

H. WILLIAM GABRIEL

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*Mary Elizabeth Hickman (1840–1909) — the second of Roger Hickman’s eighteen children. She was the “Lizzie” referred to in many of William P. Hickman’s letters. (The Virginia Historical Society has a photo of Flora Cooke Stuart (1836–1923), wife of J.E.B. Stuart, with an identical hairdo and a similar dress and earrings.)*

## *William P. Hickman in the New River Valley, 1852–64<sup>1</sup>*

H. William Gabriel

The Rev. William P. Hickman was a Presbyterian preacher who spent twenty-two years ministering to small congregations in Wythe, Pulaski, and Montgomery Counties until his life was cut short by the Civil War. Born at Sun Rise on Back Creek in Bath County in 1810, Hickman earned B.A. and M.A. degrees from Washington College in Lexington before leaving his beloved mountains to attend the Union Theological Seminary at Hampden Sydney. Licensed to preach by the Lexington Presbytery, he began his labors as a Home Missionary in Pulaski County in 1842, and there he met Margaret Reid Hoge (1821–1904) while boarding in the home of her parents, John Hoge (1772–1847) and Elizabeth Rippy (1782–1851). William and Margaret were married in 1843 and eventually had nine children.

Like many people of his time, Hickman was a writer of letters, and many of those sent to his youngest brother, Roger Hickman (1813–89), have survived to give an account of the life of his family in mid-nineteenth century Southwest Virginia. The subject matter and tone of his letters change over time, but those from this period contain comments on the land, resources, and people of Southwest Virginia; the coming of the railroad; and William's ever-present interest in a proper education for his children and those of his brothers. William asked Roger to send his older children, Lizzie and Lanty, to live with him in Wytheville or Blacksburg to get the schooling unavailable to them on Back Creek.

As William pointed out to Roger in many letters, Back Creek was an isolated and lonely place that growth of the nation was leaving behind, and he often asked his brother to consider moving to Pulaski County where there were better prospects of improving his lot in life. His assessment of Bath County was correct, for the stony soils in its narrow mountain valleys make cultivation difficult, the distances to markets are great, and opportunities limited. Accordingly, throughout much of its history the chief export of Bath County was its young people. But Roger seemed content to stick close to his home and neighbors.

William, on the other hand, was always in the saddle, going from church to church and town to town as he carried the word of the Lord to the growing population of Southwest Virginia. There were no Presbyterian circuit riders — that was a Methodist calling — but ministering to his scattered flocks required the Rev. Hickman to ride ten to forty miles between meetings in all sorts of weather. He complained in 1852 that “...35 miles is a long distance to ride winter & summer to preach. It is very fatiguing indeed, & I ought to know...”

In September 1845 the Rev. William P. Hickman was called to serve as “Stated Supply” of the new White Glade Presbyterian Church in Pulaski County with a congregation of only seventeen members, including John Hoge as the elder and seven other Hoges. The little church, which met at Page’s meeting house, had been organized on 17 August 1844 by a committee of the Montgomery Presbytery including his friend, the Rev. Henry H. Paine, and the Rev. Nicholas W. Chevalier, pastor of the Blacksburg and Christiansburg Presbyterian churches. Records of the White Glade Presbyterian Church tell us that

This church was without the stated means of grace from its organization in Aug. 1844 until Sept. 1845 when the Rev. Wm. P. Hickman began to labour here as Stated Supply. ...<sup>2</sup>

To make ends meet, William was then preaching at three places: one-half time at Wytheville, one-quarter at the Brick Church southeast of Wytheville, and one-quarter at White Glade, which was thirty-five miles from Wytheville.

In 1850 William’s White Glade congregation constructed a new church building in the Long Hollows on one acre of ground donated by Michael Brown and Moses B. Lloyd, the husband of Margaret’s sister Matilda Hoge (1809–55). The deed stated that they gave the land

for the erection of a Presbyterian Church with the understanding that it is to be used by the Methodists when not occupied by the Presbyterians and Missionary Baptists and that the Missionary Baptists are to occupy it on the first Sabbath in each month exclusively.

In 1851 the church name was changed from White Glade to Bell Spring in recognition of a nearby spring from which the water fell with a musical bell-like tone. Although the date of the change is a bit confused in the records, it was confirmed by an act of Presbytery during its meeting at that church on 25–26 April 1851.

Presbyterian congregations were small in that part of the state in William’s day, making it necessary for him to serve two or three concurrently — and sometimes also teach school — to support his family. To make matters worse, William sometimes had difficulty collecting a salary from his congre-

gations. The situation was so bad in 1859, and again in 1860, that the Presbytery admonished the Blacksburg congregation “for their delinquency in discharging their pecuniary obligations to their pastor.”

It was a hard life, but by 1852 he was prospering and had a home near Wytheville and small farms in both Wythe and Pulaski Counties. His twenty-nine acres in Wythe County came with a small log house that William enlarged on a T-shaped pattern like thousands of other farm houses in Virginia. He had made a comfortable home and he had many friends, but the churches were too small to support a man with a growing family.

The important news in the following letter was that he had been invited to move to Blacksburg. If William were to move, he could serve two churches only twelve miles apart.

Wytheville Jan. 6th 1852.

Dear Brother.

Yours of the 14th ultimo was received to day about noon. I was glad to hear from you. I was not surprised to hear of Uncle Jimmy death. You wish to know how much I would charge you to board Elizabeth a session &c. Well I suppose that I would not charge you more than \$500. any how; & if she behaved herself pretty cleverly & learned pretty well perhaps might take something less. Tuition per session is Ten dollars, in our best female school, is the price for tuition per session.

But the same mail that brought your letter, brought one from Blacksburg, giving me a call to take charge of that church. Mr. Chevalier, who has divided his time between that place & Christiansburg, has recieved a call from the church of Christiansburg for the whole of his time, which he has concluded to accept so soon as Blacksburg can engage another to supply his place; & so notified the congregation a few Sabbaths ago. And hence they have applied to me. And it is probable I shall accept I will dislike to leave this place very much; for I have many kind friends here. And altho at presant a hard field, this is to be a very important place yet. And I have built my self a very comfortable house here. I built a porch since I was in Bath; & have also made some other improvements; so that so far as these things are concerned I am very comfortably fixed. But there is one heavy drawback, this church is too week to take the whole of my time, & there is no other church nearer than Pulaski 35 miles distant with which it can be connected. And I find it very laborious to ride so far in all sorts of wether to preach. The plan is to connect Blacksburg with Bell Spring the church in Pulaski to which I have been preaching. Bell Spring is a new church, built a little more than a year ago, & stands near Moses Lloyd's , some half a mile on this side of the river. Some 12 miles this side of Blacksburg. But shoul I remove to Blacksburg, you could nevertheless send Lizie & it will be fifty miles nearer to you nearly half way. They usually have a very good school in Blacksburg, but I do not know

how it is just now; for I have not been there since last spring as I returned from Bath.

Should the wether, health &c. permit I shall go down to Pulaski the last of this week; & it is likely I shall visit Blacksburg before I return And if the matter will then very soon be determined. But should I decide to go, I cannot leave here till after the meeting of Presbytery, which is about the first of May; as I am installed pastor of this church, & hence must be released by Presbytery before I can leave. And the same is the case with brother Chevalier & Blacksburg church. I will write to you again as soon as I can begin to see what is likely to be the issue of the present comnorion.

You say there are changes & turnings taking place on the Creek, & they might perhaps turn you out. I wish they would & roll you over to South Western Virginia I think it would be the best "roll" you ever made. But you know my sentaments on this subject. I wish you were located in this country This is to be a great-great country after awhile, when we get our railroad in operation. They are tareing away like wild-fire on it. It is nearly all let to the Tennessee line, & the heaviest of the grading pretty well done to New River...

We had very abundant crop here last year. My corn did not turn out quite as well as expected but it was pretty good. The ground was too new. My rye did well. And I raised 42 bushels of Buckwheat. I suppose I raised enough of grain (except wheat of which I raised none) to have done me, but rather than be scarce I bought 21 bu- of corn. I gave 37½ cets. per bushel.

We are all pretty well. I have had rheumatism which has confined me to the house pretty much since last Thursday. I preached once on Sabbath But I am a good deal better now. I am a good deal troubled with rheumatism; which make me more anxious to get so situated that I will have less riding to do to attend my appointments....

