

Letitia Preston Floyd: Supplementary Notes

Jim Glanville and Ryan Mays

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This article provides a correction and supplementary notes to the authors' sketch of the life of Virginia First Lady Letitia Preston Floyd (1779–1852) published in the previous volume of the *Smithfield Review*.¹ That sketch presented the first comprehensive biographical account of Mrs. Floyd and was divided into six principal periods of her life. It presented fourteen of her letters, twelve of which were published for the first time. A reading of her correspondence led to the conclusion that she was a well-educated, sophisticated, and intelligent woman and an intellectual equal to her husband Governor John Floyd. A study of her life provides a useful insight into the Jacksonian period of American history.

Correcting the Location of Cavan

The 2015 article showed in figure 5 on page 102 a picture of what was judged to be the site of Cavan. The estate named Cavan in Burke's Garden, Tazewell County, Virginia, was where Virginia First Lady Letitia Preston Floyd spent the last dozen years of her life as a widow. It was here Letitia Preston Floyd was baptized by Bishop Whelan, who traveled for that purpose from Wheeling (in present-day West Virginia) in August 1852, and where she died in December of that year.

This note corrects by about two miles the location of the site of Cavan.

The authors' previous conclusion of Cavan's location was based on an analysis of the available literature and a visit to Burke's Garden. The literature has been reviewed and another visit to the Cavan site has been made. Doing this has caused relocation of the site about two miles to the northeast of where it was previously placed in the 2015 article.

The best single piece of evidence for the location of Cavan comes from a picture in a 1920 book about the history of Tazewell County,² shown in figure 1. During a second visit to Burke's Garden in August 2015 the authors were able to accurately locate the Cavan site by standing on the exact spot where the 1920 photograph had been taken. As shown in figure 2, the pattern



Figure 1. The legend to this picture in William Cecil Pendleton’s 1920 *The History of Tazewell County* reads: “This beautiful landscape shows the location of the house of the Floyds when they lived in Burke’s Garden. The house stood in the grove of sugar trees at the left of the picture. On the right is seen the handsome residence of Mr. R. M. Lawson, who now owns one thousand acres of the splendid Floyd estate, that consisted originally of about three thousand acres.” This image is not dated, but the picture must have been taken sometime shortly before 1920.



Figure 2. A picture of the Cavan site taken in August 2015. The former Lawson House is at the present time obscured by a cluster of Norway Spruce trees and the “grove of sugar trees” has vanished. Gose Knob is in the distance in the background. Photograph by Ryan Mays.

of standing trees has changed, but otherwise the view is remarkably similar to the earlier one. A close-up view of the cabin site is shown in figure 3.



Figure 3. The Cavan Site. The sugar maple grove noted by Pendleton was here in 1920. The GPS coordinates of the Cavan site are 37.117468 N, -81.313630 W. Photograph by Jim Glanville.

A Brief History of the Cavan Property

The history of land acquisition and transfer in Burke's Garden is very complex. The following summary attempts to trace through the years the land named Cavan.³

Col. John Buchanan surveyed what was reportedly approximately 4,400 acres⁴ for Col. James Patton and Company on 26 October 1749. Buchanan recorded the name of the tract as Fanad.⁵ This tract was patented by William Thompson and Col. William Preston, executors of James Patton's estate, on 23 December 1779.⁶ It was later claimed by Col. James Thompson, son of William and Mary Patton Thompson. James Thompson eventually owned over 6,000 acres in Burke's Garden, including most or all of the original 4,400 acres. He sold large portions of this land to Col. Robert Sayers around 1800.⁷

Samuel Sayers, nephew of Robert Sayers of Anchor and Hope in Wythe County, Virginia, inherited about 2,000 acres in Burke's Garden from his uncle in 1826. Robert had noted in his will that he bought the 2,000 acres from "James Thompson and others." Judging from the impressive inventory of his Burke's Garden estate, which included 26 slaves, Robert had established a sizable plantation there by the time of his death, in addition to his even larger Wythe County estate.⁸ Samuel and his wife Elizabeth Gose lived at the Sayers estate in Burke's Garden until 1841, when they moved to Missouri.⁹

