The Grigsby Homes in Rockbridge County, Virginia

By Matthew Beard

Utilizing the list prepared by Reverend H. Middleton Raynal[1], the Pastor of Falling Spring Church at the time of the first meeting at Natural Bridge, we have the following list of Grigsby related homes in Rockbridge County:

Seven Hills of Natural Bridge:

- Fruit Hill - "Soldier John" Grigsby and Elizabeth Porter
- Rose Hill - Elisha Grigsby and Elizabeth H. Porter
- Fancy Hill - Sally Grigsby and Thomas Welch II
- Hickory Hill - Reuben Grigsby and Verlinda A. Porter
- Clover Hill (Herring Hall) - Hannah Ingram Grigsby and David Greenlee
- Liberty Hill - Thomas Welch III and Eliza Porter Grigsby
- Cherry Hill - David Greenlee, Sr. and Jane White

Other Houses of Rockbridge County, VA:

- Tuscan Villa - Rachel Grigsby and Alexander McNutt
- Glen Maury - Peggy McNutt and Elisha Paxton
- Holly Hill - Martha Grigsby and Alexander Trimble
- Cress Hill - Hannah Grigsby and John G. Hamilton
- Locust Hill - Betsy McNutt and John Hamilton
- William McNutt House (Birnam Farm) - Elizabeth Grigsby and William McNutt
- William Paxton House - "Blind William" Paxton and Jane Grigsby

A map of these houses, as well as the Falling Springs Church, is shown in Figure 1 on the next page[1].

An additional house listed in Memorabilia I, page 70:

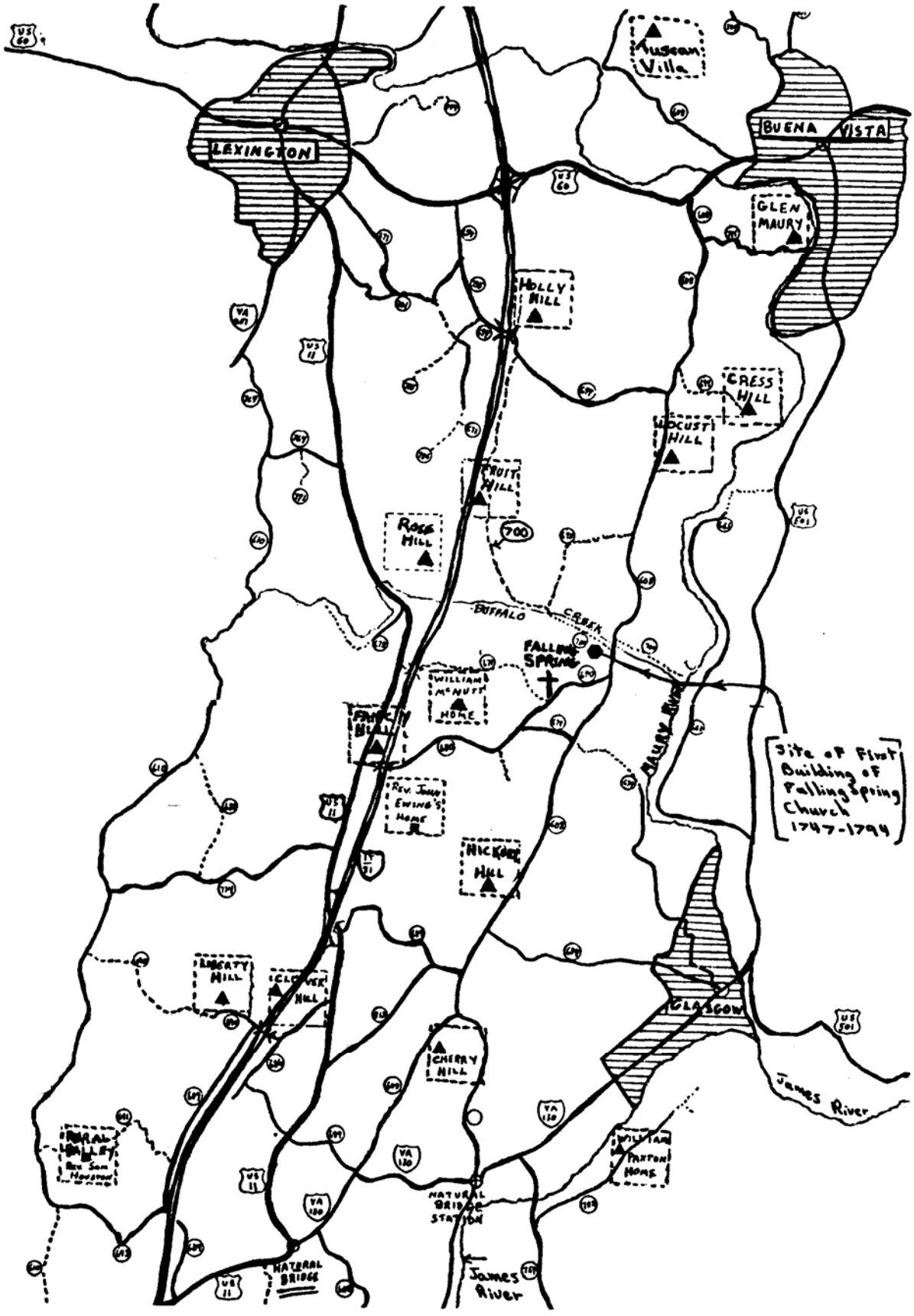
- River Vale - William Paxton and Sarah Petit Burke

