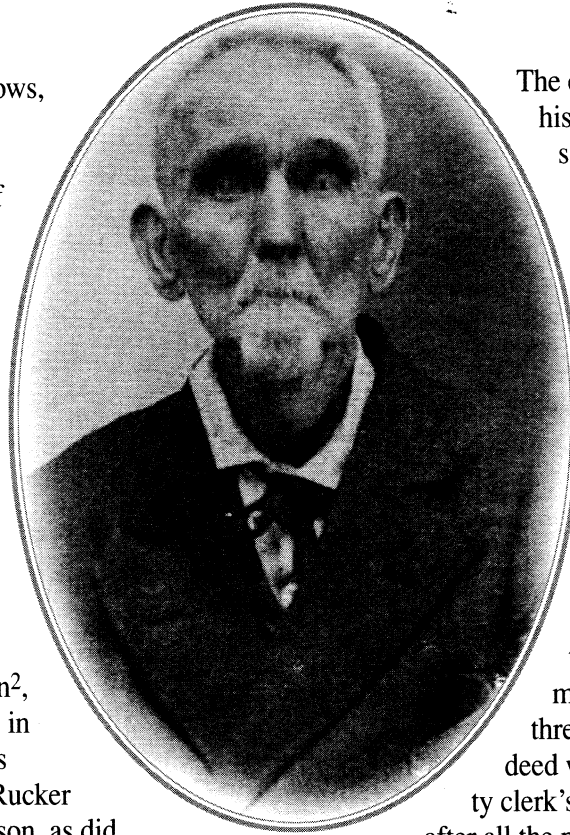
1826-1912

Ambrose Rucker*

Through his living room windows, Stanley Bennett of Hurt, Virginia, can see over 140 years into the past. He has a view of the wood frame house built by Ambrose Rucker, his great-great-great-grandfather, a decade before the Civil War. He can also see the fields and woods on which Ambrose Rucker farmed, cut wood, and raised a family, creating a proud heritage for his many descendants who trace their roots to the "good earth" of Pittsylvania County.

Ambrose Rucker⁷ (Reuben⁶, Ambrose⁵, Reuben⁴, Ambrose³, John², Peter¹) was born in Amherst County in July 1826—the same month Thomas Jefferson died. His father, Reuben Rucker (1801-1871), likely knew Mr. Jefferson, as did several of the Ruckers of that period. Reuben was a Baptist minister and served several churches before moving to Pittsylvania County, Virginia. He married Mary Glasscock of Pittsylvania County in 1819.

Little is known about Ambrose Rucker's early years. Although it is uncertain when the family moved to Pittsylvania County, the 1850 census shows that Ambrose was a deputy county sheriff and, later, a constable. From family accounts and reminiscences, Ambrose was a man of slight to medium stature. He must also have been tough and strong to have lived 86 years when most men of the time died in their forties or fifties.