Write to me often. Postage is cheap - only three cents. What toper would not give his friend a dram at any time, which would cost that & more....

The next letter was to his nephew, William W. Hickman (1828-?), the eldest child of Arthur Hickman and Rebecca Walker. William W. may have then passed it on to his Uncle Roger to read and save, not knowing that William P. had sent a similar letter to Roger. Arthur Hickman had moved his family west to Braxton County, and schools may have been scarce there because it sounds as if William P. had expected his nephew to board with him while attending school in Wytheville.

Wytheville Jan. 7th 1852.

Dear William:

... I was very glad to hear from you. And would like to hear often. We have all enjoyed pretty good health since you were here. Old Mother

Hoge died the 13th of May. Her last end was peace; for the clouds that so bedarkened her sky when you were there, all vanished before she left us. Nancy was married the 20th of Nov. to Jno. Spickard of Blacksburg. There was a good deal of marrying here last Fall. One month brought me in \$35. by way of fees. I wonder if so much marrying betokens a hard winter? What think ye? The rye that looked so badly when you were here, turned out pretty good. and I got a fine set of clover on the ground. It was half leg high over nearly all the field; & a great deal of it bloomed. My corn in the New ground did not come up to my expectation quite. But was pretty good especially on the part that had been cleared the previous year. From various interruptions I did not get that piece of old ground in oats as I had expected, but I put it in buck wheat & got 42 bushels. I have built a porch to my house, side next to town. And built a dary for milk &c. in the yard close up against the plings where the hen-house stood when you were here (which is now moved across the lane under the locust tree) It is nine feet deep 8 wide 10 long walled up with rock, & covered first with plank doubled, then with tan-bark some six inches, then two feet of earth & sodded. It does very finely. I then built a shed from the smokehouse over the steps which lead down into the dary & enclosed it. the dary thus constructed is one of the most convenient places I ever saw. Nothing freezes in it. I have my potatoes & beets in it.

I have been looking for you out to go to school. The crops were fine here last summer, & grain is cheap. Corn 37½ cts delivered. I dont think we would fall out about the boarding. The Misses Walker are well. Neither of them married yet. They have some [here he drew a picture of some bows] it is said. I saw Olivia when Nancy was married. She was well.

Mr. Chevalier is going to quit preaching at Blacksburg & give the whole of his time to Christiansburg. And the Blacksburg people have applied to me to become their pastor. And I have a pretty strong notion of accepting. It would suit me much better as it would be but a morning ride over to Bell Spring as you know. But they wont agree for me to live on my farm in Pulaski, they say I must live in Blacksburg. It will however go very hard with me to leave this people, for I have some warm friends here. And I will dislike it very much to leave my house here just as I am getting it comfortably fixed. and my land fenced & in grass &c. The great difficulty is this church is not able to take the whole of my time & there is no church nearer than Pulaski (35 miles) to connect with it; & 35 miles is a long distance to ride winter & summer to preach. It is very fatieguing indeed, & I ought to know, for I have tried it six years....

Your uncle Roger & family were well when he wrote 14 ult. Uncle Jame Hickman is dead. He died Nov. 11th Was sick only two or three days. He left a will. Six negros are to be sold now the rest are disposed of by will; & the land to be sold at the old woman's death — which wont be long. ...

I wish you could be with me a few months. I think I could help you a good deal. Dont idle these long night away. Get the best books in your reach, & read them carefully. Be sure, dont run over any thing in a careless thoughtless manner. It will ruin any mind. Read with attention. If you cant at first; keep trying till you can. Then often stop, & con over in your mind what you have read, until you get it thoroely fixed in your mind. And my word for it you will soon read to purpose, if you will as this. ...

Sickness and death were frequent subjects in Hickman's letters because his role as pastor brought frequent contact with the sick and dying and because, in those days, dying was a public event not hidden away as it is now. The Old Mother Hoge was his mother-in-law, Elizabeth Rippy (1782–1851), the third wife of John Hoge.<sup>3</sup> The Uncle Jame Hickman was James Hickman (<1770–1851), who in 1795 married Margaret Bird, referred to as “the old woman” in the above letter. His property was located on Back Creek north of William P's family home.

William P. Hickman decided not to accept the call from the Blacksburg Presbyterian church because of their insistence that he live in Blacksburg.

Salem Va. Nov. 17th 1852.

Dear Brother:

It has been a long, long, time since I wrote you last. And as I have nothing very special to engage my attention just now I will spend a few minutes in writing to you. From the caption of my letter you may perceive that I am not at home I am in Salem Roanoke county, whither I have come to assist brother Lacy in a meeting. I left home last Friday, the 12th instant, & come to Pulaski where I had a sacramental meeting on last Sabbath brother Lacy assisting, & come down here on yesterday. When I wrote you last I had some thought of leaving Wythville & removing to Blacksburg, which however I did not do. I am still at Wythville where I preach half my time & the other half in Pulaski.

Margaret & the children were well when I left home; and we all have enjoyed generally good health since I had wrote. My general health is better than it has been for several years. My friends in Pulaski & Blacksburg were well when I left there....

I suppose you have had some addition to your domestic treasure since you wrote last. We have not yet, — we have but four but are expecting a New-years-gift. I am anxious to hear from you; & to hear what you are doing for the education of your children. What ever you do — or do not do, — do not neglect that. It is the most valuable legacy you could possibly leave them. We have good schools in Wythville — both male & female.

Andrew Mathis has bought land in, & moved to Pulaski. He is in striking distance of my church, & was there last sabbath. He gave \$30.000 for about 17.000 acres. His land lies near Newbern the county seat. The

rail-road is progressing very well. The cars now run to within four miles of this place — Salem: And most of the grading is done between this & New-River, & a great-deal between the River & Tennessee. The work will soon be done; & then what a country will the South western Virginia be!! I wish your lands lay out here. They would then be worth something....

The first train of the new Virginia & Tennessee Railroad had arrived at Big Lick on 1 November 1852, and trains were within four miles of Salem when he wrote.

William P. Hickman's four children were Elizabeth "Eliza" Jane, Mary Crockett, James Brown, and Emily Kate. In the next letter he announced the birth of another son, William White Hickman, born 31 December 1852. William was a favorite name among the Hickmans and now there was a second William W. Hickman to confuse with Arthur's son, although with a twenty-five year difference in ages.

Wytheville Jan 31st 1853

Dear Brother:

Your letter came duly to hand & I was glad to hear from you. We are all in good health. My expected New-year's gift came to hand the evening before about sundown — a son; we call him William White after Dr. White of Lexington. He is doing very well. He is a month old this evening.

The friends in Pulaski were all well a week ago except Mary Hoge, John Mathew's wife, who was quite sick. It was thought she had the fever.<sup>4</sup>

You wished to know what it would cost to send Landreth & Lizzie to school here a year. I could suppose it hardly worth while to say any thing on that subject now, as we expect to start to California in May i.e. provided I can sell this property on which I am living; I do not expect to sell my land in Pulaski. Mr. Charles McClannahan of Roanoke an acquaintance of mine, has spent three years in California & is now in Wythe expects to return with his family this Spring & we expect to go out with him. Mr. Robert Crockett, son of one of the elders of this church is going. He & McClannahan expect to take out 5.000 sheep. I had forgot to say we expect to go by land from Independence Missouri over the plains & across the Rocky mountains. It is 1600 miles from Independence to California....

They need ministers there very much, especially Presbyterian. There were seventeen towns that applied to the Presbytery of California last spring for preachers offering a salary of 2500 dollars a year. The field is very important & promising. And I hope to enter it before the close of the year. ... By the way how would you like to go to that country? I should like to have you along. The government gives each settler 160 acres of land....





*William Taylor (1821–1902), Methodist missionary to California from 1849 to 1856, with his wife Isabelle Anne Kimberlin. Raised in Rockbridge County, he was the son of Martha E. Hickman and Stuart Taylor, and a nephew of William P. Hickman. Near the end of his long missionary career William Taylor was named the Methodist Episcopal Bishop of Africa.*

This reply to an inquiry from Roger must have come as quite a surprise, considering William's love for the Wythe and Pulaski county areas and his many entreaties to Roger about joining him there.

