

A Lansford Memory by Nancy Biggs Craig Thomas (b. 1920, Chester, SC).

(Taken by Nancy Biggs Thomas, her daughter, May 2012)

The name, Lansford (Lands Ford), has been in my memory since the time I was a young girl, listening to stories told by my mother, and grandmother, Nannie Biggs Cross, "Mamoo," as we called her. Mother took us home to visit Mamoo and "Big Daddy" in Chester every summer for two weeks and on other occasions, until they died. She died young at age 59 of a stroke, leaving my grandfather, Samuel Duncan Cross, Big Daddy, a widower. I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Big Daddy died not too many years after that when a drunk driver hit him while he was crossing the street on "the hill" in downtown Chester. He lived a week in the hospital, before dying of the injuries. There was a law suit and my mother and aunt were given a nice settlement. I was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade then. I remember the dress I wore to the funeral because Mother borrowed it from Steadman Cork. It was deep burgundy red and had a little jacket with puffed sleeves, with a straight shift beneath it. It had been sent to her by her Aunt Loretta Culp from Rock Hill, who moved to New York to work as an investor.

Mamoo and Big Daddy Cross had two children, my mother, Marie, and her sister, Kathryn. Both of them were born at Lands Ford in the old plantation house called "Mount Holly." Many times Mother shared her childhood stories about that house to us, and I remember discussions while sitting on the dark green velvet loveseat in Mamoo's parlor in Chester. Mother gave me this original photograph of this place where she and Kathryn were born, after it appeared in an article in the Evening Herald in the 1960's.

My great uncle, James Harvey Smith, of Smith's Turnout, owned the plantation house from the early 1860's until about 1910, when it passed to his daughter, and only child, I believe, Mrs. Robert Gage, of Chester. Harvey did not live there, as he had many landholdings; his sister, Margaret Smith did with her husband, Rufus Marion Cross (my great grandparents). They married in June of 1861, managed the plantation, raising their five children there, Samuel Duncan Cross being born there in March of 1862.

Mother told me that this house was patterned after a fine plantation built in 1813, not far from there, called "Wyoming." When Rufus Cross died there was no one left to run the farm, so Margaret left and moved in with Samuel Duncan and Nannie Biggs, who had by now established their permanent home in Chester. Margaret lived to be in her 90's.

Mr. Billy White, Mother's dear friend and well known Rock Hill historian, told us that this antebellum plantation was one of four memorable ones built along the Catawba, and that it was known as "Mount Holly." It was originally the home place of his ancestor, Col. Cadwallader Rives, who built it in the 1850s.

According to Mr. White, during the Civil War financial collapse of the South, his ancestor, Mr. Rives, lost everything and could not pay the taxes, so “when it went on the block, J. Harvey Smith bought and saved it.” Mr. White said he was well off financially, and so was his family. They were descendants of the Pattons who had originally owned all that land since the 1750’s. The Patton/Davie/Smith connection was the principal family connection in the Lands Ford area. They were the major folks there, financially, politically, and socially.

Big Daddy was born at Mount Holly in 1862. He farmed with his father, and later became a salesman as a young man. After he married Nannie Biggs from Trenton, Tenn., they traveled the country, he taking his young wife with him to explore the expanding western territories. They literally traveled on the railroad, staying in boarding houses, and Big Daddy would sell whatever he was selling at the time. When the time came for their children to be born, they would come back to home to give birth, live there for a time, then resume their travels. When the two girls, Marie and Kathryn, became school age, the family settled in Chester where both families had close family ties. They lived at this country home before buying their first house on Saluda Street.

I was told that Mamoo’s parents in Trenton, Tenn., did not want their Nannie Biggs to marry SD Cross because he did different things like traveling and vending, and he had not finished college. Her father was a Methodist minister, and they did not approve of such activities, but, they married in spite of it when Nannie was only 18 years old. He took her to the old plantation home at Lansford, where they lived between traveling. Mother declared that she had “been in every state in the Union by the time she was eight years old, except the Dakotas, only because there were no roads there.”

One story Mother told was their love of Kentucky, so they would stop often in Lexington, spending some time there. Because their girls were approaching pre-school age, they would enroll them in a special school there under the direction of a Miss Mini McFeat, a well known teacher in those parts, who had studied in France under Montessori. Later, when my parents sent Frances and me to nursery school at Winthrop College in the mid 1920’s, Miss Mini McFeat was our teacher there, also! ( For the last twenty years of my teaching career in early childhood development, until retiring in 1972, I held the position of full time director of that same nursery program at McFeat Nursery, a place very dear to my heart.)

