





Original house and 1867's address



*Rounded bay window adds to Taylor Springs' rightmost
entrance ambience*



Deeply angled entrance



Hallway door



Hallway door is original woodwork built



Dining room door, trim and floor pattern



Door is wooden jay construction



Wood door jamb





Talking Walls - History in Houses
*Poplar Springs - Home of the Vaidens**
by Brian E. Gordineer

* taken from the National Register nomination

The construction and design of a house, like any structure, reveals a great deal about the person who built it, the person for whom it was built, and the times in which it was built. Building technology, architectural design and scientific invention have changed dramatically since the first settlers arrived at Jamestown nearly four centuries ago. A glimpse back at the shelters of the Indians reveals an even more dramatic evolution of the development of building in the area that is now Charles City County.

"Poplar Springs - Home of the Vaidens" is the first feature of "Talking Walls - History in Houses." This regular feature of the newsletter will excerpt portions of the nominations of Charles City properties to the National Register of Historic Places. These excerpts will give a detailed analysis of a selected site and its structures, as well as a historical analysis that illustrates the historical significance of the site. Walls do talk, and buildings can tell us a great deal about the past!

Summary Description

The principal dwelling of Poplar Springs is a well-preserved example of Tidewater vernacular architecture dating from the first half of the nineteenth century. The surviving plan and details of the 1809 and 1840-1844 portions of the house are representative of the local architectural tradition that was employed in the modest structures built across the rural landscape of the Virginia Tidewater. The house remains in the center of a cultivated field that borders the northern edge of the Old Main Road from Williamsburg to Charles City Court House, present day Virginia Secondary Routes 615 and 623. The house site presently includes two noncontributing buildings; a modest frame barn, built c. 1900. and a pole shed, built c. 1940 on the site of the slave quarters.

Architectural Analysis

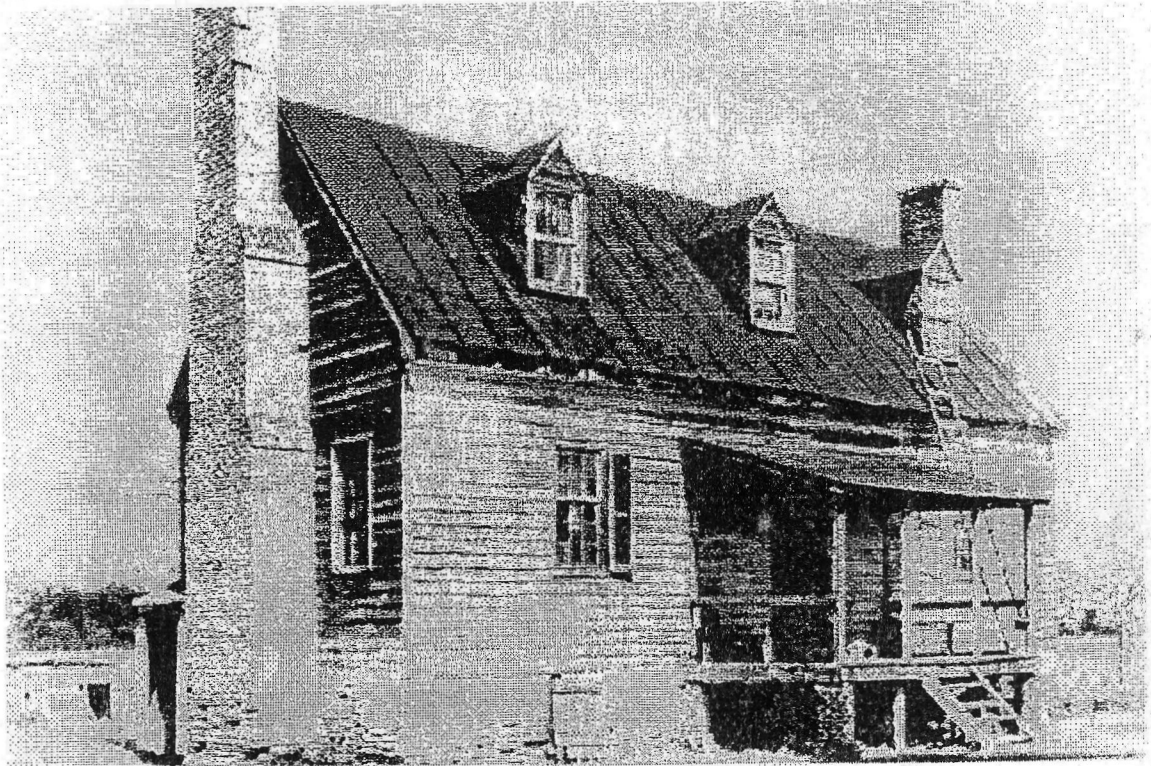
The original portion of the house at Poplar Springs was constructed in 1809 as a frame, post-and-beam, one-and-a-half-story, single-pile, side-passage house. The two-bay scheme was executed with a six-over-nine sash window and six-panel door, topped with a three-light transom, on the front facade, and two six panel doors on the rear facade. These window and door frames include mitered joints and pegged sills. The roof was pierced with two gabled dormers with six-over-six sash windows on both the front and rear elevations. The roofs of the house and dormers are

