



LOWER CAPE FEAR HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Inc. BULLETIN

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Solomon Nash

by Nancy N. Beeler

Solomon Waddell Nash (1779-June 25, 1846) belonged to three socioeconomic groups currently under renewed scrutiny by historians. He was a builder during the building boom in Wilmington in the 1840's; he was a free black of mixed blood in a city where freedmen, especially those of mixed blood, exerted probably a greater political and economic influence than in any other southern city;¹ and he was a black who owned both slaves and land. According to John Hope Franklin, the total real estate valuation for free Negro owners in New Hanover County at that time was \$37,720 (the highest in the state).² Nash's real estate had a total purchase value of around \$3,200.

One piece of property that Nash owned was a strip of land fifty-six feet along the eastern line of Front Street between Mulberry (now Grace) and Chestnut streets; insurance records are quite specific in locating the "carpenters shop of Sol Nash" thirty feet north of the residence of James H. Dickson.³ And Nash may have been brought here following a fall from scaffolding at another location on Front Street. According to a memoir by Thomas Fanning Wood, son of the builder R.B. Wood:

My father is a builder and at the time I was a wee school boy he was putting up a building on Front Street between Market and Dock. A mulatto carpenter by the name of Solomon Nash fell from the scaffolding and was killed. The funeral procession passed by our school-

house the next day, and we were all let out on the front piazza to see it, as it was the first funeral I had ever seen it made a lasting impression.⁴

The precise building is not known.

The first printed record of Nash's having taken apprentices to the carpenter's trade occurs within a year of the posting of his emancipation bond. This latter event occurred in New Hanover County Superior Court, with Edward B. Dudley presiding, July 26, 1827. Posting bond for "a certain negro slave named Solomon Nash" were John Waddell, Francis N. Waddell, and John Waddell, Jr. They were a father and two sons.⁵ In his will, written in 1830 and executed in 1831, John Waddell, Sr., identifies his place of residence as "Belleville," in Brunswick County. He names the two sons, above, and two others—Hugh and Maurice. Each son is given an obligation under the will; at least one was reminded that he had already received more than his share.⁶ Francis Nash Waddell, listed in University of North Carolina alumni records as a planter, from Wilmington and Hillsborough, was born in 1796, attended the University c. 1813, and was a member of the state House of Commons, 1820-21. He is buried in the tiny cemetery at "Moorefields" in Hillsborough.⁷

The builder and freedman, Solomon Nash, spent the next dozen years after emancipation going back

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and forth between Wilmington and Fayetteville. He took "Negro orphans" as apprentices in 1828 in New Hanover County, according to Craig and other sources. Several years later he took Robert Wesley, 11, and William Revels, 16, as apprentices in Cumberland County.⁸

Nash's first wife, who died, was a slave; he was obliged for a time to endure the slave status of their three daughters. In 1835 he petitioned successfully for their emancipation.

Whereas by virtue of an act passed by the General Assembly of North Carolina at its last session, Lucy Ann, Emeline and Priscilla, children and slaves of Solomon W. Nash were emancipated and set free ...

Nash posted a bond of 1200 dollars at the

subsequent court session in Cumberland County.⁹

Records in that county also reveal Nash's marriage contract to his second wife, Celia A. Bryant (1833).¹⁰ By his will (1838)¹¹ and by this contract, Nash settled on her a house and lot on Winslow Street in Fayetteville, near the intersection with Mumford (now Russell).

One other piece of property recorded as having been in Nash's name in Fayetteville was at the SE corner of Maxwell and Franklin streets. The deed was from the president of the board of trustees of the Donaldson Academy, also known as the Manual Labor School.¹² The date of this transaction, 1837, suggests that the location may have been considered for the school and then discarded. Donaldson was chartered in 1833 and property purchased in the Haymount section.

In his will Nash also left a female slave, Venice, to serve his daughters "for ten years from the time of my death and after the expiration of that time I desire her to be freed, and if she wishes to remove to any free state, I wish her to be permitted to do so."

(Actually, a law had existed, 1823-1831, calling for the immediate departure from the state of any slave manumitted in North Carolina; it was largely ignored. In both ports, and in particular in the commercial center of Wilmington, it was advantageous to have artisans, both slave and free, maintaining a trade and moving about from place to place.¹³ The Whig stance of leading state politicians of the day may have contributed to this permissive atmosphere.)