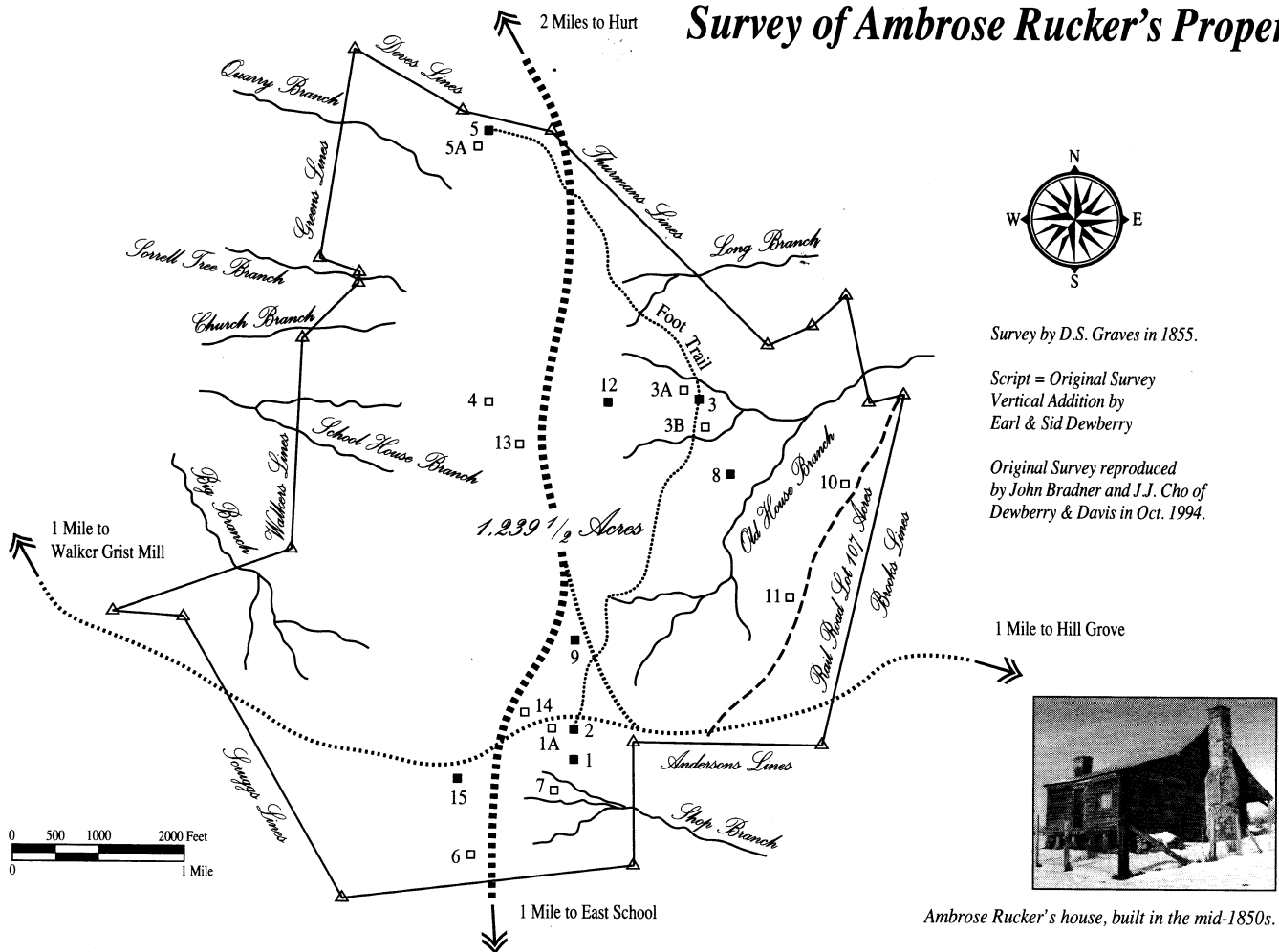


The cornerstone of Ambrose's career was his land. In May 1851, he attended a land sale with a friend, C. Coalman Simpson and purchased a tract of 1,239-1/2 acres from the estate of Thomas Atkinson for less than a dollar an acre, agreeing to pay the amount in four installments. He must have been a good businessman to have acquired land at such an early age; \$1,131.80 was a large sum in 1851, and a deputy sheriff probably earned about \$10-\$15 per month. Ambrose paid one-quarter of the agreed price (\$282.95) when the deed was written July 11, 1851. According to the records, he promised to pay three more equal installments over the next three years. However, it appears that his deed was not admitted to record in the county clerk's office until January 2, 1855, perhaps after all the payments had been made.

Located within this tract was the Mt. Pleasant School, which was also used by the Baptist Church of Christ. Shortly before Ambrose Rucker bought the land, the church was deeded the two-acres on which the school stood. The Mount Pleasant congregation met for worship here until 1875, when they built a new church two miles north (renamed New Prospect Baptist Church by Mary Green, one of the active members of the congregation). Reuben Rucker was a circuit rider minister in the area and, according to the church minutes, served as pastor at Mount Pleasant from 1865 to 1867. Ambrose was probably married in this church, and his children were also baptized there. Dozens of descendants of Ambrose Rucker have belonged to this church, and many are still members today. It is interesting to note that while several of Ambrose's descendants were also ministers, Ambrose himself was said to have been a worldly man rather than spiritual.

**Ambrose Rucker's signature, as it appears on his 1900 application for a pension that was offered to disabled Confederate Civil War veterans by the Commonwealth of Virginia.*

Survey of Ambrose Rucker's Property



LEGEND

- | | |
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| 1 Ambrose Rucker's House. | 7 Site of Letitia Anderson Smith's House. |
| 1A Ambrose Rucker's Cemetery. | 8 Tucker House. |
| 2 Irving Simpson's Home, built in early 1950s. | 9 Anthony's House. |
| 3 Molly & Jack Dewberry's House (converted saw mill shanty). | 10 Site of Twelve White's House. |
| 3A Molly & Jack Dewberry's Cemetery. | 11 Site of Mary Dove's House. |
| 3B Location of Old Saw Mill. | 12 Russell White's House. |
| 4 Site of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church. | 13 Site of Richmond "Uncle Dick" Stone's House. |
| 5 Site of Victoria & Cange Simpson's House. | 14 Approximate location of Blacksmith shop and general store/saloon. |
| 5A Victoria & Cange Simpson's Cemetery. | 15 Stanley Bennett's House. |
| 6 Meandering Old Lynchburg-Danville Road/
Old Indian Trail (now approximate location of State Rt. 634). | |