edged with flared rakeboards. The brick foundation walls enclosed a basement kitchen. A brick exterior-end chimney with stepped shoulders serviced the basement kitchen fireplace, the first-floor parlor fireplace, and the second-floor bedchamber fireplace.

The chimney, located on the west gable end of the house, is laid in American bond with three rows of stretchers between each row of headers. The chimney includes two commemorative bricks; one is marked "TV 1809" to commemorate the initial construction of the house by Jacob Vaiden and the other is marked "RJV 1840" to commemorate the enlargement of the house by Robert J. Vaiden. Local tradition passed on by the present owner states that the bricks used in the construction of the chimneys were manufactured on the property. A bulkhead entrance located on the west gable end, adjacent to the chimney, provided an exterior entrance to the basement kitchen and allowed food to be transported to the first-floor room through the exterior door located on the north side of the house. The interior central passage stairs that lead to the basement were added in the 1930s to replace an old rope ladder. The basement kitchen retains remnants of the original plaster ceiling. The interior woodwork of the upper portions of the original house appears to have been replaced during the expansion that was begun in 1840 and completed by 1844 as indicated by building assessments entries in the Charles City county land books.

During the expansion begun in 1840, the house at Poplar Springs was enlarged with a frame, one-and-a-half-story, single-pile, single-room addition attached to the east end of the existing house. The previous two-bay fenestration was expanded to a symmetrical three-bay facade with an overall appearance that is balanced with a matching brick exterior-end chimney. The addition rested on brick piers. The early-nineteenth-century floors survive throughout the house. The six-panel doors still possess the original H-L hinges, brass knobs and iron box locks. The box locks bear the insignia of the royal coat of arms which suggests that they were imported from England and possibly remain from the 1809 portion of the house. An original wooden latch is still used to open the central passage door to the basement.

Beaded baseboards are found throughout the house. The chair rail, found throughout the first floor, has a molded top member and a beaded bottom edge. The door and window trim has a molded out member and a beaded inner edge. The second-floor, bedchambers have doors with two elongated molded panels. The austere



Poplar Springs, as it appeared during the Great Depression when it was photographed by the WPA.

design of the original mantel in the western first-floor room illustrates the influences of Neoclassicism in the vernacular architecture of the Tidewater. The central passage includes a closed-string staircase that rises from the rear of the house to the front. The use of a gable roof on this single-pile house required that the staircase utilize angled steps at the bottom in order to achieve the rise necessary to permit the staircase to rise ten feet and clear the first-floor central passage door to the parlor, as well as allow sufficient clearance at the top of the stairs beneath the sloping ceiling. The square balusters echo the simplicity of the square newel posts located at the top and bottom of the staircase.

Several minor changes were made to the house at Poplar Springs during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries. These changes included the installation of the simple Victorian-style replacement mantels in the second-floor bedchambers and the insertion of a nine-over-six-sash window on the first floor of the west gable end, to the south of the chimney. The modest frame barn, located northwest of the main residence, was also constructed during this period.

The house remained little altered through the first four decades of the twentieth century. A photograph of the house, that appeared in the April 1938 issue of the

William and Mary Quarterly, documents the condition of the residence at that time. Shortly thereafter, the frame portion of the house was renovated and the floor plan was enlarged with the addition of a one-and-a-half-story frame ell that accommodated a kitchen, bath, and sitting room on the first floor and a third bedchamber on the second floor. This sympathetic addition was carefully placed against the rear facade and resulted in changing the central rear dormer into a door. No other changes were made to the interior openings or the exterior fenestration.