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On my first visit to Lansford in the 1930’s, I was a teenager. Daddy’s sister, Aunt Lula Craig Mills, her husband, Uncle Gene, Gene Jr. and Craig, would return to Rock Hill for summer vacations with Grandmother and Papa Craig down on Johnston St. Aunt Lula would work on her master’s degree in education at Winthrop.

One summer she was also gathering genealogy material for her DAR membership. She was tracing the Craig connection to Colonel Robert Patton, Revolutionary War hero, who was buried in the old cemetery at Lands Ford. My mother, Marie, also had a lineage to Col. Patton, therefore, Marie and Lula planned this trip to the house and the church cemetery located in the Lansford Community. I was able to go along, as was my sister, Frances.

Mr. White recalled to us that the old cemetery was once called "The Patton Graveyard," and was now called the "Old Stone Graveyard." He told us that after the Revolutionary War, Col. William Patton sold his great home place estate at Lansford to General William Richardson Davie, renowned Revolutionary War soldier, and founder of the University of North Carolina. General Davie, married by now, then moved to Lansford, making it his permanent home, and renaming it "Tivoli," after a garden he had seen in Europe.

The other two of the four plantations built in succession along the Catawba were "Rose Hill," home of Halcott Pride Green, and "Wyoming," home of Fredrick Lafayette Jones Pride. Col Pride's true surname was really "Jones;" he assumed the name "Pride" in order to inherit an enormous estate from a bachelor uncle who had no heirs otherwise.

Mr. White added that these Catawba River plantations were worked by slaves who worked the lands in that area, but, none of these plantations had the large number of slaves that one found in the low country plantations. Cotton was most probably the feature crop of these large farms after the Civil War, along with rotated grain crops such as corn, barley, wheat, and oats.

All but "Tivoli," which was just several hundred feet from the water's edge, overlooking Lands Ford, itself, were located a little more distantly from the Catawba shores. "Wyoming" is still standing and can be seen as one drives by toward the entrance to the Lansford State Park, although many alterations have been made to it.

We did find the cemetery and Col. Patton's marker. It was a simple marker, rounded or curved at the top, and about 24 – 30 inches wide and 2 inches thick. We then proceeded to locate the old house where Mother and Aunt Kathryn were born in. We had to pass by the beautiful old home called "Wyoming" to get there. We turned onto a narrow dirt road.

We drove up the dirt driveway where some large cedars were still standing. The layout of the entrance was easily recognizable because of the descriptions Mother had given over the years. Even then, I remember feeling a brief moment of nostalgia and sadness, but, was also excited that my mother had such a lovely heritage that gave her many fond memories of happiness.

Mother recalled once more the rows of large cedars and hollies that flanked the dirt road as one approached, and how the cedars continued in a large circle around the house. Around that was another row of cedars forming a square. It was the beauty of the grounds that Mother recalled most vividly. She said there was a beautifully laid out

formal garden, with flowers everywhere. Plans are thought to have been laid out by an English architect. ("Even today the English and Dutch bulbs lift their head in early spring," Mother was later quoted as saying in a feature article in the Herald in the 1960s.) Ancient boxwoods, big though broken, were still living on that first visit.

Mother remembered the entrance as having a wide open hallway, which lead straight back onto an open back porch which lead to a separate kitchen house. On either side of the front door were two large doors leading into a parlor on the right and a study on the left. Then you came to the stairs.

The back porch served as a refrigerator in winter for the many partridges, quail, and doves that the men in the neighborhood would kill and bring home from the hunt. Mother recalled seeing them hanging from large hooks on the porch ceiling along with hams. On my visits to Chester, I would visualize that scene when passing by a painting that Mamoo had hanging in her dining room, because it pictured dead partridges hanging from hooks. I always looked at it; she was very proud of that painting, studied her art. I remember she painted irises. Mother said, "It was the boast of many a man that during cold weather he ate a quail a day for a month or longer at a time."

We pulled up to the back door. A family of black people, Mr. John D. and Georgia Cherry, was living there. A bunch of little dark faces of all ages with big round eyes were staring at us as we made the surprise visit. They were very cordial, and invited us in, but we declined, as we had come unannounced. I've always regretted not taking them up on their invitation to go inside. We walked around the yard which was neat outside, with cotton fields all around.

The Cherry's were farming the land for Mrs. Gage, Big Daddy's first cousin, I believe. I remember the cedars and boxwood. I saw signs of what looked like white paint on the siding. Mother said the Cherrys had kept up the traditional plantings by placing small cedars as a base planting between the older ones as they died. Crepe myrtles were blooming; the circle of trees around back had been removed to accommodate farming needs, replaced by out buildings.