(Note: Locations of demolished structures are approximate)

This is the survey, as prepared by D.S. Graves in 1855, of the property acquired by Ambrose Rucker from the estate of Thomas Atkinson in 1851. Ambrose paid \$282.95 (1/4 of the agreed price of \$1,131.80) in cash at the time of purchase on July 11, 1851. He then paid three more equal installments in 1852, 1853, and 1854. The final deed was recorded June 2, 1855.

A mathematical closure of the meets and boundary survey shows that the property lines do not mathematically close - there is an error of 1,000 feet. Not knowing in which line, or lines, the error occurred, John Bradner, surveyor, in Danville, Virginia, has followed the accepted practice of prorating the error into each line, resulting in a slightly smaller parcel of 1,165 acres.

The Old Indian Trail followed the ridge line, when possible. This trail has probably been in existence for hundreds if not thousands of years, as the area abounds in Indian artifacts.

As noted in the story, many portion of the property have been sold or given away during the past 140 years. Stanley Bennett is the only direct descendant to own a piece of Ambrose Rucker's original purchase.

Ambrose was married to Letitia Smith on December 22, 1853, at a ceremony officiated by his father. The couple built a house that is still standing and used for storage. (*See accompanying story on the Rucker House.*) Ambrose and Letitia had two daughters: Mary B. (Molly) in March 1857, and Victoria, in 1859. Ambrose and Letitia later adopted a son born in 1871 of an unknown widowed woman who it is said was “passing through.” The son was named David Rucker (the 1880 census refers to him as Davy). Little else is known of him; the 1890 census data was burned and he was not listed in the 1900 census. However, David appears in an 1907 group photograph owned by Cornelia Walker Hailey. It has been passed down in the family that he moved to California.

Rally ‘Round the Flag

The young family’s life was interrupted by the outbreak of the Civil War. Ambrose enlisted in the 46th Regiment of the Confederate Army on March 18, 1862, and served as a wagoner and ambulance driver. During the course of the war, he hired a substitute, as was permitted in those days, to serve in his place while he returned home. The substitute, John Grady, replaced Ambrose on November 20, 1862, but deserted several months later. The Army sent a detail to find Grady, rumored at the time to be in Richmond, but was unsuccessful.

Although searches of incomplete Confederate military records have found no further record of service for Ambrose Rucker, family legend places him with Lee’s army at Appomattox in 1865. Following the surrender, it is said that he traveled home with two war buddies: Aaron Jackson “Jack” Dewberry and Cange Coalman Simpson, the son of his Pittsylvania County neighbor. Both of these men would later become his sons-in-law. The old Lynchburg-Danville Road went through the Rucker farm in those days, and thousands of confederate soldiers came this way following the surrender at Appomattox. Many tales have been woven about this trek of the homeward bound defeated troops. Although tales of rustling and theft were common, most local residents welcomed and fed the hungry soldiers with what food they had available. Some of these young men decided to stay and marry their hosts’ daughters. It has been said that Jack Dewberry first met eight-year-old Molly Rucker on his way home to Georgia. He vowed to return when the young girl was old enough to marry.

The old abandoned roadbed meanders through fields and woods today, but approximately follows the path of State Route 634. The Lynchburg-Danville road, also known as the “Seminole Trail,” is now part of U.S. Route 29, located approximately two miles west.

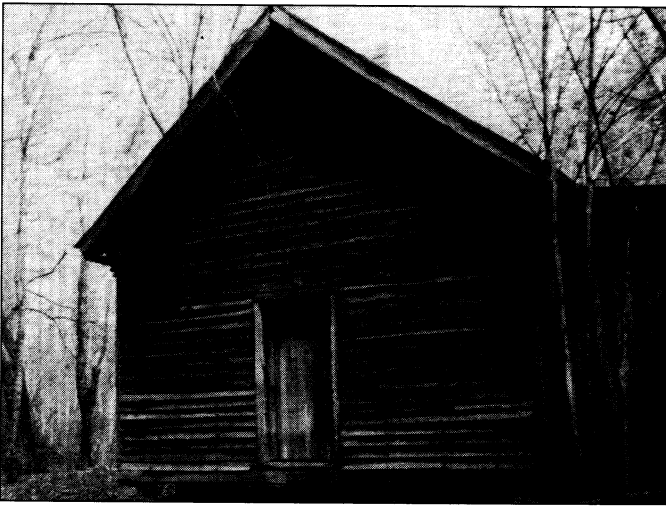
In later years, Ambrose was called “Captain” Rucker, a common salutation for former Confederate soldiers that was usually given more out of respect than accuracy. However, he must have “promoted” himself later on, as many family members recall him having painted “Colonel Rucker” on his mailbox after the turn of the century. In 1900, Ambrose applied for and received a \$30 annual pension that the Commonwealth of Virginia had made available to disabled Civil War veterans. His application, certified by a physician and two witnesses, noted that his disability (“ruptures on both sides and general infirmity of age”) was the cumulative effects of “forced marches while in the service of the Confederate States,” which had left him “totally incapacitated from doing manual labor.” Ambrose specified service only in the Virginia 46th, and it is not known if his injuries occurred during that service early in the war, or later when he reenlisted, as family tradition suggests.