The renovation and enlargement also included the addition of a basement beneath the 1840-1844 addition. The Colonial-style reproduction mantel in the east first-floor room was installed to replace the original which had been removed. The small gable-roofed and pedimented porch, with slender columns, was added to the front facade during the renovation. West of the house a pole shed was constructed on the site of a recently removed slave quarter.

During the 1960s an arcaded porch, subsequently enclosed with glass panels, and an attached garage were added to the ell. In 1984 a single-story, frame, bedroom addition was also added to the ell. All of the twentieth century additions were strategically located so

that they are barely visible from the public road or the drive that leads from the road to the house.

The plantation complex at Poplar Springs originally also included an ice-house topped with a gable roof and a one-story, frame, slave quarter with a central chimney.

Statement of Significance

The plan, elevation, and details of the diminutive plantation house of Poplar Springs reflects the popular adherence to the vernacular tradition of domestic architecture that emerged in the Virginia Tidewater during the late seventeenth century and continued to be employed into the beginning of the twentieth century. The well-preserved vernacular dwelling at Poplar Springs incorporated a traditional central-passage plan, symmetrical three-bay facade, and simple painted woodwork with beaded and molded edges. This modest dwelling, once the center of an agricultural complex of several hundred acres, illustrates the persistence of an architectural vocabulary that met the needs of rural Virginians for two centuries.

Historical Background

The history of Poplar Springs illustrates the pattern of settlement that occurred throughout the Virginia Tidewater. English immigrants, and later Virginia Colonists, established the plantations on the sites of former Native American Indian settlements. During the eighteenth century, the earlier seventeenth-century plantations were transformed into complexes that prospered with the benefit of African-American slave labor. Consolidated holdings, such as Poplar Springs, were subsequently subdivided as they were dispersed at the death of an owner and passed to several members of the next generation. The present well-preserved early-nineteenth-century plantation house at Poplar Spring was once the center of the Vaiden Family's consolidated land holdings in eastern Charles City County.

The early history of English settlement in this area remains sketchy. Fragmentary seventeenth-century records relating to the northeast portion of Charles City County suggest that the area between the Chickahominy River and the Old Main Road (present-day Virginia Secondary Routes 615 and 623), which follows the high ridge between the Chickahominy and the James rivers, consisted of considerably smaller parcels than the expansive tracts that existed along the James River. It appears that even early settlement along the James River consisted of the largest plantations with substantial populations of labor -- first white indentured servants and later black slaves. The Old Main Road

has served travelers going east to Williamsburg and west to Charles City Court House, as well as local residents of eastern Charles City County, since the eighteenth century.

The entire area surrounding the present-day Poplar Springs tract was referred to as Poplar Springs during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Charles City County land tax records from the early nineteenth century identified parcels in this area with the proper name of the tract or name of the owner, followed by the name Poplar Springs used to identify the geographic area. The use of Poplar Springs as the description of the entire area, may have evolved if the entire area had been an early land grant identified as Poplar Springs. An exhaustive analysis of seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century county records has not revealed when the area or specific tracts became known as Poplar Springs. The name is a natural choice in this area; numerous springs and poplar trees are located along the ravines north of the present house.

The Poplar Springs tract that existed when the house was constructed in 1809 had been assembled by 1791 and totaled more than 740 acres during the first decade of the nineteenth century. Joseph Vaiden, who once served as the commissioner of revenue for Charles City County, assembled the Poplar Springs plantation with the purchase of a 312-acre tract from William Randolph, a 225-acre tract from Seth Stubblefield, and a 180-acre tract from Austin Wyatt. Vaiden owned an additional 700 acres which included a 300-acre Poplar Springs tract that Joseph's parents, Isaac and Elizabeth Vaiden, of New Kent County, purchased in 1771 from Travis Harwood, as well as 207 acres located west on the Old Main Road, adjacent to the glee lands of Westover Parish, at present-day Ruthville. Ruthville and the rural settlement became known as Vaiden's Crossroads until it was officially named for the new post office. Between 1791 and 1809 Poplar Springs was also home to between sixteen and twenty slaves. Vaiden's other taxable property included at least a handful of horses, as well as one or two riding chairs.

