JOURNAL *of the* Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society

Serving Our Members,

Promoting the Research,

Documentation and

Preservation of African

American History

and Genealogy

CORAL ANNIVERSARY EDITION

VOL. 31 & 32
published simultaneously as
33rd, 34th, 35th & 36th Afro-American Historical & Genealogical Society
National Genealogy Conference Proceedings (Parts I & II)

ARVIDA'S STORY

By Arvida Marie Woods

I was born at Freedmen's Hospital (now known as Howard University Hospital) and grew up in Northeast Washington, DC. I was an only child. My mother was a beautician who worked from home. My grandmother lived with us and took care of me when my mother was working on customers. I attended public and Catholic school, and I graduated from Eastern High School. We had a small family, but I enjoyed spending time with family and friends on holidays and other special occasions.

My father Chester C. Lee died in 1976 and in 1985 my mother Marie C. Lee died. I was 36 years old, and married with children. During the process of clearing out their home, tucked away in a closet, I found an Adoption Decree. It was then that I learned for the first time that Chester C. and Marie C. Lee were not my birth parents. According to the decree, my name had been changed from Avida Marie Standard to Avida Marie Lee.[1] I knew nothing about my birth parents. Regrettably, my adoptive parents took the information about my birth parents to their graves. I was never angry at my parents. I was just disappointed that they never told me that I was adopted. I was relieved to know the truth. Soon, however, I realized that although I was 36 years old, I knew nothing about who I really was.

In 1987, I faced another staggering blow. My husband died. As a single parent raising four children, my days were then filled with working, homework, after school activities, and other routines of everyday life. There was no time to even think about where to begin my search for my birth parents. Eight years after my husband's death, when my children were older and settled in school, I began my search.

Adoption records in the District of Columbia are sealed and are not accessible to the public after an adoption is finalized. I joined an adoptee-birth parent support group. One of the many things that I learned from the support group is that I could file a Motion to Break the Seal of Adoption in District Court. The Court seeks to determine if the information sought is for a legitimate purpose. Furthermore, if it is established that the information would benefit the adoptee, the Court issues an order for the case to be investigated.[2] In my case, a social worker was assigned to try to locate my original adoption file and find my birth parents. The process took over a year.

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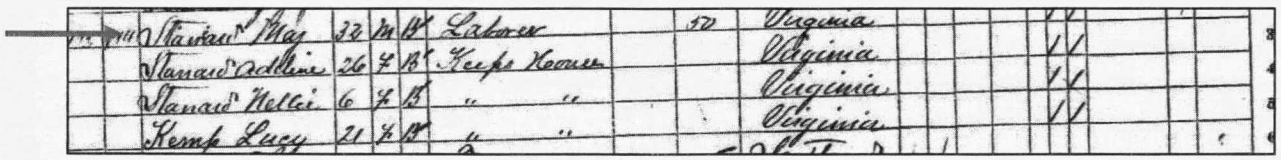
In the interim, I decided to start researching to see what I could find about my birth parents. Fortunately, I found a close friend of my adoptive parents who had met my birth parents before I was born. Their friend recalled that one of my birthparents was a medical student at Howard University. However, I did not know if the surname Standard was my birth mother's or birth father's name. At the university, I found out there was a student enrolled in the School of Medicine in the late 1940's by the name of Raymond L. Standard. However, I had no evidence that he was my biological father.

My research led me to my birth father's first wife. I decided to visit her to see if she knew anything about the woman with whom my birth father had a relationship while he was in medical school. After I found out where the family lived, it took some time for me to actually get the courage to knock on their door. But I am so glad that I did! The person who answered the door was the daughter of my birth father's first wife. Ironically, 18 months prior to the day I knocked on their door, the family had learned about me from a cousin. I discovered I have a sister and brother from my birth father's first marriage and two sisters and a brother from his second marriage. Also, I have an Afro-Italian brother, born during the time my birth father served in Italy as a Buffalo Soldier with the United States Army. However, the family has had no success finding him.