Succumbing to gold fever, William sold his Wythe County farm and prepared to move to California to preach to the godless miners. Since the salary paid by his small congregations totaled only \$800 to \$1,000 per year, the \$2,500 salary in California must have seemed generous. However, costs of living in California would have gobbled it up. At about the time William P. paid \$240 for five half-acre lots with a small house near Wytheville, his nephew had to pay \$1,250 for a lot only 23 feet by 137 feet (less than 1/10 acre) in booming San Francisco. William Taylor (1821–1902), son of William's sister, Martha Elliott Hickman (1800–75), had gone to California as a Methodist missionary in 1849 and was making a name for himself as an eloquent and forceful preacher on the streets of San Francisco.

As it turned out, William P. Hickman did not take his family to California. Maybe he got cold feet and could not put them on the road west, but it is unlikely that Margaret caused his change of mind because in later letters William noted her suggestions that he should see the West — probably meaning Missouri — and also take a look at Texas as places where they could relocate.

Roanok Montgomery County Va. May 6th 1853

Dear Brother.

I suppose you are very anxious to hear from me as the last time I wrote to you, it was my purpose to go to California. I sold my property in Wythe with that intention; but all my friends & bretheren in the ministry whith whom I came in contact, & especially the church in Pulaski opposed my going very strongly; & other difficulties arising in our geting ready in time to go this Spring. We have for the present pitched our tent within four miles of Blacksburg on the road leading from Blacksburg to Fincastle on a farm belonging to Col. Thomas — which I think I pointed out to you when we passed by it some years ago.<sup>5</sup> The Col. had built a new house which had never been occupied in which we are living. The pastoral relation between me & the church of Wytheville was dissolved by Presbytry last week, & I expect for the present to divide my time between Blacksburg & Bell Spring the church in Pulaski.

We have not entirely abandoned the idea of going to California. We may go next spring. But in that I will be subject to the leading of Providence. Should I not go, I shall give out all idea of leaving this country & shall go to our farm & build there & settle down for life. At least that is my present feelings. The man that is living on it, is doing very well both for himself and for me. He had between 25 & 30 acres in corn last year which brought him, he told me, an average of fifty bushels to the acre. The rail road runs in some two miles of it.

I sold my property in Wythe for \$2250. cash. I would not have taken that if I had known how things would have turned out. But I trust there is an overeeling providence it. You may remember that Blacksburg church presented me a call last Winter was a year which I then declined. And it was the least of my thoughts when I got the California fever that was to bring me to the very place I had declined fifteen months before. But as it is, "A man's heart deviseth his ways; but the Lord directeth his steps." You might get out to see us now, as we are some fifty odd miles nearer than formerly. It is but 36 miles from Fincastle to my house. But the most direct way is by Covington & New Castle. We have been talking of paying you a visit the latter part of the summer or the early part of the Fall, but I dont know how it may turn out yet.

Margaret has not had quite as good health the past Winter & Spring as usual. She has suffered a great deal from a pain in her jaw & ear & such like ailment of the head & face. My own health has been better than it has been for many years. A few weeks ago, I weighed 175½ & I have lost none since. I suffer but little now from dyspepsia.

I saw Shanklin McClintic at Presbytry last week — he gave me some of the news of Bath. Let Lanty & Lizzie come to see us this summer. — Inclosed I send you your old note for renewal. I do not need the money. You can have the use of it as long as you may choose, or until it is entirely

convenient for you to pay. But I think as there are a good many credits endorsed on the note, it would be better to renew it.

William P. Hickman had pulled himself up by his own bootstraps from the time he left Back Creek for Washington College. As an impoverished student he wore his few clothes till threadbare, and he wrote of his appreciation for receiving a new pair of warm socks from home or enough homespun cloth to have a pair of pants made. Unable to afford to ride, he walked the sixty miles between home and school each term. And while at the Union Theological Seminary, he wrote of having "tea & bread, bread & tea, and tea & bread" with lots of sugar for his three meals a day.

Even though he sold his Wythe County farm for less than it may have been worth, William was now financially secure. He had the Pulaski County property leased to Mr. Burton, and he was able to buy still more land. He no longer asked Roger for money and, in fact, told his brother there was no urgency in Roger paying the balance of the note due since their father's death in 1843. By the terms of their father's will, Arthur was to pay \$100 and Roger was to pay \$200 to William from the assets willed to them. Now, ten years later, there was an outstanding note by which Roger still owed William \$146.50, and William charged him interest on the balance. The method by which he calculated the interest caused a later misunderstanding. By that will William also inherited a slave named Jesse, six years old at the time, who is mentioned in several of the following letters.

Montgomery Co. Va. June 22nd 1853

Dear Brother.

I wrote you the 6th of May but have not yet recd. an answer. My letter may have been miscarried. As your note had a good many entries on it &c. & had been of several years standing, I sent it to you in my last for renewal. The amount on the 6th of May was \$146.50 I make this statement because it may be my letter containing the note never came to hand.

We think it probable that we — Myself wife — five children & Jesse — will pay you a visit about the first day of Sept. if we can make the arrangements, & provided also, you think you could find room for such a swarm, a few days. We propose to leave here the 29th of Aug. & spend two weeks in Bath & Rockbridge, & take Presbytry on our way home, which is to meet at Falling Spring (8 miles from Lex.) on the 15th of Sept. And I should like it if Andrew could meet us at your house the first of Sept. Margaret has never seen him, & wants him to meet us there. If we can carry out our present plan, I will preach for you the first Sat. & Sunday in Sept. at your house if you desire it.

We are all pretty well. One of the children — Emily — next to the youngest — has not been very well for several days; but with that excep-

tion, we are well. Margaret's health is much better now than it was in the winter & spring. Our friends in these parts are well.

Mr. Chs. Black Mary Hoge's father, dropped dead in his yard the 7 of this month of apoplexy. He had had a stroke about six weeks previous, & had made his will & settled up his business. And atho the call was sudden, it was not unexpected....

Andrew Johnson Hickman (1811–80) was a younger brother who had moved from Back Creek west to Pocahontas, then Greenbrier, and on to Nicholas County.

Charles Black's daughter Mary was the wife of John Matthew Hoge (1819–1903?). Six years later William noted that Mary Black's mother was one of "two very sudden & unexpected deaths in my congregation at Blacksburg."<sup>6</sup>

In the next letter William mentioned another "shirt-tail" relative who was dying. John Peterman was the husband of Jane Rutledge Hoge (1804–59), Margaret's half-sister by their father's second wife. Jane Rutledge Hoge Peterman would be the second of those sudden and unexpected deaths in 1859.

Blacksburg July 14th 1853.

Dear Brother.

Yours of June 13th & July 2nd was duly recd. today. I was very sorry that you think I charged you compound interest on the note I sent you. You are certainly mistaken. I would rather loose the debt than do so knowingly, & I have always thought for these twenty years at least, that I knew how to compute simple interest, as well as compound; & to know the difference between them. I hope you still have the old bond. if so keep it till I see you, & I know I can in five minutes satisfy you that you are mistaken. I computed the simple interest at six per centum per annum on that bond, & not one cent more. I think I know wherin your mistake lies. And if you will examine the Arithmetics on bonds where partial payments have been made, I presume you will be able to see your error without my assistance. Compound interest is illegal in Va & exposes him who exacts it to the forfeiture of the whole debt. And it being illegal, it would be immoral in me to charge it. But I know you did not bringe or impute such a charge against me. But your statement has made me feel very badly. Such consequences being involved in it. But I will dismiss it for the present by again saying you are mistaken in your supposition. And honestly so, I have no doubts.

We are all pretty well. Margaret was complaining of headache this morning when I left home.

Mr Peterman, at whose house I now am, & who married one of Margarets half-sisters, is very low. He cant live but a day or two. Disease of the stomach. He has been a very worldly man, & has accumulated a good deal of prop-

erty; but has been for some days thoroughly awake to his awful situation. And his distress has been, & still is awful. Poor man, how he has suffered both in body & mind. He unites his testimony to the millions who have preceded him, that a death bed is a poor place to prepare for eternity. ...

I think I told you of the death of Chs. Black in my last.

I hope to see you in Sept. Is there a good waggon road down the Indian drought from Vances in the direction of Covington? I hardly know how to get on to Back Creek. I can get to Covington pretty directly for here; but how to get from thence to the Creek bothers me a good deal.

I got a letter day before yesterday from little John G. Kerr. He is going as a Missionary Physician to China; & is now on his way to New York.