Many years later, in the 1950's, Goody and I decided to make a return visit to Lands Ford and the old house, taking Mother, Little Nancy, Little Goody, and Craig. We had no trouble finding the house at the end of the same dirt road, still lined with cedars and hollies; but, now it was vacant, so we did go inside. We explored all through the house and the stories Mother had told me seemed to come to life in my imagination once again. The walls were made of rough wide horizontal boards which were still intact. Pieces of wallpaper strips still hung in places. There were fireplaces in every room. The children ran up and down the halls and stairs and up to the balcony over the front porch.

Then, on our final visit around 1970, the whole place was all grown up in a pine forest. The house was gone. Duke Power had bought the land and planted the area in pines.

I wish I could go back and find it again.



Other Memories about the Crosses, emerging from this story:

When Samuel Duncan Cross settled in Chester and bought one of his farms, he planted it in pecan trees. He sold pecan trees and pecans most of his life after settling in Chester, South Carolina. Many of those old groves still exist in the countryside. (There was a news note in the Evening Herald not too long ago about what occurred that same day in local history 75 years ago, which stated that Samuel Duncan Cross of Chester announced that he was having a bumper crop of pecans that year.... ) I can't put my hands on that clipping right now.) Pecans were his main source of income for many years, in addition to his farming.

In the 1920's, he also tried his hand at raising white faced cows. He had seen them in Texas on his travels. He had one larger farm between Chester County and Lancaster County, and bought a whole herd home to raise. I went with him in his little Ford car to see them. All you could see was cows. But, the sad thing is, they all came with a disease, evidently, and he lost them after not too long a time. No one knew they were sick when they were sold.

Big Daddy also took Frances and me in that same car to the York County Fair where he toted us in one hand and his big branch of Japanese persimmons hanging from the other. He was the only one there with persimmons, and people would turn and look as he was walking down the aisle to deliver them to the blue ribbon competition, which he won.

He dressed well. And, we had to dress for meals and sit at the dining room table properly, too. When he hit his diamond ring on that table top we knew we had to straighten up. Mamoo would let us get away with anything.

In Chester, they lived downtown on Saluda, just about a block from "the hill." Granny Cross was quite old when we visited. She also made several trips to visit us in Rock Hill, one reason being her spinster sister, Loretta Culp, still lived there on College Avenue further up the street than we lived. Her name was Jennie Steadman Smith Culp. She had two daughters, Jennie Steadman Culp (Cork) and Loretta Culp, who lived in New York City, and did well as a stock broker. She was always sending fine clothes home to Jennie Steadman, who was always the best dressed friend we had.

Mother told us that the old canal was designed by Robert Mills, and, that he lived in Chester temporarily. The story went that only one boat used that canal and lock. The Civil War stopped all progress of any kind in South Carolina.

Genealogy: Brother J. Harvey Smith-----Sister Margaret Smith 1836-1928.  
married  
Rufus Marion Cross  
their son  
Samuel Duncan Cross (Big Daddy) 1862-1934  
married  
Nannie Lorene Biggs (Mamoo) 1871-1930  
daughters  
Marie Cross 1891-1978 & Kathryn Cross  
married  
Bernard Nathaniel Craig 1892-1973 (Lancaster,  
Craig Farm)  
daughters  
Nancy Biggs Craig 1920- + Frances O'Neal Craig  
married  
Goodwin Grove Thomas 1920-2004  
children  
(Nancy Biggs, Goodwin Grove, Bernard Craig)



Bernard with Nancy and Frances



Marie with Nancy and Frances





**Mount Holly**, cir. 1850.  
Hand hewn and pegged timbers, Rowells section, Eastern Chester Co.



Nannie Biggs Cross with Marie, Kathryn and friends, on a picnic on one of their many travels. (Note tent in background and water melons in hand.)





Four Generations:  
Margaret "Granny" Smith  
Samuel D. Cross  
Marie Cross Craig  
Little Nardy Craig



Big Daddy, Little Nardy in the horse & carriage,  
Chester, SC, cir. 1918





Mamoo with her sister, Marie & Kathryn, on a visit home to Trenton, Tennessee



Mamoo with her sister-in-law, Kate Cross Avery, Chester, SC



Kathryn Cross in front of their house on Saluda St., Chester, SC



Marie Cross and friend Bernard Craig, Chester, SC





Marie & Bernard on Big Daddy's tractor



A white faced cow



A farmhand at Big Daddy's Barn



Big Daddy with his white faced cows