I learned about my birth father's military service, education, and career. He earned his medical degree at Howard University and subsequently established a private practice in internal medicine in Washington DC. He earned a Bronze Star Medal for valor for his service as an Army medical corpsman during World War II. From 1969 until 1980, he was the Director of Public Health for the District of Columbia.[3]

Ever since the day I knocked on the door of my birth father's first wife, my paternal family has welcomed me with open arms. I now have a large family. My paternal family is from Spotsylvania, Virginia. I learned that in the 1870 census, the full names of approximately 4,700 formally enslaved African Americans born and/or living in Spotsylvania County were enumerated for the very first time.[4] The names of my paternal 2nd great grandfather Major and Adeline Stanard, progenitors of the Stanard Line, were enumerated in these census records.[5] Major Stanard was born enslaved about 1840 in Virginia.[6] He was probably included in the 1850 and 1860 slave schedules. However, with few exceptions, neither Major Stanard nor any other slaves were listed by name in the slave schedules. Slaves were listed under the name of the slave owner with their age, gender, and race.[7] Slaves had surnames, but few were ever distinguished in official records by the use of their surnames.[8] Family members have already researched the Stanard family history, they have done a family tree, and they have family reunions. Over the years, I have continued the research and have found additional information and documents on my paternal ancestors. My roots are firmly established in my birth father's family tree.



Major & Adeline Stanard, 2nd Great Grandparents, 1870 federal census, Spotsylvania County, Virginia

However, I had no information about my birth mother. Unfortunately, the social worker assigned to my case was unable to locate her. After a year, based on the fact that my birth father and adoptive parents were deceased, the court reluctantly agreed to break the seal on my records. My birth parents' names are Betty Mae Gorrell, born in Danville, Virginia and Raymond L. Standard born in Hartford, Connecticut.

Dr. Raymond L. Standard [9]

Betty Mae Gorrell

I immediately began searching through federal census records at the National Archives, looking for information about my birth mother. I did find a family with the surname Gorell (sic) who resided in Danville, Virginia in 1910.[10] The wife of the head of household was Bettie Gorell.[11] I was not certain who Bettie Gorell was, but because her name was almost the same as my birth mother's and she also lived in Danville, I was fairly certain I had found my birth mother's family.

According to the adoption records, my birth mother stated during the adoption process that she was placing me up for adoption because she already had a child and didn't want another child. Therefore, I knew I had a maternal sibling! Later, I found out that my sister's name is Evelyn and that

she already knew about me. What I did not know is that my birth mother gave Evelyn the contact information for my birth father and adoptive parents, and Evelyn had been in contact with them for many years. After the death of my parents and since I had married and moved away from home, Evelyn lost track of my whereabouts. Evelyn promised my adoptive parents and birth father that she would never divulge to me the fact that she was my sister or that I was adopted. Ironically, one day in 1997 my birth father's second wife got a phone call from Evelyn. My birth father's second wife was initially confused by this phone call because she did not know about me. One of her daughters explained the situation to her. Subsequently, Evelyn called me and a couple of months later, my daughter and I were on a plane to Florida to meet her. Evelyn was raised by her paternal grandparents in Danville, Virginia. Regrettably, Evelyn did not know much about our birth mother.

My maternal grandmother Lucy Owens died when my birth mother was seven years old.[12]My birth mother lived in Danville until the age of 16 and then lived with relatives in Washington DC and New York. She did domestic work and also worked in retail. She died in New York in 1964.[13]

I was determined to find more information about my birth mother and her family. In 2003, I checked the Message Board on Ancestry.com and read an entry for a man who was also researching the Gorrell family in Danville, Virginia. After communicating with him several times, we discovered that his grandfather Alonza Gorrell and my grandfather James Gorrell were brothers. They were the sons of John and Bettie Gorrell, the same family I had found in the 1910 federal census in Danville, Virginia.[14] James Gorrell was my birth mother's father.[15] After that discovery, my new-found cousin and I met in Danville almost every year to do research. We traced our 2nd great grandmother Eliza Roan to Yanceyville, Caswell County, North Carolina, where she was born. Eliza's death certificate indicated her parents' names were Horry (sic) and Queen Roane.[16] We had found our ancestral home and our oldest known slave ancestors.

One of the challenges in doing slave genealogy is identifying the slave owner of enslaved ancestors.[17] Listed in the 1870 census in Yanceyville, I found a cluster of five black families living in dwellings located side-by-side (dwellings 332 through 336).[18] All 19 members of these families have the surname Roan. Slaves did not always take the surname of their last slave owner and our Roan family name could have several other possible origins.[19] However, in this case there is a white slave-holding family with the Roan surname in the same neighborhood (dwelling 375) as the cluster of black families.[20] He was the only slave owner with the Roan surname residing in Yanceyville in 1860. After emancipation, freed slaves often maintained residence nearby their former slaveholding family and many of them continued working on the same land as sharecroppers.[21] For these reasons, the research for our enslaved ancestors began with a focus on Dr. Nathaniel Moore Roan as the possible slave owner.