The extensive holdings of Joseph Vaiden were dispersed at his death in 1809 according to his will, which was written in 1808. The will lists Joseph's wife, five children, and many of his grandchildren. Joseph's son Jacob received the use of the 312-acre core of Poplar Springs plantation, as well as an adjacent 218 acres. Land tax records suggest that Jacob was responsible for constructing the original section of the house. A commemorative brick in the west chimney is inscribed "IV 1809," probably for Jacob Vaiden.



Poplar Springs as it appears today.

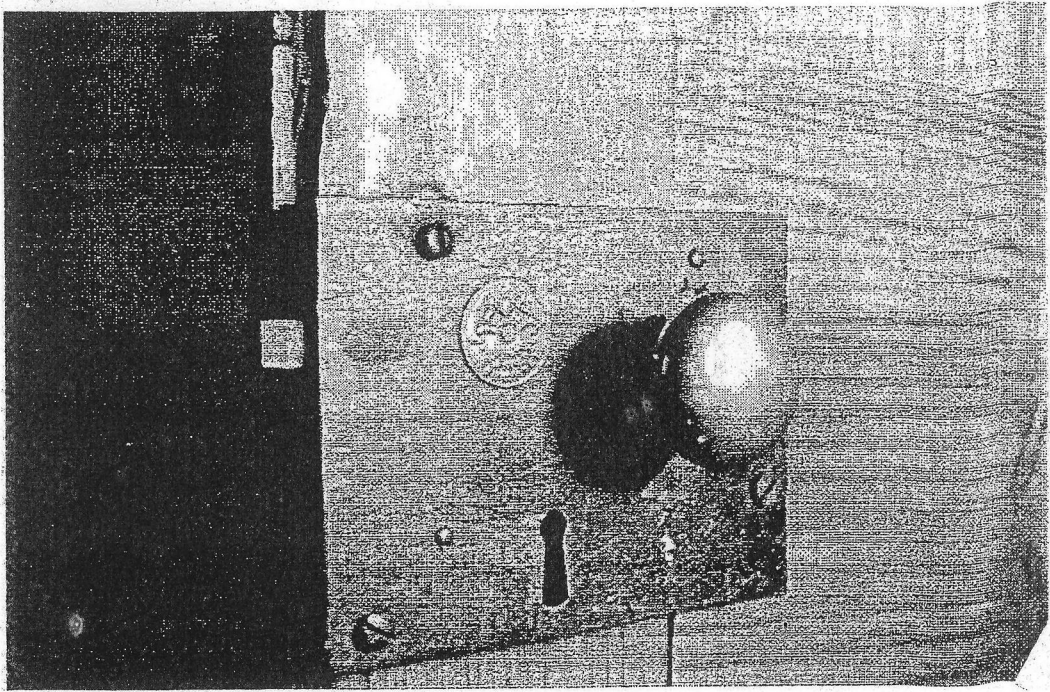
Ownership of Poplar Springs passed to another of Joseph's sons Sims Vaiden in 1840. A survey of personal property tax records reveals that the combined wealth of the children of Joseph Vaiden, Sr., approximated the value of their father's holdings at his death in 1809.

Joseph's will of 1808 had specified that the ownership of Poplar Springs would pass from his son Jacob to his wife Matilda, and then to his son Sims. Matilda remarried shortly after Joseph's death and Sims was already residing at Peace Hill, a nearby tract that he had inherited in 1809, so the use of Poplar Springs was given to the five children of Sims Vaiden. Land tax records indicate that the Vaiden children immediately expanded the diminutive dwelling and created the modest central-passage plantation house. The expanded dwelling employed a symmetrical format that had existed since the introduction of Georgian formality to Tidewater vernacular architecture at the close of the seventeenth century.

The modest, frame, post-and-beam, side-passage house was typical of early-nineteenth-century

farmhouses in this area. One-and-a-half-story houses with gable roofs, pierced with gable dormers, became a standard format in the Tidewater and spread with settlement far to the west. Poplar Springs was originally very similar to the well-preserved early-nineteenth century, side-passage-plan house at nearby Edge Hill, built about 1800, and it is possible that the same house-wright or carpenters may have been involved in the construction of both houses. A stylistically related early-nineteenth century residence, which also began as a side-passage-plan house, exists across the Oldie Main Road at Meadowspring Farm. Several central-passage plan houses in Charles City, James City and New Kent counties were originally constructed as side-passage-plan houses and later enlarged. These surviving nineteenth-century residences suggest that side-passage-plan houses were typically enlarged to become central-passage plans.