Nash named as his executor a well-known "Free Man of Color" in Fayetteville, Matthew N. Leary.¹⁴

Nash's will does not mention the half-share in a navigation company left to him by the will of a certain Thomas Flowers, styling himself "late of Wilmington, but formerly of Fayetteville."¹⁵ But in 1821, the date of the will, Nash was still a slave and thus barred from inheriting.

Between the year 1838, when Nash again took apprentices in New Hanover County, and 1840, when the census listed him as owning five male slaves and housing six free males other than himself, Nash

seems to have decided to settle in Wilmington.¹⁶ He began buying real estate in earnest. He bought a parcel of land west of Hoskins Alley on Orange Street; this, from Oscar Parsley, commission merchant. He bought property at Third and Brunswick Streets from another Wilmington merchant, Phineas Fanning, the great-uncle of diarist Nicholas Schenck. He paid \$40.00 for this tract and sold it to James Sampson, a well-known and outspoken fellow builder, for the same amount. Nash, Sampson, and a William Hill purchased some property that had been part of the Marsden Campbell estate, north and east of Wilmington proper. Of interest from the standpoint of possible improvement of a lot by Nash, is a tract near the NW corner of Walnut and Fourth Streets, which he acquired from an Orange Street resident, Thomas Brown, for \$30.00. Whatever the reason for its inflated value, the property sold for \$350.00. Its buyer was John Dawson, dry-goods merchant.¹⁷

Two of Nash's slaves may have fallen with him on the day of his accident, and survived. The *Wilmington Chronicle* account (July 1, 1846) mentions two slaves, and on September 23 the same paper contained the following notice:

This day at 11 o'clock, at Shaw's corner, will be hired for balance of the year, two carpenters, one woman and two children, belonging to the estate of Solomon W. Nash, deceased.¹⁸

Solomon Nash is believed to have had two sons by his second marriage, on the evidence of census and real estate records, as well as an oral will recorded as being that of John W. Nash. In the 1850 Federal census, Sol Nash, Jr., twelve years old, and John Nash, nine years old, are listed among the considerable household of Nelson and Elizabeth Henderson in Fayetteville; perhaps receiving schooling.¹⁹ This serves to heighten the mystery surrounding Celia Bryant Nash, however. She was apparently mentioned in the census ten years earlier in New Hanover County ("1 Free Female over 24 [but] under 36"), but not identified with family activities in Wilmington subsequent to that.

After Nash's lifetime there were complications over some of his real property. First a daughter, and then a son, went into court to try to straighten things out. Sol Nash, Jr., was the plaintiff in an Equity Court

case involving his father's properties listed to be sold for taxes. The Master of Equity, Alfred M. Waddell, was authorized to sell at auction the Front Street and Orange Street properties, and to divide the proceeds between Sol Nash and John Nash, after taxes and court costs were paid. The buyers were James H. Dickson and Donald MacRae, respectively. (Dickson's parents-in-law had given a quitclaim deed to Nash for the land on which he had his shop.) The Nash family kept the property at Fifth and Campbell, which had also been on the sheriff's delinquent list. It is impossible to say how much of the expected sum of roughly \$1,770 Sol and John actually received, since Dickson, a physician, perished in the yellow fever epidemic of 1862 and it took another thirty years for his widow to obtain clear title.²⁰