After the War

Home safely from the battles, Ambrose and his small family settled down to lead a relatively normal life. Molly and Victoria attended nearby East School, which still stands. Ambrose farmed much of his land, raising tobacco (his cash crop), wheat, corn, molasses cane, and cotton, the last of which was woven into threads for their clothes. The farm also supported many cows, horses, mules, oxen, chickens, and pigs. Apples, peaches, blackheart cherries, and grapes were grown as well, and the family canned many of the vegetables for the winter months.

Leonard Wilson, the last surviving great-grandchild of Ambrose Rucker to be born in the original family house, recalls that in the 1920s and 30s, his family used apples from those same orchards to make cider. The method was probably similar to that used in Ambrose Rucker’s day: crush the apples with a hand crank, then use a press to squeeze the juice into a wooden staved barrel. Wilson adds that his father made cherry wine from the fruit of a black cherry tree that Ambrose Rucker planted.

In those early years, Ambrose and his family shopped at the Hill Grove country store, which still stands. There, he purchased what few dry goods they needed and the few groceries they couldn’t grow. There was also a blacksmith shop located nearby, which with the store had been owned and run by several generations of the Treadway family. Hill Grove also served as the address of the Rucker family until the post office was moved to Hurt in the early 1920s. Later, as commercial activity on Ambrose’s land grew, a blacksmith shop and general store were built near the intersection of present day State Routes 634 and 638 (*see map*). The store, which closed in 1935, may have also served as a



The East School, located about a mile south of the Ambrose Rucker property, educated generations of Pittsylvania County school children, including Molly and Victoria Rucker. The building, though run down and abandoned, still stands today.

saloon for thirsty workers and travelers. It is believed that Ambrose was owner or part-owner of this business.

In addition to being a farmer and deputy sheriff, Ambrose helped his neighbors build barns; portions of these structures still stand, albeit in ruins. In 1872, Ambrose sold to Thomas Dillard "all the standing timber of pine, ash, hickory and white oak which Thomas Dillard shall select which will square nine inches or more, for one or more cuts, said cuts to be fifteen feet in length. The price paid was 0.10 cents each, on the stump." The agreement was to last until 1880. Thomas Dillard's farm was later carved out of the Rucker property and a sawmill established. To this day a large, decaying sawdust pile stands on the Dillard property, witness to the thousands of trees hauled there to be cut into lumber.

An older sawmill had been constructed on the Rucker property, perhaps as early as the mid-1850s. Also built nearby was a shanty to house sawmill workers. In the mid-1880s, the steam-powered sawmill exploded, killing a former slave named Bogie Stone and severely injuring several others. The explosion was heard by the mother of Daisy Simpson, who then lived in the old Tucker house a half-mile away. The sawmill was then moved to Hill Grove and remained in operation until about 1940. This mill's sawdust piles are gone, but the fertilized earth yielded fine crops of potatoes for many years afterward.

As the years went by, Ambrose began to sell other pieces of his land. One person who was sold or given several acres was a former slave, named Twelve White. Twelve's son, Russell, was a skilled axeman and reportedly could cut trees as good and as fast as Paul Bunyan. He once related that