Poplar Springs was virtually identical to Ashland, built in 1835 in western James City County along Diascund Creek. Ashland was located just across the Chickahominy River from Poplar Springs and was built



The original iron box locks at Poplar Springs bear the insignia of the royal coat of arms.

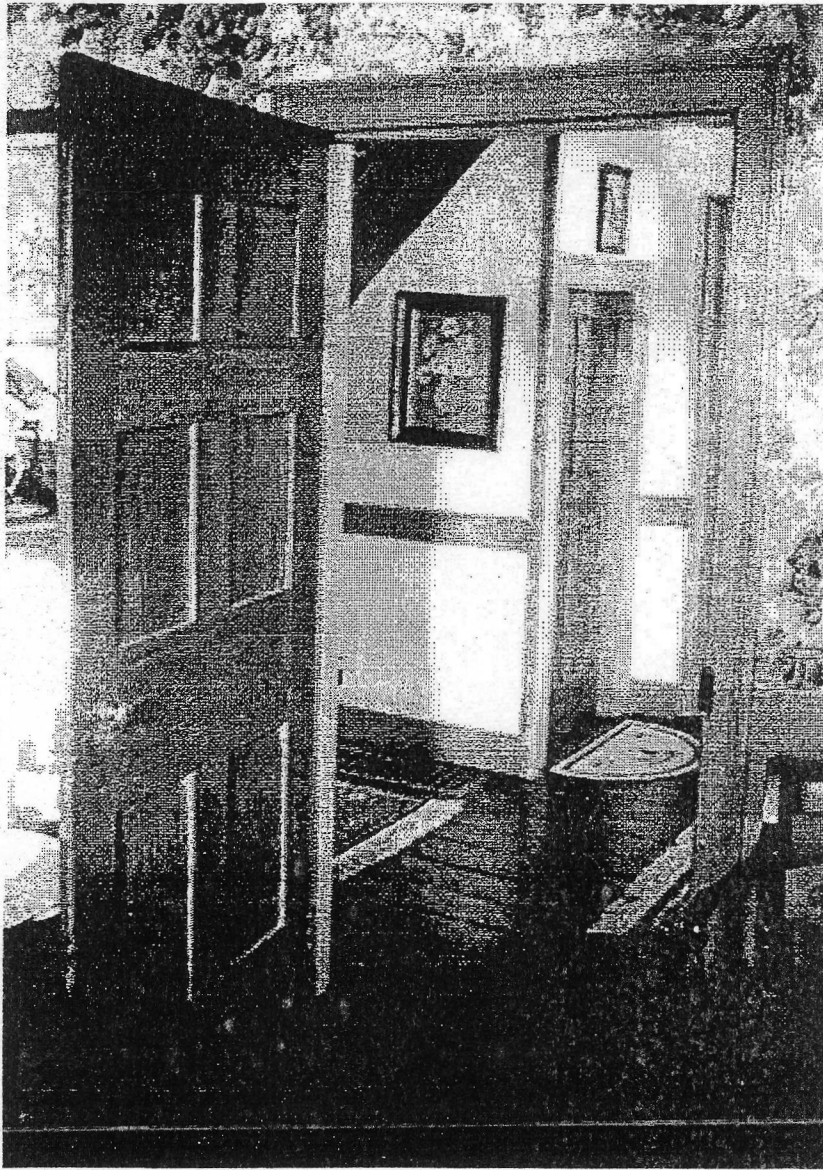
built in 1835 for William H. Gregory and his wife, the former Susan B. Vaiden, the daughter of Sims Vaiden. James City County records indicate that William Gregory died in 1843 and soon after his widow sold Ashland. Gregory's widow and two children, Richardson and John, returned to Charles City county and established their residence at Poplar Springs. The deeds, wills, and census records of Charles City and James City counties, as well as the oral history provided by the area's oldest residents, confirms that residents on opposite sides of the Chickahominy River were as socially involved with their river neighbors, as they were with more distant neighbors.

The expanded dwelling at Poplar Springs overlooked the increasingly busy thoroughfare that led from Williamsburg to Charles City Court House. The Old Main Road served travelers and the growing population of northeastern Charles City County. Throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the large tracts of land in this area of the county were subdivided and more intensely settled. Cross-road settlements, such as Binn's Hall, to the west of Poplar Springs, and Holdcroft, to the east of Poplar Springs, developed to serve the growing inland population along the Old Main Road. These crossroads settlements typically included a store, several houses and a church. The Vaiden Family was affiliated with several churches along the Old Main Road. tombstones

mark Vaiden graves at the cemeteries of nearby Mt. Pleasant Church and Manoah Church.