Write soon & let me know how the road is from your house to Covington or, to Callehan's old stand; or whether there is a road through the drought yet; & what sort, & whence it intersects the road leading from the Warm Springs to the White Sulphur.

The primitive roads of the time may have changed enough for William P. to need Roger's help in planning his route. Vance's was the site of an old fort from the time of the Indian Wars near Mt. Grove in Bath County. The Indian Draft, Callaghan's old stand, and Covington were southwest of Back Creek in Alleghany County. If William P. went to Sun Rise by that route, then he took a different route home as outlined in the next letter. Millboro lies southeast of Sun Rise in Bath County. Martha Hickman and Stuart Taylor — parents of William Taylor — had their home near the head of Cedar Creek, near Cedar Grove Mills in Rockbridge County, and the Kerrs lived in Lexington. So, William and Margaret visited with family and friends on the return journey.

John G. Kerr was most likely a son of the Kerr's of Lexington, with whom William had boarded while a student at Washington College.

Montgomery Co. Va. Jun 26th 1854.

Dear Brother.

I have delayed writing to you much longer than I had intended when I left you. We got to Millboro the day we left your house; & the next day to Mr. Taylor's. We visited Mr. Kerr's the Monday after Presbytery; Tuesday it rained all day, so we staid there that day; on Wednesday we went to Mr. Robert Glasgows, where we staid till Thursday afternoon, when we left for home, where we arrived Saturday a little before sundown without a mishap of any kind. We had an exceedingly pleasant visit. Margaret says she never enjoyed a visit so much in her life. Now it remains for you & your Margaret to return the visit.

I have been trying to purchase a house in blacksburg, but as yet have been unable to get one that would suit me. And so we have concluded to remove to Pulaski & build us a cabin on our own dung-hill raise our own

potatoes. I was at a sale yesterday & bought a plow & harrow. One of my Pulaski hearers not knowing what was in my head, wished to what I wanted with a harrow? I replied, by asking him if he did not think my people needed a harrowing some times.

Mr. Burton raised four hundred bushels of wheat last year, & about two thousand bushels of corn. I have some thought of buying the remainder of the time. I will either do that or build me a cabin on the other end of the farm & open land for myself.

Wheat is very high here now. It is selling at a dollar & a half in Lynchburg. And about ten cents will market it, from here. Corn is worth 62½ cents per bushel, & rising. It is pretty near time for me to go to the [White] Glade, with plow & harrow, when bread-stuffs are getting up so. Every thing is getting up, but preacher's salaries. They remain about the old noch.

I have nothing new or important to write. All the friends are well. My own health has been generally remarkably good since I was in Bath. The rheumatism took hold of me last fall pretty strongly; but I commenced the first of November taking a cold bath every morning; & some times at night also & it has relieved me almost entirely; & has improved my general health very much. I have several times broken the ice, & gone in when the mushy ice would sweep down my sides. I am very advantageously situated as the creek is only about fifty steps from the house. It is not as disagreeable as one would suppose. I of course dry off, & dress by the fire. Do you try it. I know you would like it if you would try it awhile.

I wrote to Andrew some time since but have not received an answer yet. I suppose you have heard of Dr. Patton's death? I was very sorry to hear of it. He was an excellent man. I loved him like a brother.

Margaret & the children are well I have been teaching Lizzie & Mary since my return from Bath. Lizzie is beginning to read right smart. She says she wants to learn to read Greek like Pa. I some times read the Greek Testament aloud; & when I do, she & Mary will sit & listen with all eagerness, delighted simply with the sound. I know a minister, who was led to lay aside the plain, & seek a classical education by hearing a boy repeat the Greek alphabet.

I wish your home lay in this country i.e. in Pulaski. But the time for getting land here at low prices has past. There is a little piece of land adjoining mine of 148 acres which Moses Lloyd bought some 4 or 5 years ago for about \$3. per acre, for which I offered him \$10. a few weeks ago & he would not take it.

The man, whose sale I was at yesterday has rented his farm of 1000 acres 600 cleared for a term of ten years to some men who are about setting up a cheese & butter factory near Christiansburg for \$1000. a year i.e. \$10,000. for the ten years!! Ain't that going it? And that too for grazing purposes; which will improve the land. ...

Dr. William Nicholas Patton, from Cedar Creek in Bath County, died 12 October 1853. Patton had been his roommate at Washington College and was the brother of Elizabeth Howard Patton whom William intended to marry. When Eliza died of consumption (tuberculosis) in December 1834, William Hickman was devastated and, in her memory, took Patton as his middle name in 1836. Up to that time his letters were signed "William Hickman Jr." or "William Hickman Secund."<sup>7</sup>

Over the years William tried a variety of remedies for rheumatism including wearing flannel shirts, drinking water from various mineral springs, and now a cold bath in the creek.

The value of farm crops was increasing, with corn going from 37.5 cents per bushel in 1852 to 62.5 cents in 1854. And the price of land was also rising, to the extent that he could not persuade Margaret's brother-in-law, Moses Lloyd, to sell at what sounds like a nice profit. Increasing prosperity may have enabled William to live on his Pulaski County farm for awhile because the next letter was sent from there, but gaps in letters at this time leave his movements a mystery. Most surviving letters were sent from Blacksburg.

Pulaski Co. Aug. 9th 1855.

Dear Brother.

I suppose you have looked so long for a letter from me that you will be some what surprised to receive one. I will not formerly enter into the reasons for my long silence. For the reason will be seen as you proceed. You percieve from the caption of my letter that I am in Pulaski. I bought Jacob Howery's lease & moved to my own farm last March was a year. I have put up a comfortable hewed-log house with some out houses: but do not intend to build extensively as I am on the East end, where as I intend living on the West end of my farm as soon as Burton is out off my way. I had out about ten acres of corn last year. It was good but did not furnish enough. I sowed about eighteen acres of wheat last fall most of which was good. I have not thrashed it yet; but I expect to have about a hundred bushels to sell. I have out about thirty acres of corn this year which looks well. The wheat crop in this country is an abundant one; & corn was never more promising & a great quantity out.

Mr Burton, my tenant, has been doing badly. He has been turned out off the church for lying & profane swearing. He has been giving me some trouble; but as I hold the rains in my own hand he can't do much. I think I shall discharge him this Winter. I have already given him notice to that efect. He is bound to give up his lease when ever I want it; & to leave the terms to the arbitration of three men. I think I shall take full possion in the Spring. I had a well dug on Burton's end last summer, & got very good water at thirty feet.

We burried our little Willie last fall. He took the flux in June, & before he had entirely recovered from that he took the whooping cough, which caused the flux to return, & then the two disease aggravated each other. In October he seemed to get a little better but the cough ultimately settled on his lungs, & he died the 9th of Nov. being 22 months & 14 days old. Poor little fellow, he suffered greatly, but our loss was his gain. For "of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." But the Lord has given us another on the ninth of last March. His name is John Hoge. He is very much like Willie....

Robert Crockett got back from California last spring. He made a loosing trip of it. He says McClannahan misrepresented things altogether. McClannahan has proved himself to be nother but a liar, a blackleg & a swindler. What an escape I made!! He swindled Crocket out off some three or four thousand dollars besides Crocking our lopes. He however seems to be cheerful & happy since his return. He says Callifornia is the last place in creation; especially for an honest man.

John M. Hoge & family are well. They lost a little girl some two or three years old since I was in Bath.— I wish you would take the time to pay me a visit. Our Presbytry meets in Covington the 18 of October suppose you come out the latter part of next month, & then I would accompany you that far on your return. Or if it would suit you better come home with me. The Synod meets in Lexington the week after presbytery. I would be glad if you & Lizie would meet me there & come home with me, if you cannot come before. And let her spend the winter with us. We have plenty of wood & some wheat, & a prosect for a few hundred bushels of corn, some potatoes, & we have just sowed about an acre in turnips; so that all together there is righ smat between us & starvation.

I want to hear from you very much. I have not heard since you sent me the grafts: which by the way got too dry before they came to hand. I did not get one....

William had heartbreaking news about his little son, William White Hickman, who died before he was two years old. But he and Margaret had a new son named for the boy's grandfather, John Hoge. The flux William mentioned was a nineteenth century term for what we call dysentery.

"Blackleg" was the term for a cheating gambler, and it does seem William had a narrow escape by not going to California with Charles McClannahan.

The next letter took three weeks on its journey from Bath County to Montgomery County.