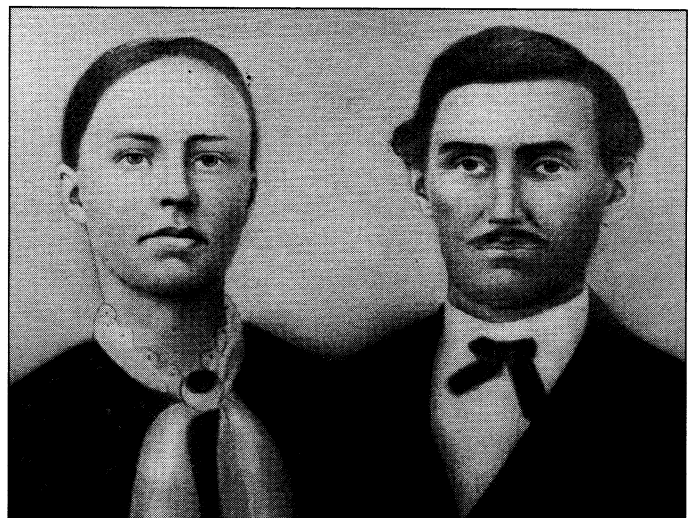
Molly Dewberry was the "prettiest white woman" he had ever known. Russell lived to be 100 years old and died in 1990. Ambrose also either gave or sold land to two or three other former slaves or he allowed them to build houses there. One of them was Richmond "Uncle Dick" Stone, who died in the 1940s well into his 90s. A talented stone mason, "Uncle Dick" was seriously injured during the sawmill explosion that killed his brother. He lost an eye and dexterity in one of his hands. His house was torn down in 1967, but his grandson, Marty Tardy, has built a home on the same site. Both the Mary Dove place and the Twelve White house are gone as well, with little more than foundations to mark the locations where these families lived.

These African-Americans were close neighbors and friends; they worked closely with Ambrose and his family, helping out on the farm for barter or money. There was no animosity or hard feelings between these former servants and masters. An easy, comfortable and trusting relationship developed between all.

New Generations

When Molly and Victoria were married, Ambrose gave each 200 acres of land as wedding gifts. The deed specifically gave the land to the daughters and not to the husbands. It could be said that Ambrose was way ahead of his time in recognizing the rights of women, although he may also have been worried about the worthiness of these two upstart young men. The property stayed in the daughters' names alone until after their deaths, when it was passed to their heirs.

Molly married Jack Dewberry on March 16, 1876, in Hurt. Jack was from Forsythe, Georgia. His father,



Molly Rucker and Aaron Jackson Dewberry

William Dewberry, had a bent neck from wounds received during an Indian attack when he was 14 years old. He was assaulted while working in the family's cornfield, but managed to escape by jumping in a nearby river and swimming away. One of his attackers' arrowheads found its mark in his neck, however, leaving William permanently scarred, but alive. William's reputation as an "Indian fighter" enabled him to hold the elected office of Constable of Forsythe County for 20 years.

Jack was ready to take up arms in defense of his native state when Georgia joined the Confederacy in 1861. He enlisted in Company A, 14th Georgia, and first saw action at the Second Battle of Bull Run. He later served in 19 significant battles, including Shepherdstown (Antietam), Gettysburg, Fredericksburg, Richmond, and Appomattox. When the 14th Georgia was formed, 250 residents of Monroe County enlisted; Jack was one of only 23 members of that group to survive the war. Among those killed was his brother, Jimmy, on April 2, 1865—seven days before the surrender. Jack received a hip wound during a skirmish from which he later developed rheumatism, confining him to a chair in later years.

Molly and Jack made their first home in the old saw mill workers' shanty, which had been remodeled for the young couple. They had nine children - Julia, William, Kate, Lea, Ambrose, Sid, George, Charles, and Eva. In 1920, Sid and his wife, Katie, bought out the other heirs and raised their own nine children in the same old remodeled shanty. The structure was torn down and replaced with a new, more modern home in 1935. Nevertheless, Katie hated the old shanty to the day of her death in 1985.

Victoria and Cange Coleman Simpson were married at Ambrose Rucker's house on February 18, 1880, by D.G. Bailey. Small in stature, Cange was described as a funny man who loved being with young people. He had blond hair and blue eyes, and spoke in a very low voice. His great-great-granddaughter, Janice Ellis, recalls that Cange ate all of his food with a knife; he also liked to crumble bread into his coffee and then drink it. Like his father and brother-in-law, Cange fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War. Although the Union Army allowed Confederate soldiers to keep their rifles after Appomattox, months of long marches and scarce food had drained many of the soldiers. Cange had become so weak and hungry that he threw his gun away, rather than carry it home.

The Simpsons had eight children and raised seven to adults - Molly, Minnie, John Lucas, Raleigh, Reuben Floyd, Tasco, and Walter. They built a house, which



Victoria Rucker Simpson.

burned down in 1930. Walter and Rosa Simpson later bought out the other heirs and lived on the property until their death. Part of the land was bought by Dr. J. Paul Kent in 1950; Dr. Kent and his sons continue to live on the property. When Rosa died in 1990, her nephew, Bert Foster, inherited the remainder of the property.