In 1855 the 522-acre Poplar Springs tract was divided in two equal parts that were transferred to the two eldest children of Sims Vaiden, Robert J. Vaiden and Susan B. Gregory. Robert J. Vaiden retained ownership of the original dwelling at Poplar Springs and Susan B. Gregory immediately built a new residence on her undeveloped tract, named Gregory's, it was situated between Poplar Springs and Piney Grove. A bed of daffodils under a young stand of loblolly pines marks the approximate location of the house at Gregory's. The house and sixty acres were transferred to Susan Gregory's sons, John M. and Richardson, in 1869, before her death. The balance of her property was transferred to her brother, Robert J. Vaiden. Tax records reveal that the house at Gregory's and other improvements on the property were no longer in existence in 1900. the Gregory tract was subsequently reorganized into two large parcels and several smaller parcels. All of these parcels are now owned by the Harwood family of Charles City County.

During Robert Vaiden's occupation of Poplar Springs he cared for an orphan, Thomas Fletcher Harwood. Harwood became a clerk at neighboring Piney Grove Store and served in the army of the Confederacy as a color sergeant in Company K of the 53rd Infantry. Vaiden's generosity also extended to his



Interior view at Poplar Springs showing the original six-panel doors.

slaves. During the sixteen years after the Civil War Robert Vaiden transferred eight parcels, which totaled sixty-two acres, to his former slaves, Burrell Washington, Phil Cyrus, Davy Cyrus, James Brown, Scott Lemon, and Patsy Christian. The parcels were located in two areas; one of these areas, adjacent to the Old Main Road, continues to be occupied by African-Americans descended from the slaves of Poplar Springs.

Louisa Vaiden continued to reside at Poplar Springs following the death of her husband Robert in 1881. By the turn of the century she passed the house

and 215 remaining acres to her sons, William H. and Robert M. Vaiden. The remaining acreage continued to dwindle during the twentieth century. A small, one-story frame residence and a one-room country store were built about 1920 at the western edge of the reduced acreage, on the land that was part of the original tract. During the same period, an acre was also transferred to the Chickahominy District of the Charles City County School Board. A one-story frame school was constructed and exists today as a dwelling.

The acreage of Poplar Springs was reduced to its present size of ninety-one acres by 1920. In 1933 Mrs.

Jeanette Beazeley Yates, purchased Poplar Springs from Robert J. Vaiden, the fourth generation of his family to own Poplar Springs. Jeanette Yates, a graduate of the College of William and Mary, moved to Charles City County to accept a teaching position at the school at Holdcroft. She also served as the post mistress in Binn's Store at Holdcroft. Mrs. Yates and her husband, J. Ashton, worked to preserve the 1844 appearance of Poplar Springs during their ownership of the property. Mrs. Yates was a longtime teacher in Charles City schools, and Mr. Yates served as the superintendent of highways for Charles City County.

List of Free Negroes over 12 years of age for the County of Charles City for the year 1863

*Tho. E. Ware, Comr. of Rev.**

*Auditor of Public Accounts: Free Blacks, entry 757, box 1974, LVA

Among the papers of the State Auditor of Public Accounts in the Library of Virginia Archives are several lists of persons holding certificates as free Negroes or mulattos in Charles City County. These lists are not a complete census of persons of color residing in the county on the date of the census because they do not include children under the age of 14. Nonetheless, the lists are extremely useful tools to use in addition to the Register of Free Negroes and mulattos because they fall between census years and because they show occupations and ages. The list printed below is an especially useful one because it was compiled during the middle of the Civil War and specifically identifies 11 men who left the county with McClellan's army in 1862.