On 26 May 1841, Samuel and Elizabeth Sayers sold to John Buchanan Floyd and George Rogers Clark Floyd their land in Burke's Garden, which by then they had increased to 3,040 acres.¹⁰ On 10 June 1841, the Floyd

brothers sold to their mother, Letitia Preston Floyd, the northeastern portion of their purchase, a tract containing 800 acres.¹¹ However, John T. Sayers, acting as trustee for Samuel Sayers, sold 2,240 acres of the original 3,040-acre tract to the Meek family and others in 1845 on default of a debt John B. Floyd had owed Samuel Sayers since 1835. The 800 acres the Floyd brothers sold to Letitia was evidently the only land the Floyds could afford to keep.¹²

The Caves at Cavan

Letitia Floyd probably did not move to Burke's Garden until late 1841 or sometime in 1842. She is said by Gose to have lived in a log house built by Samuel Sayers. Gose also wrote that she "called her plantation 'Cavan' due to a number of caves on this tract."¹³ Having seen the cave entrances, the authors now understand why Gose could speculate that its name came from the place's geology. Indeed, large cave entrances are located in a deep sinkhole ravine only 500 feet from where Letitia's house is said to have stood.¹⁴ However, as noted in the authors' 2015 article, this geologic explanation seems fanciful. Possibly any one of the many people noted above with Irish connections could have introduced the name Cavan from the Irish county — though as previously noted there is no known connection of the Preston family to County Cavan. Until someone finds documentary evidence of how Cavan got its name, only speculation is possible.

Census Data and Floyd Family Household Members and Slaves

In preparing their 2015 article about Mrs. Floyd,¹⁵ the authors did not take into account the available United States census data for the Floyd family. The census schedules are quite detailed and give information about the number, sex, and approximate age of the free white persons, free black persons, and black slaves present at the then-current place of Floyd family residence for the five recording decades from 1810–1850. Table 1 presents a summary of this census data.

In summary, table 1 shows that the Floyd family owned slaves in every census decade and that in the later years they owned significant numbers of them.

For convenience and brevity, in table 1 the children of John and Letitia Floyd are referred to by their initials. Table 2 shows those initials. Table 2 also gives the birth and death dates of the Floyd children and notes their ages at the five census decades. Only seven of the twelve children lived to adulthood, and the dashes in table 2 show children who were not alive in a year when a census was taken. Two of their children were named George Rogers Clark Floyd, the first of whom lived only nine months.

Table 1: Summary of Floyd Family Census Data 1820-1850				
Census Year	Census Place	Free White Persons	Slaves	Total Persons
1810	Christiansburg, Montgomery County ⁹	John and Letitia Floyd, three of their children (JBF, GRCF, WPF), and an unidentified female aged between 16 and 25 Total 6	4 (not enumerated)	10
1820	Blacksburg, Montgomery County ¹⁰	John and Letitia Floyd, seven of their children (JBF, GRCF, WPF, GRCF, BRP, LPF, ELF) and an unidentified male aged between 16 and 25 Total 10	5 male (including one child), 5 female Total 10	20
1830	Blacksburg, Montgomery County ¹¹	John and Letitia Floyd, nine of their children (JBF, WPF, GRCF, BRP, LPF, ELF, NBF, CPF, MLMF), an unidentified female aged between 20 and 29, and an unidentified male aged between 15 and 19 Total 13	13 male (including 3 children), 12 female, plus one free colored person Total 26	39
1830	Monroe County ¹²	John Floyd, two boys under nine, two girls under 9, ELF and NBF?, and unidentified male aged between 30 and 39 (maybe JF), and an unidentified female aged between 40 and 49 (maybe LPF) Total 8	None	8
1840	Tazewell County ¹³	John Buchanan Floyd and wife Sarah Buchanan Campbell Floyd, BRP aged 29, an unidentified female aged between 30 and 39 and two unknown teenage males Total 6	23 male (including 10 children), 14 female (including 3 children) Total 37	43
1840	Newbern, Pulaski County	Letitia Floyd and two of her daughters, ELF and NLF (not LPF2 who was married) Total 3	12 male (including 7 children), 11 female (including 3 children) Total 23	26
1850	Monroe County ¹⁴	Letitia Floyd 71, William L. Lewis 50 Letitia Lewis 36, Susan M. Lewis 12, Letty N. Lewis, 10, William L. Lewis 6, John F. Lewis 3, Mary Bowen 18 (born in New York) Total 8	None	8
1850	Tazewell County ¹⁵	Nicati Floyd 71, George F. Holmes 27, Sarah H. Holmes 31, Mary A. Holmes 4, Letitia Holmes 1, Peggy Vance 30 Total 6	None	6
1850	Wythe County ¹⁶	Benjamin R. Floyd Aged 39	1 male and 3 female slaves	5
1850	Wythe County ¹⁷	George Rogers Clark Floyd aged 40	10 male and 2 female slaves	13