Life on the Farm

The 200-acre farms of Victoria and Molly, were adjacent, making it easy for the families to exchange visits. Everyone traveled by walking, except on Sundays when they hitched up the wagon and rode to church. The children rode in the back with their feet dangling off the edge. The footpaths carved through the woods were well worn and heavily traveled, even into the 1940s when the great grandchildren of Ambrose Rucker were growing up. These footpaths are still traceable today. Victoria's and Molly's children attended a school in the same building that was once Mt. Pleasant Church. Only the foundation stands today.

Life was engaging in those days. Minnie Jacobs Moses, great granddaughter of Ambrose, tells this story about her mother, Molly Simpson, Victoria's daughter:

My mother, Mary (Molly) Simpson (1886-1925), who was the wife of Samuel T. Jacobs, told me that when she was 15 years old, she was summoned before the Mt. Pleasant Church governing body to answer to a charge of "patting her foot in harmony with some music maker."

"I didn't want to be 'turned out of the church,' which meant when you died you went straight to the 'bad place!'" she said.

She told me she had to appear before a group of "old men," who warned her not to do it (pat her foot to music) again.

(Note: Obviously, Ambrose was not one of these "old men," as he likely would have approved of Molly's actions.)

Cange Simpson, Victoria's husband, lived until 1928 and is buried alongside Victoria on the Simpson place at the cemetery shown on the map. Dorothy Dewberry Berger, another great granddaughter of Ambrose, tells this story:

I never heard anyone refer to him other than "Cange Simpson" or "Mr. Simpson." It was always by his full name. I thought everyone called him Cange, because he walked with a cane. He had a long white beard. It seemed so long, and I asked if he was Santa Claus. I remember him and Papa [Sid Dewberry] sitting in front of the fireplace chewing tobacco and spitting in the fire, the fire popping and spewing. I was fascinated by this. I remember touching his beard. I am not sure how old I was when he died, maybe 3 or 4 years old. I think he must have been the first dead person I'd ever seen. Papa held me up to see him and told me to touch him. I was a little afraid. Then Papa took my hand and put it on his; it felt so cold and hard. I heard Papa say to someone, "If you touch a dead person, you won't be afraid anymore." (Personally, I am not so sure of that.)

Janice Ellis, adds that Cange requested that he be buried in a blue surge suit. "He had suffered a mild stroke a few days before, so my grandfather (Tasco Simpson) went to E.A. Smith & Co. in Altavista and bought a suit," she says. "A few days later, Cange suffered a fatal stroke."

The Later Years

Life was abundant and pleasing to Ambrose Rucker. He had a large family, many friendly neighbors, and a sufficient income to take care of his needs. However, his bliss was to be short-lived. Soon after his 67th birthday in 1893, his beloved wife, Letitia, died. Tragedy struck again six years later when his son-in-law, Aaron Jack Dewberry, died, leaving Molly with nine children ranging in age from 4 (Eva) to 22 (Julia).

Molly moved in with Ambrose and brought the seven youngest children with her. This must have been very hard on all of them, as times for all rural families were very difficult. Although the family farm and timber selling helped keep the family relatively self-sufficient, Ambrose had few other resources on which he could

draw. In his Civil War veterans pension application, the Pittsylvania County Commissioner of the Revenue assessed that the value of Ambrose's personal property at \$352.

Ambrose helped Molly raise the children until she died in 1907. Her older children then took on the responsibility of rearing their younger siblings. Ambrose continued selling timber, and in his later years (according to a story told by Irving Simpson to Earl Dewberry) he would visit his neighbors on foot, with his knapsack supported by a stick across his shoulder in which he would carry his "stuff." Ambrose had been something of a trader for most of his life. Around 1905, he gave Irving's father a buck saw in exchange for a bushel of wheat. On a visit in 1990, Earl recalls Irving pointing out the old buck saw, which was still hanging in the barn.

Ambrose spent the last years of his life with his daughter, Victoria. He died in 1912 at the age of 86. Janice Ellis recalls a story that her grandmother, Mrs. Tasco (Daisy) Simpson told about that day: Ambrose asked his grandson, Tasco, to sit him up in bed and bring him a glass of water. He then died in the arms of his grandson. The next day, Tasco left Hurt early on the old No. 10 locomotive and went to Thompson's funeral home in Lynch Station, where he purchased a coffin for \$75. He returned late that afternoon on the No. 9 locomotive where a horse and wagon were waiting to carry the coffin home.