To find information about my enslaved ancestors, I had to do a family tree and research the family history of the possible slave owner. Dr. Roan, born about

1803 in Caswell County, was said to have come from a long family line of men who were both plantation owners and physicians.[22] He was a well-known tobacco grower and a physician who practiced medicine in Yanceyville for over 53 years.[23] In the 1860 federal census, Dr. Roan's personal estate is valued at $71,580.[24] In that slaves were considered property, the value of slaveholdings were included as part of personal estates. By 1870, which was after emancipation of the slaves, the value of his personal estate had dropped to $1,000.[25] The slave schedules indicate that Dr. Roan owned 15 slaves in 1850[26] and likely 53 slaves in 1860.[27] There are no apparent correlations between the slave data on the 1850 and on the 1860 slave schedules. However, hopefully the increase in slave holdings will improve our chances of finding official records of the slaves bought or otherwise acquired during that ten year period.

Ironically, I found two separate 1860 slave schedules for Dr. Roan. The enumerator completed the federal population schedule for Dr. Roan's residence in Yanceyville on August 5, 1860.[28] On that date, the same enumerator also completed Dr. Roan's 1860 slave schedule. There are 19 slaves listed and three slave houses.[29] However, prior to that, there was another slave schedule completed on July 27, 1860 by the same enumerator.[30] The specific city or location of the slaves in Caswell County is not indicated in the July 1860 slave schedule. There are 34 slaves and five slave houses on this slave schedule. Dr. Roan may have had slaves residing in more than one location, i.e., perhaps some at his plantation and others at another location in the county. In some communities, slaves were rented.[31] The enumerators were supposed to record the slaves wherever they resided.[32] There is no correlation between the two schedules. Based on the value of Dr. Roan's personal estate in 1860, in approximate comparison with the values of the personal estates and total number of slaves held by neighboring slave owners, Dr. Roan probably had a total of 53 slaves.

Also noteworthy is the fact that without exception, all of Dr. Roan's slaves listed as mulatto on both slave schedules are designated as fugitives from the state.[33] Likewise, with few exceptions, all the mulattoes listed in the 1860 slave schedules in Yanceyville are designated as fugitives from the state.[34] Of course, each enumerator likely used his own judgment as to color classifications.[35] However, in the instructions, the definition of fugitives from the state is clear, i.e., slaves "who, having absconded within the year, have not been recovered."[36] It is hard to imagine so many mulatto slaves running away during that timeframe. Yet, it was not uncommon in North Carolina for persons described as mulatto to runaway in larger numbers than their proportion in the slave population.[37] I have no picture of my 3rd great grandmother Queen Roane or her daughter Eliza. However, Eliza and her children are listed in the 1880 census as mulattoes.[38] I suspect they were fugitives. But without additional information about my enslaved ancestors as a family unit, along with their probable ages, it has been difficult to try to trace their lives.

Reportedly, by 1862 runaway slaves had become a serious problem for slave owners in Caswell County and elsewhere. Slave holders complained of serious economic loss as a result of slave runaways.[39] In January 1862, the decision was made in Caswell County Court to take

action to address the problem of slave runaways. Seven squads of white men, including Dr. Roan, were appointed to the slave patrols.[40] These patrols, which in the South were generally responsible for the "pursuit, capture, suppression, and punishment" of runaways, often made their rounds at night.[41] I can only imagine the fear these slave patrols instilled in my enslaved ancestors and other slaves residing in Yanceyville.

Dr. Roan died in 1879. He is buried in the Yanceyville Presbyterian Church Cemetery.[42] Dr. Roan was the architect for the church. Interestingly, bricks for the church were made by Dr. Roan's slaves on his plantation.[43] I visited this church a few years ago and while standing in front of the church I envisioned my ancestors diligently at work making bricks for this small but elegant church. And yet, upon completion of the church, because they were slaves, not one of my ancestors would have been able to worship there.