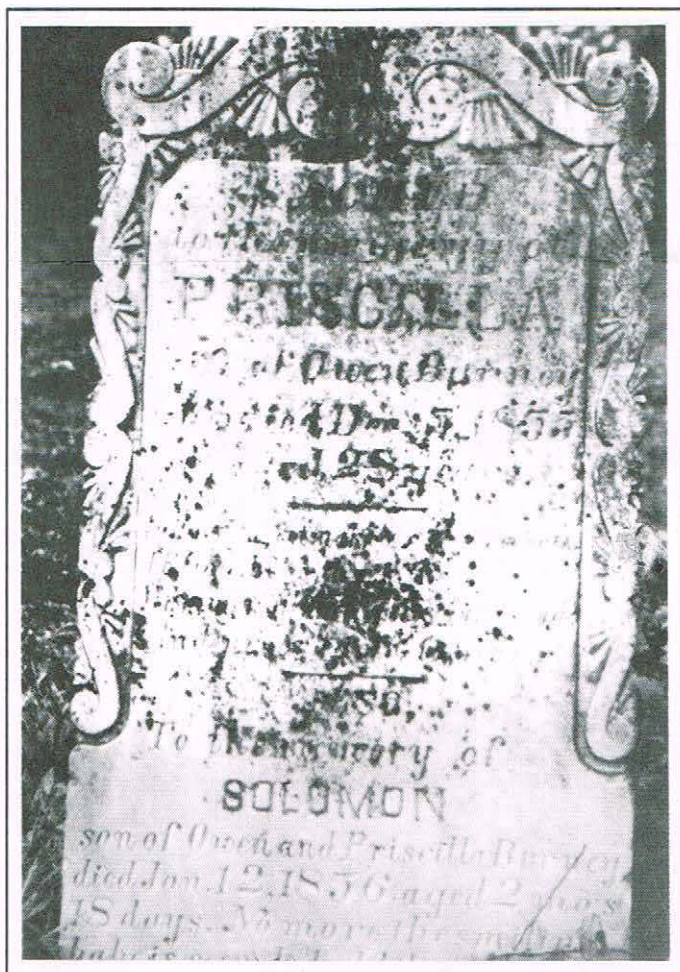
Sol Nash probably composed the tender verses carved on the heraldic-style tombstones of his father and his half-sister Priscilla Nash Burney. He and Owen Burney were on the board that incorporated



Stylistically at odds with their nearest neighbors, the tombstones of Solomon Nash and Priscilla Nash Burney and infant son stand in Section C, Pine Forest Cemetery, Wilmington. Photograph by Janet K. Seapker.

Pine Forest Cemetery, c. 1869, and some time after that the graves were moved from another “negro burying ground” – perhaps that mentioned by Nicholas Schenck on Dock Street, between Third and Fourth. The daughter died nine years after the father, in 1855.²¹

Records of Saint Mark's Episcopal Church show that Sol Nash's second wife, Kate Love Nash, was sponsor at a baptism with builder Alfred Howe. Of her own children baptized in Saint Mark's, John Williams Schenck Nash was probably named in part for the Reconstruction-era sheriff of New Hanover County, J.W. Schenck, who, in 1871, was supervisor of Sol W. Nash, listed in the Wilmington city directory as “keeper of County jail.”²² Another son had been named for Oliver Dockery, a moderate politician from Richmond County who supported Negro rights.²³



- Photograph by Janet K. Seapker

For all the intriguing glimpses of Solomon Nash the man, there are disappointingly few clues to his building career. The diarist Schenck wrote that the “James Anderson House” (known today as the Hogg-Anderson House, 110 Orange Street) was “built by

Solo[mon] Nash.” In Wrenn, Wilmington, North Carolina ..., this house is described as “being much more at home in New Bern than in Wilmington, where it stands almost alone as a house type.” It was built around 1825 – a side-hall frame house of two-and-a-half stories, with Federal and Greek Revival elements. It passed to Alexander Anderson, who willed it to his son. James Anderson was already living in the house when his father died, and he carried out alterations in the early 1840's. This date suggests that Nash was responsible for the addition “eight feet by eleven feet” noted in an insurance record. On the other hand, Nash received his freedom in 1827 in New Hanover County.²⁴

Finally, there is a poignant reference to Nash's work in progress, published after his death. The *Wilmington Commercial* newspaper, which commenced publishing in September, 1846, ran this advertisement in several issues:

On Tues., the 20th of October next, at Shaw's corner, will be sold at 11 o'clock, a part of a House Frame on the lot of S.W. Nash's late residence. 1 Lot of Window Blinds. 1 Lot about 3,000 ft. Lumber opposite Mrs. Owen's residence, and about 10,000 ft. seasoned 1 1/4 inch boards.

This is the location referred to elsewhere as Nash's place of business. The ad went on to mention “1 Horse, 2 Saddles, and 1 set of Harness belonging to the estate of S.W. Nash, de'd.”²⁵

¹Bishir, Catherine W., “Black Builders in Antebellum North Carolina,” *The North Carolina Historical Review*, LXI (October, 1984), 454-458.

²Franklin, John Hope, *The Free Negro in North Carolina 1790-1860* (Chapel Hill: 1943), 158. For motivation in free black ownership of slaves, see Franklin, 159-160.

³*New Hanover County Insurance Records*, February 28, 1849 [Old Book FF, p. 368], from a compilation by Margaret Thompson, New Hanover County Library.