David "Davy" Rucker, adopted son of Ambrose and Letitia Rucker, was said to have moved to California in the early 20th century. Above, he is pictured (seated, far left) at Molly Rucker Dewberry's funeral in 1907. The family would appreciate any information about his life and descendants. Also in the photo are (seated) Albert Sidney Dewberry, George Dewberry, (standing) Susan Catherine "Kate" Dewberry, Cornelia Letitia "Leigh" Dewberry, Charlie Dewberry, and Lottie Eva Dewberry. (Photo courtesy of Mrs. Cornelia Walker Hailey.)

Ambrose Rucker was not soon forgotten. Willis Dewberry recalled that as a five-year-old in 1919, he left a train in Hurt, and got into a one-horse buggy with his parents; Sid and Katie Dewberry, brother Claude and sister Phyllis. From there, they rode to his Aunt Julie's, who lived with her husband, Charlie Wilson, in the old Rucker home. Ambrose Rucker had been dead seven years, but he was still talked about. Leonard Wilson says that growing up in the old house during the 1920s and 30s meant living in Ambrose Rucker's shadow—a strong influence that can still be felt, even though the house has been abandoned and the much of the land now in the hands of descendants and other families.

A Living Legacy

What kind of man was Ambrose Rucker? From the second-hand information that we've been able to gather, we can conclude that a man of many skills and foresight to have realized the value investing in such a large tract of land. He must have also been something of a shrewd trader, given his frequent trading of timber and produce, and his ability to hire a substitute during the Civil War. He must also have been very generous man to have given land to his daughters and former slaves, and compassionate enough to have adopted the son of an unknown woman. He must have been a responsible man to take in his daughter and her seven children when his son-in-law died.

Ambrose Rucker was not famous, yet he was known widely in a three-county area. His home of 62 years was typical of middle-class families of his day, yet modest, a far cry from homes of landed gentry. Fortunately for us, he also left quite a bit of evidence of his life, with deeds to

land, some Civil War service records, birth and death certificates, a marriage certificate, pension application, and census data. His tracks are more traceable than most men who have been dead almost 100 years.

Perhaps Ambrose's greatest contribution has been his many descendants. An exact accounting is not yet complete, but we can estimate that close to 500 people have been able to trace their roots back to Ambrose and Letitia Rucker, and their two daughters (Molly's descendants number approximately 278, and Victoria is estimated to have 200 descendants. David's family could easily make this number much higher!). These people have come from all walks of life - farmers, factory workers, preachers, physicists, engineers, musicians, pharmacists, land developers, land surveyors, politicians, salesmen, airplane pilots, soldiers, writers, lawyers, judges, teachers, businessmen, secretaries, and public servants.

Like their Confederate veteran ancestor, Ambrose Rucker's descendants have proudly served their country in World Wars I and II, Korea, and Vietnam. At a 1984 graveside memorial service for Ambrose Rucker, his great grandson Winfred Simpson, a Vietnam veteran, recited a well-known poem that reads in part,

Not for fame or fortune, not for place and rank, not lured
by ambition; or goaded by necessity; but in simple obedience
to duty as they understood it, these men suffered all,
sacrificed all, dared all, and died.

Pride in one's heritage, country, and family: this is the legacy Ambrose Rucker has given his descendants. It is a gift that will be cherished for generations to come.

About This Article

Just as Ambrose Rucker's family has grown and evolved, so too has this article about his life. Michael P. Rucker wrote the original version and sent it to Sidney¹⁰ O. Dewberry for comments. After contacting several relatives, a wealth of new and interesting information about Ambrose and his family came to light. Sid worked with Jim Parsons, a professional writer, to incorporate this data into Michael's original story. Michael's edited version is what we are pleased to present here.

We greatly appreciate the efforts of everyone who contributed to this article: Earl¹⁰ Dewberry, Dorothy¹⁰ Dewberry Berger, Janice¹¹ Ellis, Sidney¹⁰ Alton Dewberry, Minnie¹⁰ Jacobs Moses, Cornelia¹⁰ Letitia Hailey, Viola¹⁰ Green, Dorothy¹¹ Simpson Rowland, Winfred¹⁰ Simpson, and Leonard¹⁰ Wilson. Special thanks to Mabel¹¹ Bennett, who collected family photographs, deeds, and contracts. All of them share the authorship of this article about our beloved ancestor. Also, thanks to Jim Parsons for editing the material, and to J.J.Cho and John Bradner for their assistance with the survey map.