Table 2: The Children of Dr. John and Letitia Preston Floyd and their ages in the census years²⁹

	Child	Initials	Dates	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850
1	Susanna Smith Floyd	SSF	1805-1806	–	–	–	–	–
2	John Buchanan Floyd	JBF	1806-1863	4	14	24	34	44
3	George Rogers Clark Floyd	GRCF	1807-1808	–	–	–	–	–
4	William Preston Floyd	WPF	1809-1870	1	11	21	31	41
5	George Rogers Clark Floyd	GRCF	1810-1896	–	10	20	30	40
6	Benjamin Rush Floyd	BRF	1811-1860	–	9	19	29	39
7	Letitia Preston Floyd II	LPF2	1814-1887	–	6	16	26	36
8	Eliza Lavalette Floyd	ELF	1816-1887	–	4	14	24	34
9	Nickette Buchanan Floyd	NBF	1819-1908	–	1	11	21	31
10	Coralyn Patton Floyd	CPF	1822-1833	–	–	8	–	–
11	Thomas Lewis Floyd	TLF	1824-1824	–	–	–	–	–
12	Mary Lewis Mourning Floyd	MLMF	1827-1833	–	–	3	–	–

The place at which the census recorder obtained the census information was not always the principal place of residence of the Floyd family. Thus in 1820, while Thorn Spring in Pulaski was where they lived, the census enumeration was made at Blacksburg, and presumably at Smithfield. The same situation occurred in 1830, with an added enumeration being made that year in Monroe County, where John and Letitia presumably were visiting the Lewis family at Lynnside.¹⁶ In 1840 the Floyd family was in the process of collectively moving from Thorn Spring (near Newbern) in Pulaski County to Burke’s Garden in Tazewell County, and enumerations were made in both counties. Interestingly, the 1840 census lists John Buchanan Floyd as living in Tazewell County (presumably Burke’s Garden) and owning a total of 37 slaves. There were 43 total persons in the household. By 1850 he was in Richmond and apparently no longer owned slaves. In 1840, Benjamin Rush Floyd was listed as living in Wythe County. His residence was occupied by six persons, of whom four were “free colored persons.” By 1850 he was living in Wythe County with Nancy age 30 and Malvina age 6.

In 1850 four different places of enumeration are listed. The Monroe County listing is no doubt again from Lynnside, where their daughter Letitia

Preston Floyd (LPF2) was living with her husband William Lynn Lewis. The Tazewell County enumeration would have been at Burke's Garden, where the slaves were owned by the two sons (George Rogers Clark Floyd and Benjamin Rush Floyd) living in Wytheville. Ralph Mann's 1990 article gives an extended account of the interactions among the sons in Wytheville and their mother in Burke's Garden.¹⁷ Also, in 1850 in Monroe County four children of William and Letitia Preston Floyd Lewis are enumerated. The identity of Mary Bowen who was born in New York has not been established.