⁴Wood, Margaret H., unpublished manuscript of family material, courtesy of Janet K. Seapker, Cape Fear Museum. Nash did not die immediately.

⁵Bond for the Emancipation of Solomon Nash, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh; machine copy courtesy of Beverly Tetterton.

⁶Will of John Waddell, Sr., March 30, 1830, Brunswick County Wills, Book B, p. 160.

⁷Material on Francis Nash Waddell, from *Alumni History of The University of North Carolina 1795-1924*, p. 639, and files of Mary Claire Engstrom, Chapel Hill. Paper entitled “Family Cemetery at Moorefields, Hillsborough, North Carolina,” State Archives.

⁸Craig, James H., *The Arts and Crafts in North Carolina 1699-1840* (Winston-Salem: 1965), 355, 360, 362.

⁹Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions of Cumberland County, June 9, 1836 (microfilm copy), State Archives. See also James Howard Brewer, "Legislation Designed to Control Slavery in Wilmington and Fayetteville," North Carolina Historical Review, XXX (April, 1953), 159.

¹⁰Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions of Cumberland County, June Term 1833 (microfilm copy), State Archives.

¹¹Will of Solomon W. Nash, September 15, 1838, New Hanover County Wills, Book AB, p. 451.

¹²Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions of Cumberland County, March Term 1837 (microfilm copy), State Archives.

¹³Franklin, Free Negro, 27.

¹⁴Oates, John A., The Story of Fayetteville ... (Fayetteville: 1981), 698-699, 714. Leary was a grandson of Aaron Revels, a free man and a soldier in the Revolutionary War.

¹⁵Will of Thomas Flowers, February 11, 1821, New Hanover County Wills, Book C, p. 111. The wording is vague, but this may have been the Cape Fear Navigation Company. Flowers is probably the man freed on petition of one Orondatus Davis in court in Cumberland County in 1816 and given this name.

¹⁶Craig, Arts and Crafts, 365, 368. Sixth Census of the United States, 1840: New Hanover County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, p. 14, microfilm copy of National Archives manuscript copy, New Hanover County Library.

¹⁷New Hanover County Deeds, Office of the Register of Deeds, New Hanover County Courthouse, Wilmington: Book Y, p. 135, 1840; Book Y, p. 499, 1841; Book CC, pp. 58, 60, 1845; Book Z, p. 527, 1843.

¹⁸Files of William Reaves, Wilmington.

¹⁹Seventh Census, 1850: Cumberland County, North Carolina, Schedule I, Free Inhabitants in Fayetteville District, p. 14. New

Hanover County Deeds, Book WWW, p. 414, 1873. Nuncupative Will of John W. Nash, sworn to by S.W. Nash and Gilbert Williams, and referring to "You [Sol, Jr.], Kate, and Burney." Kate was Sol's wife and Burney, his brother-in-law. The will was probated February 28, 1874. New Hanover County Wills, Book E, p. 268.

²⁰New Hanover County Court Minutes: June, 1857; March, 1858; March, 1859; June, 1859. New Hanover County Equity Minutes, April 23, 1860: "The Master is authorized, empowered, and directed to make title to the purchasers for the real estate by them respectively purchased upon the payment of the purchase money, and ... divide the proceeds of the said sales equally between the complainants Solomon and John Nash" Microfilm copies, State Archives.

²¹Records of Pine Forest Cemetery, Wilmington, courtesy of Mr. John H. Greene, Jr., President of the Board (deceased, 1989). Schenck, Nicholas W., The Schenck Diary, transcribed by R.V. Asbury, Ida B. Kellam, and Ed Turberg, New Hanover County Library, 134.

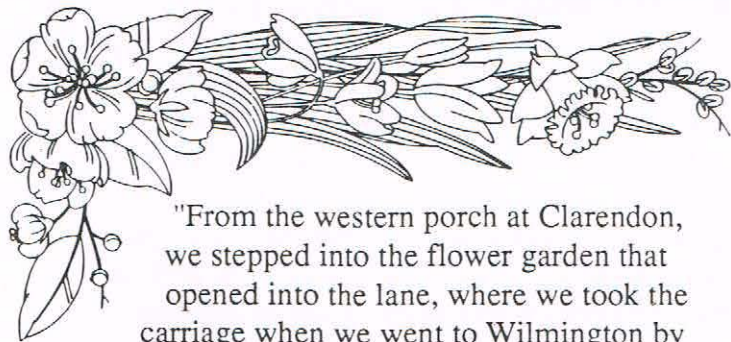
²²Haddock's Wilmington, N.C. Directory (Wilmington: 1871), 176.