Blacksburg March 8th 1857

Dear Brother.

Your very welcome letter of the 14th ultimo came to hand this evening. I was aware that I was the delinquent. I had not forgotten you, tho' I had neglected you. I have often, often thought of you, & over & over again purposed to write, but did not just then get at. When I was farming I was kept very busy; & now I am teaching, & am kept busier than ever. I found that I could not get my children educated unless I would teach them myself; & there was a teacher needed very much in this place, so I yielded to the urgent solicitations of my friends here, to move over & open a female school in the Blacksburg Academy. I opened the 5th of Jan. I now have 33 scholars. Nine of them studying Latin. It is the first time I have ever taught girls alone; & I greatly prefer them to boys. There is no comparison. The only draw back is, my health is not so good, as it was when farming. I suffer a good deal from dyspepsia.

My Mag presented me with another daughter the 27th of Dec. It is a fine harty child. We call her Kate Lyle. Mary Hoge, John's wife, has another daughter some 2 weeks old. She has been very sick, but I head from her this evening & she is better.

I was gratified to learn that Huldah expects to visit us not summer. I have been think & talking of visiting her during the coming Summer. As Margaret is anxious for me to take a look at the Western country. I was surprised to learn that Wm Taylor had returned from Cal. Do you know why? Is it on a visit? This seems improbable as he (from your letter) seems to have stoped in New York....

I recd a letter from W. W. Hickman a short time ago. He told me of his brother's death. I am afraid he will be disappointed in getting mony, for I have been wholly unable this far to get any for him. But I hope I shall in a few days. Money matters are very tight here, & have been for months. Wm was saying something about your sending Lanty out here to go to school. My house is small, but if you wish to send him, I will do the best I can for him. There is a male school here — an embrio college under the Baltimore Conference. But I do not know from personal knowledge, what sort of a school it is.

But if you would send Lizzie I take care of her at my own school. I do not know what to say about going to Bath this Summer. If Huldah comes of course I must see her. I was asking Mag about taking another trip but she seems rather to back out unless we could leave all the children at home, — I suppose except the baby — Kate. But I would like to take them all along. — & we have but one more than we had when we visited you before. We have six. And the older ones are better able to take care of the small ones. But I suppose you would have to fit up the barn for them to sleep in....

... The Hoge Lanty met with near Richmond was a cousin of Margaret's. He told me of his speaking with him. He is one of the General's sons.

And by the way Aunt Nelly, the General's wife is dead. She dropt dead from her feet. She was standing in the poarch at her house talking to me, & sunk down, & as she sunk I cought her, & two minutes she was dead - she never breathed — nor moved. I never conceived of any thing as sudden. the general was then lying with a stroke of paralasis from which he has only partially recovered. It was in June aunt Nelly died. Kind regards to all: & to Lizzie especially for her kind letter which I have not yet answered....

Once again, William P. Hickman was teaching school and suffering from dyspepsia, a chronic problem that appeared whenever he took up teaching.

His statement about opening a female school in the Blacksburg Academy is confusing; a Blacksburg Female Academy had opened in the town some seventeen years earlier.

The “embrio college” was the new Olin and Preston Institute, opened under Methodist sponsorship in 1851 and granted a charter in 1854. The little institute fell on hard times and closed during the Civil War. In the years just before the Civil War, with no public school system in Virginia, there were hundreds of small, privately supported academies in the state with a total estimated enrollment in 1860 of 13,000 students and 700 teachers.<sup>8</sup>

But there were no academies on Back Creek, and it was necessary for Roger Hickman to send his children away from home to get an education. After the war Roger sent his eleventh child, my grandfather, to Roller's School at Fort Defiance in Augusta County.

William considered making another trip to visit Roger on Back Creek, taking his whole family. Traveling must have been tough enough in those days even without a double handful of kids to look out for, and they would probably have made such a trip in the farm wagon, probably with some hay in the wagon bed to cushion the ride for the kids in back. One reason for the trip would be to once again see his sister Huldah Shallum Hickman (1806–88), who had moved to Illinois in 1834 with her husband, Isaac Callison, and several children.<sup>9</sup>

After William Taylor had spent seven years preaching in California, a San Francisco fire and financial panic wiped out his mission, forcing his return to the East Coast. There he wrote two books about his California experience to recoup the money owed: *Seven Years Street Preaching in San Francisco* and *California Life, Illustrated*, published in 1857 and 1858, respectively. They were the first of seventeen books written by that amazing man who supported his missionary work on four continents with income from the books and public speaking tours. William Taylor was later

the Methodist Episcopal Bishop of Africa and, in his time, the best known of the Hickmans.

William married into an influential family. His wife's uncle was James Hoge (1783–1861), brigadier general of the 19th Brigade of Virginia Militia who had been a captain in the 75th Virginia regiment during the War of 1812. The general's wife was Eleanor "Nelly" Howe (1792–1856), who died 13 June 1856. Eliza Hoge (1815–46), the only daughter among their five children, died on 11 August 1846, leaving an infant son named James Hoge Tyler (1846–1925), who grew up to become the governor of Virginia in 1898 — the third Tyler to serve as governor.

Blacksburg March 27th 1857

Dear Brother.

I have just returned from Pulaski after an absence of several days. Mary Hoge, wife of John M. Hoge, has been very sick, but is recovering. Margaret went over last Wednesday week, & I went over Sab. evening, & we returned to day. On my return amongst other letters I was no little surprised to find one from you to "Mr. W. W. Hickman Braxton C. H. Va." which your Postmaster has carelessly sent to me at Blacksburg Va. I have inclosed it & will give it another start in the morning. — I think you had better not attempt to send that money by mail, unless you cut the notes & send half at a time. And it would be well for you to take a note of the number, letter &c of the notes you send, in the presence of the P. Master then if one letter should fail, the other end of the notes will draw the money in Bank or banks whence the notes were issued.

We are all quite well. Kate grows finely. I sent William a certificate of deposit on the bank in this place a couple of weeks ago, for \$100. which I hope he received.

My folks are all in bed. Good night. Love to all.

In continuing a tradition of helping family, Roger and William P. were sending money to their nephew, and that is the last word we have of the family of Arthur Hickman. Some of his descendants may still live in West Virginia, but the contact with their cousins on Back Creek was lost.

Blacksburg Montgomery Co. Va Dec. 20th 1858

Dear Brother.

I was very much gratified on the reception of your letter. It had been along time since I had heard from you, & was therefore much more gratified on hearing. I was sorry to hear that you had lost Peter Lightner from your community for I think he has not left many equals behind him in that community. I do not wonder that you some times feel like leaving too. Had you left ten or twelve years ago & purchased in this country as I wanted you, you would have bettered your condition very much. But it is now too late for that here, as land has more than doubled in that time.

The rail road has wrought wonders here. There is some pretty good land now for sale in Pulaski adjoining mine on the South, & on the Rail Road, for which I have understood 26 dollars per acre is asked. There are some 15 or 16 hundred acre in the tract. I should like very much to have you for a neighbor. Some of the land is very good, & some of it is rather thin.

We had an excessively dry season here last year. Wheat, about half a cropt. Oats a perfect failure; I have been trying to get some for seed, but have not yet succeeded. Corn also very short, — & especially in this vicinity. I had some 6 or 8 acres out here, from which I expected to get as much as wuld do me but I got I suppose about 50 bushels. The corn on my farm in Pulaski was good — the best in that neighborhood. I had rented a field of some 25 acres from which I have already halled a good deal, & have a great deal more to husk. I will have more than will do me. It is quite troublesome to hall so far. I will also have some wheat to sell. I have bought three parcels of land all lying together about a mile & a half from town — together making about ninety acres for which I gave lot first containing 33 acres forty dollars per acre — lot second I bought by the lot containing about 25 acres for which I gave \$775. the third & last purchase I gave \$26.50 per acre. Some of the land is very good especially my first purchase a pourtion well timbered, & some ten or twelve acre prity well set in grass, from which I mowed last summer as much hay as will keep my horses I hope till hay comes again. But the drought has killed a great deal of the timothy. There are rods where you can with your foot just rake the ground perfectly bare.

But I did not intend troubling you with so long an account of my farming matters as I am no farmer.