Finally, the census data provide a tantalizing hint that Mrs. Floyd had the family nickname "Nicati" as listed in the 1850 census from Tazewell County. This possible nickname was first noted by the genealogist Alex Luken and reported in the Floyd family genealogy prepared by General Pat Stevens.¹⁸

Future Work

The authors' 2015 article listed a number of archives where Letitia Preston Floyd's letters may be found, one of which is the University of Virginia at Wise. A detailed copy of the finding-aid for the Trigg-Floyd-Johnston papers at the John Cook Wyllie Library at the University of Virginia at Wise reveals that there are approximately 60 letters in this collection either written by or to Mrs. Floyd. A very preliminary assessment of these letters is that "Most of the letters were about health, and people not writing."³⁰ There is, however, another copy of the "My Dear Rush" letter. A future article based on some of these letters may be forthcoming.

Acknowledgments

The Cavan site is currently owned by Mr. John L. Moss, whom we gratefully thank for giving us a guided tour of his property in August 2015. He owns 379 acres of Letitia Preston Floyd's original 800 acres that she bought from her sons John Buchanan Floyd and George Rogers Clark Floyd in June 1841. We thank General Pat Stevens IV for generously sharing his Floyd family genealogical records with us. We thank Mrs. Alex Luken for investigating the Floyd family records at the Wyllie Library at the University of Virginia at Wise.

Endnotes

1. Jim Glanville and Ryan Mays, "A Sketch of Letitia Preston Floyd and Some of Her Letters," *Smithfield Review* 19 (2015), 77–120.
2. William Cecil Pendleton, *History of Tazewell County and Southwest Virginia: 1748–1920* (Richmond, Va.: W. C. Hill Printing Company, 1920), 505.
3. The origin of the name Cavan is uncertain. Any of the many owners of Cavan of Irish birth or with Irish ancestors named in this section could have introduced the name Cavan as a nod to County Cavan, Ireland.

4. Augusta County Surveyors' Record 1:46a, Augusta County Courthouse (Staunton, Va.), Library of Virginia microfilm reel 107. This tract actually measured closer to 7,000 acres.
5. The Fanad is the peninsula to the west of the outlet of Lough Swilly into the Atlantic in County Donegal.
6. Virginia Land Office Patents B, 1779–1780: 240–243, Library of Virginia microfilm reel 43.
7. Louise Leslie, *Tazewell County* (Radford, Va.: Commonwealth Press, Inc., 1982), 422.
8. Mary B. Kegley, *Early Adventurers on the Western Waters: The New River in Pioneer Days, 1745–1805*, vol 3 (Wytheville, Va.: Kegley Books, 1995), 768–75.
9. George B. Gose, *Pioneers of the Virginia Bluegrass (and Their Descendants)* (Radford, Va.: Commonwealth Press, 1971), 240.
10. Tazewell County Deed Book 7: 134–35, 287–88, Tazewell County Courthouse (Tazewell, Va.), Library of Virginia microfilm reel 3; Gose, *Pioneers of the Virginia Bluegrass*, 240.
11. Tazewell County Deed Book 7: 285–86, Tazewell County Courthouse (Tazewell, Va.), Library of Virginia microfilm reel 3; Gose, *Pioneers of the Virginia Bluegrass*, 240.
12. Gose, *Pioneers of the Virginia Bluegrass*, 240; Crockett A. Harrison, *The Allens and the Harrisons of the Kingdom of Callaway: Where They Came from, Why They Came to America, What They Encountered and Their Part in Settling and Developing a New Land* (Grove City, Pa.: C. A. Harrison, 1981), 296, 311.
13. Gose, *Pioneers of the Virginia Bluegrass*, 241. Burke's Garden is a gigantic collapsed sinkhole. See Byron N. Cooper, *Geology and Mineral Resources of the Burke's Garden Quadrangle, Virginia*, Virginia Geological Survey Bulletin 60 (Richmond, Va.: University of Virginia, Division of Purchase and Printing, 1944).
14. "Lawson Cave" contains about 1,740 feet of passage. It was evidently named for the Lawson family who acquired the Cavan land in the late 1800s; Robert M. Lawson built the large mansion house now standing at the Cavan site around 1900. For a detailed description of Lawson Cave see: John R. Holsinger, *Descriptions of Virginia Caves* (Charlottesville, Va.: Virginia Division of Mineral Resources, Bulletin 85, 1975), 358–59.
15. Glanville and Mays, "A Sketch of Letitia Preston Floyd."
16. United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service National Register of Historic Places, Registration Form for Lynnside Historic District, Sweet Springs, W.Va., on line at <http://www.wvculture.org/shpo/nr/pdf/monroe/91000452.pdf>.
17. Ralph Mann, "Mountains, Land, and Kin Networks: Burkes Garden, Virginia, in the 1840s and 1850s," *Journal of Southern History* 58 (1992), 411–34.
18. Pat M. Stevens, *Genealogy Report: Descendants of John Floyd*. 392 pp. On line at the link <http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/s/t/e/Pat-M-Stevens-iv/> and copy in the authors' files.
19. Census Place: Christiansburg, Montgomery, Virginia; Roll: 70; Page: 619; Image: 00068; Family History Library Film: 0181430. Source Information: Ancestry.com. 1810 United States Federal Census [database on line]. Provo, Utah: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Images reproduced by FamilySearch. Original data: Third Census of the United States, 1810. (NARA microfilm publication M252, 71 rolls). Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
20. Census Place: Blacksburg, Montgomery, Virginia; Page: 173A; NARA Roll: M33_130; Image: 333. Source Information: Ancestry.com. 1820 United States Federal Census [database on line]. Provo, Utah: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Images reproduced by FamilySearch. Original data: Fourth Census of the United States, 1820. (NARA microfilm publication M33, 142 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
21. Blacksburg, Montgomery, Virginia; Series: M19; Roll: 198; Page: 65; Family History Library Film: 0029677. Source Information: Ancestry.com. 1830 United States Federal Census [database on line]. Provo, Utah: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Images reproduced by FamilySearch. Original data: Fifth Census of the United States, 1830. (NARA microfilm publication M19, 201 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