Sidney¹⁰ O. Dewberry

The Ambrose Rucker House

by Earl¹⁰ Dewberry

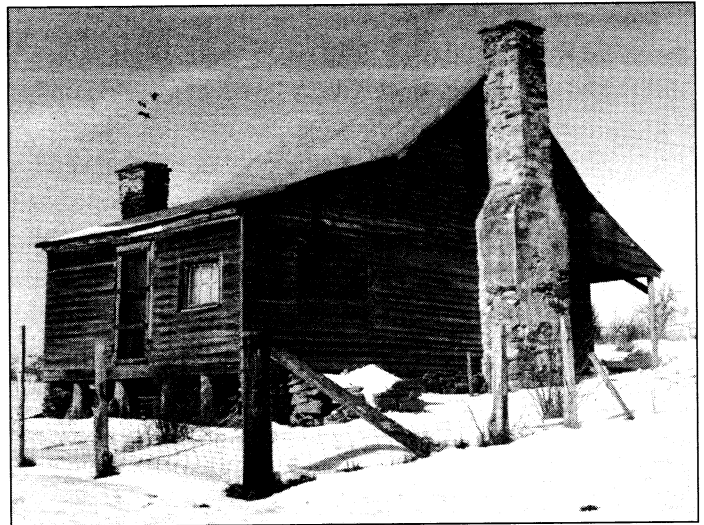
Ambrose Rucker's house is located near the intersection of Virginia Routes 638 (300 feet south) and 634 (700 feet east), approximately three miles south of the Hurt city limits. I believe the house was built in the early 1850's, soon after Ambrose paid for the land.

The original house apparently consisted of a two-story, 18'x18' frame structure, with a one-story, 12'x18' shed room on the south side. The cooking, eating and daily chores were probably done in the main room, first floor, where there was the largest fireplace. Still intact, the main chimney was built by a skilled mason (perhaps "Uncle Dick" Stone) and reaches above the gable end. The stairway to the upstairs is in a corner of the main room and, consequently, has to make a 90-degree turn. A custom-made guardrail stands at the top, probably installed to keep rambunctious children from accidentally falling from the second floor. The downstairs room also has smooth exposed 18'x3"x7-1/2" ceiling joists, which were hand-planed and mortised to support the stairwell and other components. The upstairs floor was wide hand-planed boards, laid on top of the exposed ceiling joists.

A bedroom on the second floor, which has never been sealed, still shows the bare 3"x4" ceiling joists, located 6 feet from floor to joist, on 24-inch centers. The roof sheathing boards, spaced three or four inches apart, are from 10 to 20 inches in width. Originally, the roof must have been made of riven-wood shingles; many nail holes exist in the spaced-apart sheathing boards. Also, the roof is steep enough to accommodate wooden shingles. There is a window in each of the two gable ends upstairs. The straight sawmark lines in the timber indicates to me that the sawmill was water-powered.

There is a window sash on the front of the house, which was assembled with wooden pegs to hold the frame together. The five doors are each home-crafted, and the small door to the shed room has a wooden latch with string to open it from inside. This room also had a lesser fireplace and may have served as a bedroom. The chimney has since been removed and the fireplace opening filled in. Hand-planed 12'x3"x4" exposed ceiling joists are also found here.

Many years after the house was first built—probably after the turn of the century, a one-story, 17'x18' shed room kitchen was added to the west side of the house, along with a small chimney and fireplace. Another shed room was added to the east side within the last 20 years, covering most of the well-masoned



Ambrose Rucker is believed to have built this house in the early 1850s. Modified many times over the years, the house is now owned by Mrs. Estic Roarke Simpson.

chimney. This room is now used for hay storage, as the house is now surrounded by a cow pastures. A porch was also built along the front side.

Ambrose enjoyed having a good time, and his Saturday night dances were counter to God-fearing people of that age in that locale. The story is told that during a dance being held one night in the Rucker house, a couple of pranksters moved the back outdoor steps aside and watched an unwitting Ambrose fall about four feet to the ground. Luckily, the fall didn't hurt him; we don't know if it eventually "hurt" the pranksters.

Although the house no longer resembles its original appearance, the additions together with the original shed have actually helped preserve the 150-year-old unpainted 6-inch plain heart pine weatherboarding. If Ambrose Rucker saw the house today, he would probably ask his former slave, Anthony, to help him remove all the additions and restore his once tall, stately home to its original appearance! I would love to see it afterward if it could indeed be restored.

NOTE: The heirs of Ambrose Rucker wish to express our thanks and gratitude to Mrs. Estic Roark Simpson (Mrs. Irving Simpson) for graciously allowing us the privilege of reminiscing and examining the house and property. We are further grateful to her family for their efforts to preserve and care for the house. Most homes of that era are long gone and forgotten.