We are all pretty well. And had another added to our family two weeks ago tonight the 6th instant, which is the eighth giving us seven living children — five daughters & two sons. We have not named her yet. The children want to call her Margaret after their mother; I dont know how they will come out I am indifferent. The list is Eliza Jane, Mary Crockett, James Brown, Emily Susen, William White (dead), John Hoge, Kate Lyle, & the baby. No mean string — for length. And then the end, perhaps not yet.

I have been right anxious to go to see you for some time, but I do not know when I will be able to do so; as it seems difficult for me to leave home. I dislike to leave my churches vacant. That is the principle difficulty. I wish you would come over & see us. Bring Lizzie & let her stay several months with us it would do her good. We have plenty of room now, as I enlarged my house last Summer. And I have corn enout to feed her on for a few months any how....

Suppose you come to see me this winter & bring Lizzie, you would be out only two nights from home to Covington from Covington to Pottse's Creek & the Blue Spring run to New-Castle & the third day to my house. I wish you would. I had intended writing some to Lizzie, but my paper is

about out & it is pritty near time for the mail to close for today; so must, defer to another time what I have to say to her.

Margaret is in her chamber caring for the little one, & the girls are at school & James has gone with Jesse to the field with a load of manure & to bring back a load of fodder for the cows — they would all join in much love to you & family one & all.

Yours as ever    W. P. Hickman

It is hard to account for the indifference to the naming of his eighth child. William's daughter was two weeks old and did not yet have a name, which was not at all unusual in that household, but he seemed willing to leave the matter up to the other children. She was eventually called Leila Lowry Hickman.

William's eldest son, James Brown, was ten years old and big enough to help the twenty-one-year-old slave, Jesse, with the farm work.

It seems that, after commuting the twelve miles to White Glade for years in order to farm, William P. Hickman finally bought about ninety acres of land near Blacksburg. So, he again had farms in two counties. Having enlarged his house, and with corn enough to feed visitors, he wanted Roger to come with his daughter Lizzie for a visit. But it sounds in the first paragraph as if Roger had considered leaving Back Creek for the West.

The Peter Lightner (1816–71) who went west to Missouri in 1858 or 1859 was the son of Jacob Lightner and grandson of an earlier Peter Lightner and among the most highly respected persons of his community. He married Rachel Berry Hamilton (1821–94), a neighbor of Roger Hickman on Back Creek. Peter and Rachel joined the Warm Springs Presbyterian Church in 1858, the same year Roger Hickman became a ruling elder of that congregation.

Roger Hickman's eleventh child was born 23 February 1858 and named Peter Lightner Hickman in honor of his neighbor. At about the same time, another family on Back Creek named its son Peter Lightner Gum. Those folks lived in a small world in which neighboring families provided a wonderful network of support for each other.

William P. wrote the following letter to his niece Mary Elizabeth Hickman (1840–1909, the oldest half-sister of Peter Lightner Hickman), when she was nineteen years old. From the tone of his various letters, William was eager to have Lizzie live with him, but not so eager to have her older brother Lanty. That may be because he saw Lizzie as potential domestic help for Margaret.

Blacksburg Va. Sept 16th 1859

Dear Lizzie,

I have been intending for a long time to write to you; but have put it off from time to time, waiting for more leisure that I might write you a letter more worthy of your perusel. But, although I have thus long put it off, I fear that the present production will be little better than a blank.

It has been a good while since I heard from you, I do not recollect how long. I hope you are all well.

My main object in writing to you at this time is to invite you to come out to the meeting of our Synod which is to commence on the 5th of next month at Christiansburg, nine miles south of this place. Could not your Pa bring you out to Synod, & leave you with us all winter; & Lanty could come after you in the Spring, or I could take you home in the Spring, if he could not come. And you could either go to school if you choose, or spend you time in reading, & profitable visiting & the like. We have a good female school here now. What say you to it? I should like to see you any how if it was only on a visit for a few days. Come & see where we live & how we live. Not that I have anything more than a comfortable home to invite you to.

The health of the family has not been very good for near a year past. I think when I last wrote Emma Sue had St. Vites' dance She was very bad with it all winter — so bad that she could not hold up her head, nomore than an infant, for several weeks, & could not speak or make her wants known by nod or gesture for a long time. And your Aunt had a young baby at the same time to care for, which she had to raise by hand, rendering it very cross & troublesome. These cares & anxieties caused her health to give way, which up to this time she has not regained. Emma Sue has been pretty well during the Summer; but since the weather has begun to grow cool, her nervousness has been returning. But she is still able to go about & feed herself. And I hope she may be spared such another spell of suffering as she had last winter. This is the third attack. The first was last Spring a year ago. The baby — Leila Lowry — has been quite sick for a week, but I think is better now, tho' still far from well. The rest of the children are well. Lizzie & Mary are going to school.

We have had a dry summer with us, & consequently rather light corn crops; which by the way is not entirely out of danger yet, as a great deal of it is very late. The corn on the river bottom is matured & most of it cut off. But the upland corn would be greatly injured by frost now. We had a very severe frost the morning of the fifth of June that bit the corn badly. & threw it back. The wheat was also very much injured in certain localities. And wheat generally is not threashing out up to expectation. Grain was very scarce with us last Spring & Summer; & I fear it will be so again next year. The people are in need of money & are consequently runing off their surplus wheat as fas as they can get it out & the cars can take it away.

We have had two very sudden & unexpected deaths in my congregation at Blacksburg this Summer viz. Mrs. Peterman, my wife's sister, & Mrs. Black the mother of J. M. Hoge's wife. ...

I have been anxious to go to see you this fall, but I know not whether I will be able to make it out. Your aunt has been urging me to visit Texas to look at the country to see how I would like it for a home; but the means to go on are so hard to get, I think that trip very doubtful; tho' I should like very much to see that country. I doubt not, but we could better our condition by a removal to that state. Missouri is too cold for me. ...

St. Vitus' dance, now called chorea, is a disease of the nervous system characterized by jerky, involuntary movements of the face and extremities and occurs mostly in children.

Unfortunately, that is the last letter from William P. to his family that has passed down over these 139 years. It is unfortunate that no later ones survive to help explain the meaning of the following rather cryptic letter to the governing body of the Blacksburg church.

Blacksburg Dec. 16th 1860

To the Session of the Presbyterian ch. Blacksburg.

Dear Bretheren.

In the Providence of God I am led to feel that it is my duty to tender to you, & through you to the members of the church & congregation, the pastoral charge of the Presbyterian church & congregation of Blacksburg. And I do hereby ask you to join with me in asking Presbytery to dissolve the Pastoral relation now existing between me & this church. The reasons for this step need not now be given; as I presume, they are all known to you.

And may the Lord bless you abundantly; & pour out his Spirit upon you, & make each one of you a blessing.

May you be guided & supported while in this world of sin & sorrow; & when the toils of life are over may you receive the plaudid, "well done good & faithful servant enter thou into the joy of your Lord."

Your Pastor

W. P. Hickman<sup>10</sup>

While William P. thought the reasons for his resignation were all known to the members of the Session, they are not so evident to us today. Smyth, in *A History of the Blacksburg Presbyterian Church*, did nothing to illuminate the subject, leaving the impression that the Rev. William P. Hickman resigned because of a salary dispute:

...on May 1, 1853, the Rev. W. P. Hickman was called to serve as Stated Supply in Blacksburg for half his time, in addition to serving Bell Spring. Then, after Mr. Chevalier went west, Presbytery installed Mr. Hickman as regular pastor for half-time in Blacksburg on June 13, 1857. During this

period, the Blacksburg people seem to have had financial difficulties. When Presbytery met here in 1859, “They were admonished for their delinquency in discharging their pecuniary obligation to their pastor.” Again in 1860 this happened, and the church in Blacksburg was notified that they were expected to pay interest on the arrearage due Mr. Hickman, and that they ought to increase his salary to at least \$700 and to report their action at the next meeting of Presbytery. The Rev. Mr. Hickman was released from his pastoral connection with the Blacksburg Church on August 16, 1861, “for reasons which seemed satisfactory.” He continued as pastor of Bell Spring Church, but was killed in action at the Battle of Cloyd’s Mountain on Cloyd’s Mountain May 9, 1864, while serving in a Confederate artillery brigade.<sup>11</sup>

However, Smyth does provide a clue to other problems when he refers to 1862 as “... a time of stress and turmoil. The dust had not settled from the unfortunate Luster-Hickman affair...”<sup>12</sup>

On the same day that William P. Hickman submitted his letter in 1860, the Session minutes reveal the following action by that body:

It being commonly reported that Achilles W. Luster had been guilty of unchristian and grossly immoral conduct in this, that he did on the \_\_\_ day of \_\_\_ attempt to commit a rape upon the person of Elizabeth Jane Hickman. It is ordered that the said Achilles W. Luster be cited to appear before the session on the 6th Day of January 1861 at the Presbyterian church in Blacksburg to answer said charges and that Elizabeth Jane Hickman, Mary C Hickman, William P Hickman, George W Sheaf., Giles D Thomas & Thos. T Jackson, P L Francisco be named as witnesses.<sup>13</sup>

Nine months later, minutes for the meeting of 11 September 1861, provided more details to the charge:

It appearing that in the charge against A W Luster brought on the 16th Dec 1860 the time and place were omitted ordered that the said charge be now corrected by inserting the time 12th of July 1860 & the place the Rev. Mr. Hickmans parlor.