²³Records of Saint Mark's Episcopal Church, Wilmington, courtesy of The Reverend John Richards. Oliver Dockery Nash was 19 and John Williams Schenck Nash 17, when Saint Mark's reported to the diocesan convention of the Episcopal Church in 1896. For descriptions of J.W. Schenck and Oliver Dockery, see, respectively, W. McKee Evans, Ballots and Fence Rails (Chapel Hill: 1966), 138-139; and William S. Powell (ed.) Dictionary of North Carolina Biography (Chapel Hill: 1979-), II, 88-89.

²⁴Schenck, Diary (transcript), 131A. Wrenn, Tony P. Wilmington, North Carolina, An Architectural and Historical Portrait (Charlottesville: 1984), 235-236.

²⁵September 29; October 3, 6, 15, 17.

Cape Fear Potpourri



"From the western porch at Clarendon, we stepped into the flower garden that opened into the lane, where we took the carriage when we went to Wilmington by land, which was eight miles. Marsden drove Tom and Jerry. Now and then we went in a row boat by water, which was five miles.

"On the east was an upper and lower porch. At one end of the lower porch was a yellow jasmine vine, and at the other end an English honeysuckle the hummingbirds loved. Dr. John Hill (1830-1854) was a near neighbor (Lilliput Plantation) and frequent visitor. He was sitting with us one day and noticed the birds. He asked Mother to give him a teaspoon of brandy or whiskey and a little sugar. He mixed it thoroughly and we went to the upper porch where the railing was covered with the two vines, and put the

mixture in the honeysuckle blooms.

"In a short time the humming birds were enjoying their treat and not long after they were too drunk to help themselves. Dr. Hill took one or two in his hand very carefully to let me see the exquisite little things near. They soon got over their treat and flew away unharmed."

Plantation Memories of the Cape Fear River Country by Fanny C. Watters, c 1944, printed by the Stephens Press, Asheville N.C.

(From the diary of a nineteenth-century teenager who was participating in a sedate houseparty at Wrightsville Beach.)



"Just as we had started across the roughness of the road the carriage wheel broke and we all had to get out and wait in the woods until the driver could go to town and get another carriage, but as we had plenty of cake, we did not let the time hang heavily on our hands. We finally arrived at Mrs. Russell's at ten o'clock and to

our great annoyance found two young gentlemen standing on the piazza. The gentlemen in question were Mr. Robert M. Dix and Mr. Harry P. Russell. Although we were very disappointed when we first saw them, we were willing to acknowledge afterward that it would have been rather lonesome without them, especially as far as sailing went.

"When we awoke the next morning it was raining very hard and we feared that we should have the blues, but we soon put away the idea and determined to enjoy ourselves. Very windy and did not go sailing. Late in the evening the Little Women went to watch the Little Men go sailing or rather capsize. When we returned we were very tired and dirty and had our bonnets pulled a good way over our faces. We changed clothes and took a short walk by moonlight, but were very much annoyed by the mosquitos and sandflies." (*Ten Days at Wrightsville Beach* by Betsey McLaurin, handwritten in 1877. Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina.)

The little Columbus County town of **Delco** was not always named so. Its original name was **Brinkly**.

In 1905, it became one of the six woody, swampy lands which Hugh MacRae turned into a farm colony. He brought many families over from Germany and Hungary and moved them to Brinkly, which he renamed **New Berlin** in their honor. In addition to 193 farms, the town soon had streets with names like Kaiser, Hamburg, and Bismark. New Berlin failed as a farming colony, but soon attracted other inhabitants who saw fit during World War I to change its then politically unpopular name to **Pershing** in honor of General John Joseph Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe during the war.

The name Pershing might have stuck except for one Atlantic Coast Line conductor who either through ignorance or a wry sense of humor insisted on bellowing "Perishing" as the train neared the tiny depot. The residents of Pershing began a quiet campaign to rename their town. One day a city worker was installing a street light. He liked the sound of the bulb's brand name and **Delco** it has been ever since. (Hugh MacRae Collection, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina.)

-Susan Block

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