<u>Names of Males</u>	<u>Ages</u>	<u>Occupation</u>
Adkins, Wm. H.	45	farmer
Adkins, Joseph E.	19	labourer
Adkins, Elias	14	"
Adkins, Eli	46	far.
Adkins, Ritson	21	lab.
Adkins, Nimmo	20	"
Adkins, Robert	17	"
Adkins, Spotswell	14	"
Adkins, John	31	far.
Adkins, Allen	40	"
Adkins, Thomas	16	lab.
Adkins, Aninias	14	"
Adkins, William	23	"
Adkins, Wm. A.	24	"
Adkins, John H.	19	"
Adkins, Thomas	23	"

Adkins, Thomas	16	"
Adkins, Daniel, Jr.	14	"
Adkins, Daniel	42	far.
Anderson, Moses	50	lab.
Anderson, Moses, Jr.	14	"
Anderson, Elias	12	"
Adkins, Pleasant	14	"
Adkins, Henry	14	"
Armistead, Henry	37	"
Allen, John	22	"
Brown, Crawford	45	far.
Brown, Thaddeus	40	"
Brown, John W., Sr.	58	"
Brown, William	20	lab.
Brown, Jim, Sr.	68	"
Brown, W. Joshua	44	lab.
Brown, Ottaway D.	36	far.
Brown, Samuel	51	"
Brown, Edmund E.	35	lab.
Brown, Jones O.	37	"
Brown, Albert	43	"
Brown, James R.	38	"
Brown, Fleming	16	"
Brown, Peter	14	"
Brown, Prior	48	"
Brown, Major M.	34	far.
Brown, Robt. W.	17	lab.
Brown, John H.	48	"
Brown, William	45	"
Brown, Jordan	35	"
Brown, Walker	51	"
Brown, Jasper	44	cripple
Brown, Robert	14	lab.
Brown, John Wm. W.	33	"
Brown, Silvanus T.	23	"
Brown, Abraham	53	"
Brown, Zacariah	46	"
Brown, James A.	22	"
Brown, Jesse	48	mechanic
Brown, Robert S.	35	lab.
Brown, Oscar D.	38	"
Brown, James M.	36	"
Brown, Silvanus	40	"
Brown, Timothy	15	"
Brown, John A.	45	"
Brown, John W.	29	"
Brown, Warren	42	"
Brown, Shedrick	12	"
Brown, Sidney	12	"
Brown, Samuel	23	labourer
Brown, Jarvis	34	"

To the Worshippful Court of Charles City County,

Gentlemen, I am summoned to attend you to day, to show cause why
 a Road shoud not Run thro' my land if any I have, I certainly
 shoud have attended, for it will be attended with a very great
 Inconvenience to me, But am prevented by ^a misfortune that
 happened to me yesterday by a fall which has rendered me unable
 to give my attendance, But I desire you may order a writ of
 Ad quod Damnum to issue a quod to Law. from Gentlemen
 your most Ob. Servant.

Joseph Vaiden
 21 of April 1795.

Joseph Vaiden protested when the county proposed to run a road through his plantation.
 This may date the construction of the road sometimes referred to as the Ridge Path and other times
 called the Old Main Road to the 1790's. Today the road is known as The Glebe Lane.

Brown, Seaton	30	"	Binford, Joseph	24	"
Brown, Archer	16	"	Binford, Wm. Allen	17	"
Brown, Travis	65	"	Binford, John	14	"
Brown, David	33	"	Bradby, Smallwood	60	lab.
Brown, Algernol	19	"	Bradby, Smallwood, Sr.	79	far.
Brown, Thom. B.	30	carpenter	Bradby, Burrel	60	"
Brown, Micajah	17	lab.	Bradby, Wm. A.	19	lab.
Bowman, Robt.	20	"	Bradby, Burrel, Jr.	12	"
Bowman, Addison	33	"	Bradby, Bowling	25	"
Bowman, John F.	14	"	Bradby, Sanford	17	"
Bowman, Dick	55	"	Bradby, Allen	35	"
Bowman, Cornelius	26	"	Brander, Turner	40	lab.
Bowman, John F.	15	"	Bradby, Elleu	57	"
Bowman, Frank	54	"	Bowling, Jim	25	"
Bowman, Robert	17	"	Cotman, Thomas	37	farmer
Bowman, Alexander	25	"	Cotman, Marston	35	lab.
Bowman, John	60	farmer	Cotman, Allen	34	"
Bowman, Charles D.	29	"	Cotman, Archer	43	engineer
Bowman, Erasmus	51	cripple	Cotman, Wm. H.	14	lab.
Bowman, James	21	lab.	Cotman, Archer	14	"
Binford, Moses	51	"	Cotman, John C.	28	"
Binford, John	27	"	Cotman, Patrick H.	34	far.
Binford, Amos	23	"	Cotman, Levi	24	"