So there we have a second reason, more serious than a salary dispute, for Hickman to dissolve his relationship with the Blacksburg church. Achilles W. Luster, a member of the church, was accused of attacking the pastor’s sixteen-year-old daughter, Elizabeth Jane (1844–72), in her father’s home on 12 July 1860. The mystery to us now is why an attempted rape of his daughter would have caused the preacher, who should have been the aggrieved party, to resign his post. Could Luster’s behavior have irreparably damaged the pastor’s relationship with his flock?

A Montgomery County Grand Jury indicted Luster “for an attempt to commit rape” but when he appeared for trial at the county court on



7 November 1860, the case was continued to the June 1861 term. At that time the indictment was dismissed on a technicality due to the disqualification of one of the grand jurors who had found the presentment in the case.<sup>14</sup>

That led the Session of the Blacksburg Presbyterian Church to bring its own action against Luster under church authority on charges of attempt at rape and falsehood. However, because so many members of the Blacksburg Session were related to either Luster or Hickman, the Session asked to have trial jurisdiction transferred to the Montgomery Presbytery. On 14 April 1862, Montgomery Presbytery found Luster guilty of the first charge, attempt at rape, by a unanimous vote, and guilty of the second charge, falsehood, by a majority vote. They then proceeded to administer the Act of Suspension according to the current Directives for Worship which read:

Whereas you Mr A W Luster are in the judgement of this court found guilty of the sins of "attempt at rape" & "Falsehood" we declare you suspended from the sacraments of the church till you give satisfactory evidence of the sincerity of your repentance.<sup>15</sup>

For whatever reason he resigned, William P. Hickman was free to move his family across the New River to his White Glade farm in Pulaski County, where he continued as pastor of the Bell Spring Presbyterian Church.

On 19 April 1863, the Blacksburg Session granted a certificate of dismissal to Margaret Hickman and her daughter, Elizabeth Jane, to unite with the church at Bell Spring. However, for some reason they did not actually join the Bell Spring church until 23 July 1864.

In May of 1864 the Civil War arrived in Southwest Virginia, where Pulaski and Wythe Counties contained a number of resources important to the Confederacy. Among those were the saltworks at Saltville, lead mines at Austinville, and the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad. The rail depot and army warehouses at Dublin, and the bridge over the New River, became strategic objectives that Union forces were determined to destroy.

A Union Army division under the command of General George Crook had managed to move through West Virginia, eluding Confederate scouts, almost to Dublin before General Albert G. Jenkins, commanding the Confederate Department of Western Virginia, was aware of the danger. Jenkins gathered up all the available forces and called for reinforcements. He even took an artillery unit, the Ringold Battery, traveling by rail to reinforce Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, off the train at Dublin and sent it west toward Cloyd's Mountain on Saturday, 7 May 1864.

The next morning, Sunday 8 May 1864, General McCausland arrived with his brigade consisting of the 36th Virginia Infantry and 60th Virginia Infantry Regiments, the 45th Virginia Infantry Battalion, and one battery of

light artillery. Jenkins sent word to the surrounding communities that their home guards were needed for the impending conflict, and their response is noted in many of the regional histories:

...He called companies of home guards to Dublin. Word of Crook's approach reached Christiansburg while townspeople were in church. Every man rose and left the meeting house. Fetching their guns, men in surrounding counties formed ranks and set out for Dublin. Reverend William P. Hickman, pastor of the Dublin Presbyterian Church, urged his congregation to rally to the Confederate cause. Though overage himself, he left his pulpit with a flourish and volunteered to fight.<sup>16</sup>

This call to arms by the preacher, noted in several of these histories, seems to be a myth, and I am at a loss to explain its origin. I have found no primary source placing the Rev. William P. Hickman in the pulpit exhorting his congregation to join the defense of Dublin, but the story has been passed on by various writers. A contemporary newspaper account and Presbyterian memorials of 1864 and 1865, while telling of his bravery and cruel death, make no mention of the call to arms. A history of Pulaski County carries a more likely account:

The Rev. Mr. William P. Hickman was the first pastor of the old Bell Spring Presbyterian Church....

Before the Battle of Cloyd's Farm a Montgomery home guard company crossed the river, bound for the battlefield. As they passed the Bell Spring the minister, wearing his high silk hat, picked up a gun and joined the guardsmen. ...<sup>17</sup>

And an unpublished 1894 memorial, written with the help of William P. Hickman's diaries and the memory of his widow, stated:

... Having spent his Sabbath with his family May 8, 1864, the next day he went over to Back Creek, where the battle of Cloyd's Mountain was pending. His object was to minister to the wounded and dying.

Seeing an invading army coming into his very neighborhood was more than his courageous spirit could stand, and shouldering his musket, he went into the very thickest of the fight, ...<sup>18</sup>

A force of only about 3,000 Confederate troops, militia, and over-age home guards hastily gathered on the farm of Joseph Cloyd and set about fortifying a position astride the road to Dublin. They would try to prevent the advance of a Union Army division of over 6,100 men.<sup>19</sup>

Initially, the Confederate artillery took a fearful toll of Union soldiers, but then the Union First Brigade flanked the 60th Virginia Regiment on the Confederate right, which began to retreat. Then the center of the Confederate line fell back, leaving the Ringold Battery exposed. Lieutenant Will-

iam H. Lipscomb, with twenty-nine men of the battery and some home guards, struggled to defend his field piece. Among those home guards defending a gun when it was overrun was William P. Hickman.

...It was at this point that Mr. Hickman fell, mortally wounded.

Private Augustus Spotts McNeil, of the Forty-fifth Virginia regiment, saw the minister fall and heard him call for help. McNeil lifted Mr. Hickman, resting him against a tree....

After the battle, Yankee medics came to the aid of the Confederate as well as the Federal wounded. The minister, not being in uniform, was considered a bushwhacker, and was left on the battlefield without medical attention.

The Reverend Mr. Hickman died two days after the battle. ...<sup>20</sup>

“Bushwhacker” was the Yankee name for Confederate guerrillas, or irregular non-uniformed troops, whose mission was to harass the Union Army behind its lines.

Thus it was that the Union forces won the battle at Cloyd’s Mountain, and the Rev. William P. Hickman, who was born next to Back Creek in Bath County, died next to Back Creek in Pulaski County. His fifteen-year-old son, James Brown Hickman (1848–1908), was wounded in the battle.

A week after the battle Jane Wade, from her home in Christiansburg, wrote a long letter to her husband, Captain John C. Wade. Some excerpts follow:

Christiansburg 15th May, 1864

My Dearest Husband

... Well to commence at the beginning, just as we were going to Church last Sunday we heard the Yanks were advancing on Dublin and every man got up and left the Church....

We were badly whipped at Dublin. About 5 o’clock our wounded commenced coming in. Ed French was wounded in the foot, Nat Woods in the leg, White Ryan was killed and his two sons were wounded. Mr. Hickman died of his wounds and his son was wounded. Every house on Main Street had some wounded ones, some had four or five, some of them dreadfully wounded. They were coming in until 12 o’clock at night. ...I don’t suppose three women in the ’Burg went to bed that night....<sup>21</sup>

Margaret Hoge Hickman probably wrote such a letter to Roger telling of the battle and his brother’s death. If so, the letter is lost, but the following original clipping, from a Salem, Virginia, newspaper of 20 May 1864 that describes William’s death must have been sent by his widow. It says nothing of him exhorting a congregation to take up arms.