I have continued to research Dr. Roan's family tree and search for all available records of Dr. Roan and his family, to include probate records, deeds, records of slave sales, and tax records. In the interim, assuming that Dr. Roan was the slave owner, my cousin and I decided we wanted to walk in our ancestors' footsteps. We visited the home of Dr. Roan, which was built in 1838 and still stands today in the Yanceyville Historic District.[44] We also found a descendant of Dr. Roan, who is also a doctor, and lived in Danville, Virginia at the time. He was kind enough to stop treating his patients when we arrived, and he sat down and spoke with us about his great grandfather Dr. Nathaniel Roan. We were grateful for the time he spent with us.

Home of Dr. Nathaniel M. Roan
216 Main Street, Yanceyville, North Carolina

In 2006, my journey to find out more about my birth family continued but took a remarkable turn. Through DNA testing, I am attempting to unlock my genetic heritage. After watching Dr. Henry Louis Gates on the television program *African American Lives*, I took my first DNA test. It was an admixture DNA test which provided a percentage breakdown of my ancestral make-up. The results were 68% Sub-Saharan African, 19% European, and 13% Native American. In 2008, I took a mitochondrial DNA test with Ancestry.com and learned that I am likely to find deep ancestral roots in my maternal lineage in Europe. In 2013, I took the 23andme autosomal DNA test.[45] The test revealed dozens of potential genetic matches. As fate would have it, in May 2014 I was at a meeting of the Central Maryland Chapter of AAHGS. Bernice Bennett, the host of BlogTalkRadio, was also there. I found out from her that we are a fourth cousin DNA match. Bernice and I are now trying to determine the ancestor whom we have in common. DNA has provided exciting prospects for connecting with relatives and researching my family history.

Since I started this journey twenty years ago, I have learned so much about my family. My roots are now firmly established in the family trees of both of my birth parents. Yet, there is so much more I would like to know. I have resigned myself to the fact that I may never know the details of how my birth parents met and how they felt when I was born. But in learning more about my birth parents, meeting my relatives, and discovering my genetic roots, I feel like I am slowly filling the void in knowledge about myself. Most importantly, I now know who I am and where I came from.

ENDNOTES

[1] During my childhood, my given name was changed from *Avida* to *Arvida.*

[2] District of Columbia. Child and Family Services Agency. *Frequently Asked Questions About District Child Welfare: Can I see the records from when I was adopted in DC?* (http://cfsa.dc.gov/page/faqs-cfsa: accessed 15 November 2014).

[3] J. Y.Smith, "*Dr. Standard, Public Health Expert, Dies*," The Washington Post, 16 December 1989, p.B5, col. 1, digital images, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (http://search.proquest.com/docview/307244965?accountid=2739): accessed 5 December 2014).

[4] Terry Miller and Roger Braxton, *Images of America*: *Virginia; African Americans of Spotsylvania County* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), backcover.

[5] 1870 U.S. census, Spotsylvania County, Virginia, population schedule, Chancellor Township, p.28 (penned), dwelling 192, family 194, Maj Stanard; digital images, *Ancestry.com* (http://www.ancestry.com: accessed 15 December 2014); citing National Archives microfilm publication M593, roll 1679. The transcriber erroneously listed the head of household as *May*. The name listed in the original census record clearly appears to be *Maj,* probably a nickname or abbreviation for *Major*. Stanard is a variant surname for Standard. Although Adeline and Nellie Stanard are also listed as residents of this dwelling (presumably Major's wife and daughter), relationships to the head of household are not indicated in the 1870 census.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Tony Burroughs, "African American Research" Loretto Dennis Szucs and Sandra Hargreaves Luebking, Editors, *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy* (Provo: Ancestry Publishing. 2006), 651-676.

[8] Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family In Slavery & Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon Books. 1976), 230-238.

[9] The pictures of Dr. Raymond L. Standard and Betty Mae Gorrell are in the possession of the author.

[10] 1910 U.S. census, Pittsylvania County, Virginia, population schedule, Danville Ward 1, Enumeration District (ED) 0015, sheet 1A (penned), dwelling 659, family 2, Bettie Gorell; digital images, *Ancestry.com* (http://www.ancestry.com): accessed 15 December 2014); citing NARA microfilm publication T624, roll 1626. My mother's name was Betty Mae Gorrell. Gorell is a variant surname for Gorrell.

[11] Ibid.

[12] According to family members, Lucy Owens died in Danville, Virginia in 1931. Efforts to locate an official record of her death were unsuccessful.

[13] New York Department of Health, death certificate 156-64-11704 (1964), Betty Gray, Bureau of Records and Statistics, City of New York. Her death certificate indicates she was divorced but no additional pertinent information was recorded.

