

William Richardson Davie

■ War hero, statesman is buried at the Old Waxhaw Presbyterian cemetery.

In 1927, it was announced that descendants of William Richardson Davie were to gather at the cemetery of Old Waxhaw Presbyterian church for a special ceremony. Davie had died 107 years previously and was buried in the old section of the graveyard beside his wife and other family members. Preston Davie of New York-City and officials from the University of North Carolina were to be in charge of the activities.

Who was William Richardson Davie and what was the occasion? Davie is best known as a Revolutionary War hero and founder of the University of North Carolina. He was also governor of North Carolina. He was appointed by President John Adams as a special minister to France, replacing Patrick Henry. Davie also headed the surveying party that adjusted the N.C.-S.C. boundary line from Old North Corner northwestward to the Catawba River.

He was born in Egremont, County Cumberland, England, on June 22, 1756. When he was 4 years old he came with his parents, Archibald and Mary Davie, to the area in which his

mother's brother, the Rev. William Richardson, famed minister of the Old Waxhaw Presbyterian church, had settled. The Davies settled on Cane Creek in the Waxhaws of upper Lancaster County, then a part of Craven County.

Davie undoubtedly was first tutored at Waxhaw Academy by his uncle, William Richardson. Davie is thought to have attended Queen's College in Charlotte before going off to Princeton College in New Jersey in 1774. Several years later he studied law in the office of Judge Spruce McCay (or Macay) in Salisbury, N.C. McCay was later to teach law to Andrew Jackson.

When the Revolutionary War turned to the South in 1779, Davie put down his books and rose from lieutenant to general in a two-year period. His military genius has never been doubted and it is said that Young Andy Jackson, who was a courier for Davie at the age of 13, admired Davie more than any other man.

When the war was over, Davie settled in North Carolina and lived for many years in Halifax County before being elected governor of the state. In 1806 he was defeated in a congressional race by a man he considered inferior for the position. In disgust, Davie returned to South Carolina and spent the next 15 years reconstructing his home and improving his plantation on the Chester County side of the Catawba River. In 1820 he was buried in Old

Waxhaw Presbyterian Cemetery. Now to the question of Preston Davie. He was a wealthy New York philanthropist and a collateral descendant of a later William R. Davie, who provided an endowment fund that made possible the building of the large mausoleum as a memorial to the Davie family.

A large brick enclosure with iron gates, bearing the Davie coat of arms in copper, was constructed by Warren Mabley, a Charlotte contractor. The plot was designed by Martin Boyer Jr. of Charlotte.

When the old graves were dug into, the cunous wondered what would be left. Everything had disintegrated, but the outlines of the coffins were clearly seen. A single silver button from the Revolutionary War uniform of General Davie was found along with three pieces of board with the initials "W.R.D." made with copper head tacks. In the other graves, a few pieces of pine, a piece of cloth and a comb with several teeth missing were found.

In addition to the general's grave, the graves of two sons, and a granddaughter were moved to the new burial plot located on the site of the third church building. The plans for a public dedication were never carried out.

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Nearby history

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