REV. WILLIAM P. HICKMAN

Among the countless victims of this cruel war, not many will be more deeply lamented than the pastor of the Presbyterian church at Bell Spring who fell in the fight with the Yankee raiders near Dublin while bravely defending his home against the invaders. Though past the military age, he had connected himself with the Home Guard of Pulaski county, and had on former occasions shown himself willing to take up arms in a cause to which he was ardently devoted.

During the hottest of the fight, being near one of the guns, and seeing the soldiers who supported it shot down, he rushed forward to take their place, and almost immediately fell, mortally wounded in the body. The last words he was heard to speak were “Do your best, boys, my work is ended!” — words worthy of a patriot, and Christian soldier.

No truer man, nor braver heart is left behind him. Falling into the hands of the enemy, and finding him in citizen’s dress, they chose to consider and speak of him as “a bushwhacker” and it is supposed that he was brutally treated by them. He was left on the field in a dying condition for thirty-six hours without any attention whatever, and died immediately after being removed to a neighboring house.

He had, for a few months past, been in part supplying the church in Salem in the absence of its pastor as chaplain in the army and had greatly endeared himself to the people during his brief ministry. We deeply sympathies [sic] with his bereaved widow and children, and lament his loss not only as a dear friend, but as a gifted and devoted minister of the Gospel.

A memorial in the Montgomery Presbytery minutes of 2 June 1865 provides additional information:

BATTLE OF CLOYD’S MOUNTAIN:  
THE REV. MR. HICKMAN’S DEATH

Bro. Hickman fell fighting for civil and religious liberty at Cloyd’s Farm on Monday, May 9, 1864. When the sound of cannon and the tramp of the enemies cavalry were heard approaching his humble home, threatening destruction, as well as the most cherished rights of humanity, he volunteered to join a company assigned to the duty of supporting a Brigade of Artillery; and it was while eagerly and bravely discharging this duty that he fell mortally wounded. After calling to his stripling son (who had run to his relief) to never mind him, but to fill his place in the ranks. And after that son and others nearby had been overpowered by numbers and driven from the field, he was allowed by the enemy to remain that evening and all day Tuesday without adequate attention; and it was not until Wednesday the 11th that his spirit took flight. Kind female friends were permitted to sit by him and minister to his wants during Tuesday, but were driven from the place when night came and not permitted to sit



*Grave of the Rev. William P. Hickman (1810–64) with two headstones. The larger stone on the right was probably erected some years after his death.*

and watch with him. On Wednesday morning he was taken to a neighboring home but died a few hours afterwards. He was calm and composed while thus lying in intense suffering and had no fear of death....<sup>22</sup>

The Rev. William Patton Hickman, his wife Margaret, five of their children, and thirteen grandchildren are buried in the Hickman Cemetery on Hickman Cemetery [sic] Road (route 624) in Pulaski County in soil that was once his “White Glade” farm. The location is about equally distant from the present Belspring Presbyterian Church and Cloyd’s Mountain, where he was fatally wounded.

In 1886 Margaret R. Hickman donated the Hickman Cemetery, and some adjacent land to enlarge the cemetery, to the Bell Spring and Riverview Presbyterian churches.<sup>23</sup> Today, the Hickman Cemetery is well-tended but, while descendants of the Rev. William P. Hickman still reside in the area, the Hickman name is no longer found among this country preacher’s descendants in Virginia.<sup>24</sup>

## Endnotes

1. The letters reproduced here are among a large collection of Hickman family papers saved by Roger Hickman (1813–89) and passed down to his son, Peter Lightner Hickman (1858-1937), and then to his granddaughter Ruth Gertrude Hickman (1908-1997) and grandson Clare Brown Hickman (1905-1997), and finally to Roger’s great-grandson, the author of this article. Punctuation and spelling in the letters quoted in the text follow the originals.

2. Transcribed by H. William Gabriel from the handwritten “The Records of White Glade/Bell Spring Church, Belspring, Virginia.”
3. William said she died on 13 May 1851, but a Hoge genealogy reports the date as 9 May 1851. See James Hoge Tyler, *The Family of Hoge: A Genealogy Compiled by James Hoge Tyler* (James Fulton Hoge, 1927). A number of these discrepancies in dates are found in the Hickman letters, but, in the absence of other documentation, I am inclined to accept William’s dates as the more accurate because they were written close to the events by a man who kept track of the births and deaths of his relatives and members of his churches.
4. John Matthew Hoge was married twice, to Mary Black and Mary Hoge, and I do not know which of them William referred to as being quite sick.
5. His landlord was probably Col. William Thomas, the husband of Margaret’s oldest half-sister, Rachel Montgomery Hoge (1800–?)
6. Charles Black was probably the son of John Black and the nephew of William Black, for whom the town of Blacksburg was named.
7. Other writers, without tracing Hickman’s genealogy, have jumped to conclusions about his name and family. Patricia Givens Johnson, *The United States Army Invades the New River Valley May 1864* (N.P., n.d.), p. 20, erroneously states, “Hickman was a descendant of the sea captain James Patton who had first brought colonists to the area along Back Creek where the battle was fought.” However, Hickman’s ancestors were in Accomac County even before Patton was born in 1692 and, in fact, the Hickmans had been in Virginia for 100 years before Patton arrived from Ireland. Similarly, Linda Killen, *Farm Land, Boom Town, Village: A History of Belspring, Virginia, 1750–1940*, (Radford Univ., 1992), p. 8, shows her confusion about his place of birth and his ancestors when she writes: “Born on Back Creek and related to the Pattons and Thompsons on his mother’s side, Hickman married into the Hoge family. . . .” Actually, his mother was Mary Elliot (1771-1842) of Rockbridge County.
8. Virginius Dabney, *Virginia: the New Dominion* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1971), p. 250.
9. Huldah Shallum Hickman (1806-1888) and Isaac Callison (1804-1880) are the great-grandparents of Vice-Admiral James Bond Stockdale, who was awarded the Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry as a POW in Vietnam. He is the author of two books about those experiences, and was a candidate for vice president of the United States on the third-party ticket with H. Ross Perot in 1992.
10. From microfilm records of Blacksburg Presbyterian Church, at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia.
11. Ellison A. Smyth, *A History of the Blacksburg Presbyterian Church: Its First 150 Years* (Blacksburg, 1982), p. 8.
12. Smyth makes various references to the “behavior and misbehavior of the members” of the church but chose to ignore this incident, which takes up more space in the Session records than any other.
13. Microfilm records of Blacksburg Presbyterian Church, at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond. The date was left blank in the original minutes. The Minutes for 11 Sept. 1861 give the date as 12 July 1860.
14. Order Book, County Court, Com: Law & Chancery 1859-1868, Montgomery County, Va., 7 Nov 1860, 3 Jun 1861
15. Microfilm records of Blacksburg Presbyterian Church, at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond.

16. Howard Rollins McManus, *The Battle of Cloyds Mountain: The Virginia and Tennessee Railroad Raid, April 19–May 19, 1864* (Lynchburg, Va.: H.E. Howard, Inc., 1989), p. 19. See also Gary C. Walker, *The War in Southwest Virginia, 1861-65*. 3rd ed. (Roanoke: Gurtner Printing Co., 1985), p. 81; and Patricia Givens Johnson, *The United States Army Invades the New River Valley May 1864* (N.P., n.d.), p. 20.
17. Conway Howard Smith, *The Land That Is Pulaski County* (The Pulaski County Library Board, 1980), p. 284.
18. Extracted from a photocopy of text passed down through William P. Hickman's descendants. B.W. Mebane, "Rev. William P. Hickman: A Memorial," prepared for the semicentennial services at Bell Spring, Va., August 19, 1894.
19. Harry T. Williams, *Hayes of the Twenty-third: The Civil War Volunteer Officer* (New York: Knopf, 1965; Lincoln: Univ. Nebraska Press, n.d.), pp. 175-77.
20. Smith, *The Land That is Pulaski County*, p. 285.
21. Excerpted from Charles W. Crush, *The Montgomery County Story 1776–1957* (Montgomery County [Jamestown] Festival Committee, 1957), pp. 94–96.
22. Smyth, *A History of the Blacksburg Presbyterian Church*, p. 55.
23. From *The Records of White Glade/Bell Spring Church*, Belspring, Virginia.
24. Surnames of William P. Hickman's descendants on the gravestones include Brown, Chumbley, and Huff.