[14] 1910 U.S. census, Pittsylvania County, Virginia, pop. sch., Danville Ward 1, ED 0015, sheet 1A, dwell. 659, fam. 2, Alonzo and James Gorell.

[15] New York Department of Health, death certificate 156-64-11704 19 (1964), Betty Gray. The death certificate of Betty Gray indicates her father was James *Gurell*, probably an error for James *Gorrell*.

[16] Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Health, death certificate 25254 (1924), Elsie Holderness, Division of Vital Records, Richmond. The number on the death certificate is blurred. Roane is a variant of the surname Roan. Eliza was also known as Elsie. Marriage records indicate that she married John Holderness in 1865 in Yanceyville, North Carolina.

[17] Dee Parmer Woodtor, *Finding A Place Called Home: A Guide to African-American Genealogy and Historical Identity* (New York: Random House, 1999), 223-228.

[18] 1870 U.S. census, Caswell County, North Carolina, population schedule, Yanceyville Township, p.490A (stamped), dwellings 332 through 336, families 352 through 356, Harrison, Frank, Davey, Moses and Fannie Roan; digital images, Ancestry.com (http://www.ancestry.com): accessed 10 December 2014); citing National Archives microfilm publication M593, roll 1128.

[19] Burroughs, "African American Research," 664-665.

[20] 1870 U.S. census, Caswell County, North Carolina, population schedule, Yanceyville Township, p. 492B (stamped) , dwelling 375, family 375, Nathaniel Roan; digital images, Ancestry.com (http://www.ancestry.com): accessed 10 December 2014); citing National Archives microfilm publication M593, roll 1128.

[21] Woodtor, *Finding A Place Called Home*, 101.

[22] Spencer T. Richmond, "Doctors of the Richmond Family," *The Heritage of Caswell County, North Carolina,* Jeannine D. Whitlow, editor (Caswell County, North Carolina: Caswell County Historical Association, 1985), 451.

[23] Case Files of Applications From Former Confederates for Presidential Pardons, 1865-1867, N. M. Roan, case 533a (penned): digital images, Ancestry.com (http://www.ancestry.com): accessed 10 December 2014); citing National Archives microfilm publication M1003, roll 73. Dr. Roan did not serve on active duty with the Confederates during the Civil War. However, as many others who supported the Confederacy did between 1865 and 1867, Dr. Roan filed an application for Presidential Pardon. In his application, Dr. Roan wrote about his personal background and activities during the war.

[24] 1860 U.S. census, Caswell County, North Carolina, population schedule, Yanceyville Township, p. 355 (stamped), dwelling 785, family 796, N. M. Roan; digital images, Ancestry.com (http://www.ancestry.com): accessed 10 December 2014); citing National Archives microfilm publication M653, roll 891.

[25] 1870 U.S. census, Caswell County, North Carolina, pop. sch., p. 492B (stamped), dwell. 375, fam. 375, Nathaniel Roan.

[26] 1850 U.S. census, Caswell County, North Carolina, slave schedule, Yanceyville Township, p. 43 (penned), N. M. Roan

(owner): digital images, Ancestry.com ((http://www.ancestry.com): accessed 10 December 2014); citing National Archives microfilm publication M432, roll 651.

[27] 1860 U.S. census, Caswell County, North Carolina, slave schedule, p.63 (penned), N.M. Roan (owner); digital images, Ancestry.com (http://www.ancestry.com): accessed 10 December 2014; citing National Archives microfilm publication M653, roll not cited, but should be 921. Also, 1860 U.S. census, Caswell County, North Carolina, slave schedule, Yanceyville Township, p. 74 (penned), N. M. Roan (owner); digital images, Ancestry.com (http://www.ancestry.com): accessed 10 December 2014); citing National Archives microfilm publication M653, roll not cited, but should be 921.

[28] 1860 U.S. census, Caswell Co., NC, Yanceyville Township, p. 355 (stamped), dwell. 785, fam. 796, N.M. Roan

[29] 1860 U.S. census, Caswell Co., NC, p.74 (penned), N.M. Roan (owner).

[30] 1860 U.S. census, Caswell Co., NC, p. 63 (penned), N.M. Roan (owner).

[31] Burroughs, "African American Research," 653.