22. Census Place: Monroe, Virginia; Series: M19; Roll: 198; Page: 18; Family History Library Film: 0029677. Source Information: Ancestry.com. 1830 United States Federal Census [database on line]. Provo, Utah: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Images reproduced by FamilySearch. Original data: Fifth Census of the United States, 1830. (NARA microfilm publication M19, 201 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
23. Census Place: Tazewell, Virginia; Roll: 579; Page: 70; Image: 145; Family History Library Film: 0029693. Source Information: Ancestry.com. 1840 United States Federal Census [database on line]. Provo, Utah: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Images reproduced by FamilySearch. Original data: Sixth Census of the United States, 1840. (NARA microfilm publication M704, 580 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
24. Census Place: Newbern, Pulaski, Virginia; Roll: 572; Page: 194; Image: 980; Family History Library Film: 0029690. Source Information: Ancestry.com. 1840 United States Federal Census [database on line]. Provo, Utah: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Images reproduced by FamilySearch. Original data: Sixth Census of the United States, 1840. (NARA microfilm publication M704, 580 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
25. Seventh Census of the United States. 1850. 23 July, "Letitia Floyd" age 71, District 39, Monroe County, Virginia. National Archives Microfilm Publications, Roll M432_961, page 437A, Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
26. Seventh Census of the United States, 1850. 15 August., "Nicati Floyd" age 71, Western District, Tazewell County, Virginia. National Archives Microfilm Publications, Roll M432_979, page 261B, Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
27. Ancestry.com. 1850 U.S. Federal Census – Slave Schedules [database on line]. Provo, Utah: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2004. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Seventh Census of the United States, 1850. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1850. M432, 1,009 rolls. District 68, Wythe, Virginia.
28. Ancestry.com. 1850 U.S. Federal Census – Slave Schedules [database on-line]. Provo, Utah: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2004. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Seventh Census of the United States, 1850. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1850. M432, 1,009 rolls. District 68, Wythe, Virginia.
29. John Frederick Dorman, *The Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield in Virginia* (Louisville, Ky.: The Filson Club, 1982), 68–70. The only datum in this table not taken from Dorman is the 1870 death date of William Preston Floyd. That date can be found on line at many genealogical web sites.
30. Alex Luken, personal communication. Email message to the authors, September 2015.