[32] "1860 Questionnaire, Instructions to Marshals and Assistants, Explanation of Schedule 2-Slave Inhabitants" in *Measuring America: The Decennial Census from 1790 to 2000*" (Washington DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2002), p.11.

[33] 1860 U.S. census, Caswell Co., NC, p. 74 (penned), N. M. Roan (owner). Also, 1860 U.S. census, Caswell Co., NC, p. 63 (penned), N. M. Roan (owner).

[34] 1860 U.S. census, Caswell Co., NC, Yanceyville Township, pp.73-98 (penned), various slave owners.

[35] 1860 Questionnaire, Instructions to Marshals and Assistants, Explanation of Schedule 1-Inhabitants, Color, in *Measuring America: The Decennial Census from 1790 to 2000,*" p, 14. From 1850 to 1880, the instructions to enumerators indicated that the word *mulatto* was to be used for quadroons, octoroons, and "all persons who had three-eighths to five-eighths black blood." This terminology probably led to confusion on the part of enumerators and therefore the results with regard to color classifications for mulatto slaves are questionable.

[36] 1860 Questionnaire, Instructions to Marshals and Assistants, Explanation of Schedule 2-Slave Inhabitants" in *Measuring America: The Decennial Census from 1790 to 2000,*" p, 12.

[37] John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (Oxford: University Press, 1999), 213-216. Persons with light complexions were said to have advantages over other runaways, e.g., they were better able to pass as freepersons or white, were able to obtain positions as house servants and similar positions, and many were literate.

[38] 1880 U.S. Census, Pittsylvania County, Virginia, population schedule, Danville, Enumeration District 182, p.16 (penned), dwelling 137, family 145, Elza, Bettie, John, Geo., Wm., and James F. Holderness: digital images, *Ancestry.com* (http://www.ancestry.com): accessed 8 December 2014); citing National Archives microfilm publication T9, roll 1385.

[39] Dorothy Schneider and Carl J. Schneider, "Runaways 1619-1865," *American Experience: Slavery in America* (New

York: Infobase Publishing, 2007), 135-162.

[40] Freddie L. Parker, *Running for Freedom: Slave Runaways in North Carolina*, 1775-1840 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 39. Also, Mary Oliver Kerr, "Caswell County in the War Between the States: Life on the Home Front," *The Heritage of Caswell County, North Carolina*, Jeannine D. Whitlow, editor (Caswell County, North Carolina: Caswell County Historical Association, 1985), 15-17. Although there were already 18th century laws established in North Carolina recognizing the right of white citizens to apprehend runaway slaves, in 1830 the state legislature gave slave patrols arrest power and required that the county courts establish an oversight committee to appoint county patrols. Caswell County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions made the decision to organize slave patrols in January 1862 for Yanceyville, and included the specific names of white men who would serve on each of the seven squads. Dr. Roan was assigned to the second squad, along with four of his neighbors.

[41] Schneider, *Slavery in America*, 143-144.

[42] *Find A Grave*, database and digital images (http://findagrave.com: accessed 7 December 2014), memorial page for Dr. Nathaniel Moore Roan (1803-1879), Find a Grave Memorial no. 45098534, citing Yanceyville Presbyterian Church, Yanceyville, North Carolina.

[43] "Yanceyville Presbyterian Church Homecoming," *Caswell County Historical Association Blog*, 7 July 2011 (http://ncocha.blogspot.com/2011/07/yanceyville-presbyterian-church.html: accessed 6 December 2014). Also, Katherine Kerr Kendall, *Yanceyville Presbyterian Church, Yanceyville North Carolina: Early History of the Church with Sketches of the Founders* (Raleigh: Sparks Press, 1976), 2,4. See biographical information on Dr. Roan. Rev. John Sharshall Grasty, minister of the church in 1849, wrote in his diary on March 8, 1849 "Dr. Roan came up to my room and he drew the plans for the church."

[44] "1840's Brick Homes and Agronomy in Yanceyville, North Carolina," *Chip Millard Weblog*, 3 April 2009 (https://chipmillard.wordpress.com/2009/04/03/1840s-brick-homes-and-agronomy-in-yanceyville-north-carolina/ : accessed 20 December 2014). Picture of the Roan home is in the possession of the author.

[45] 23andmeDNA, Autosomal search, database (https://www.23andme.com/you/relfinder/: downloaded 5 May 2013), results for DNA Relatives Finder search for Arvida Woods.

Note: To protect the privacy of living family members and others, select information was omitted from the manuscript.