There has been a lot of published information about these homes; both with NGFS material and by other sources. The purpose of this article will be to gather the highlights that may be important to the visitor in Natural Bridge and reference other material that may assist the visitor / researcher to find additional information as they desire.

An extensive discussion[2] of Soldier John Grigsby and the expedition to Cartagena, Columbia (1740-1741) can be found in Memorabilia I, starting on page 36, by Beth Nicholson. She and the other previous society genealogists gathered a lot of information on Soldier John and his family. In the files that have been passed on me as the current society genealogist, I discovered a typed paper titled "*The Early Grigsby's in Virginia, Part 1*" [3]. Parts of this information has been published in different formats, but I cannot find any indication that the paper in its current form has been provided to the membership. Unfortunately, there is no indication of who put it together, so I am only providing a generic reference to it.

The portion on Soldier John Grigsby will be provided in an article titled "*Soldier John Grigsby, 1720-1794*" later in this issue to provide the society a better understanding of his life.

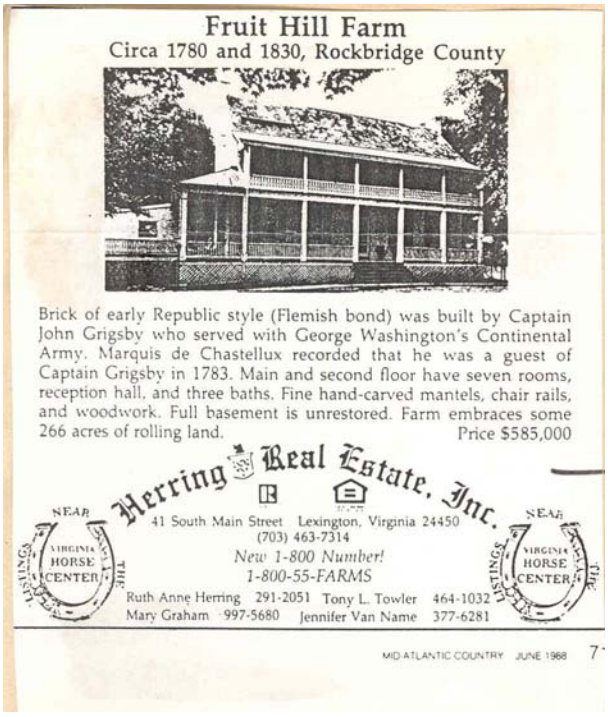
Figure 1: Rockbridge County, Virginia with the Location of the Grigsby Homes



Fruit Hill was the home of Soldier John Grigsby and his family in Rockbridge County[3]. The initial tract of 460 acres was conveyed to John Grigsby on November 1, 1779 by his son, James, who was his eldest child from his first marriage to Rosanna Etchison. John and Elizabeth's (Porter) youngest son, Reuben, was born here on June 6, 1780. In 1976, Fruit Hill was owned by Effinger Herring of Natural Bridge and was occupied by a tenant. Mr. Herring also owned Clover Hill / Herring Hall in 1976.

From Memorabilia I, page 61, we have the following description[4]:
"This is a brick home, now painted white, two story plus attic and basement, center hall entrance with stairs to second floor. Second floor rooms are separated by a solid wall. One set of rooms is reached by the front stairs, the other set is accessible by stairs from what may have been the first floor master bedroom. Buildings which housed the kitchen, etc. are not now standing."

John died at this house on April 7, 1794 and the house was inherited by his and Elizabeth's oldest son, Joseph, who later married Mary Ashley Warren Scott.



(above) Fruit Hill in 1979 during the first NGFS reunion.
(right) Advertisement for the sale of Fruit Hill in 1988.
(below) Drawing supplied by Brian Grigsby dated 1997 by R. Tharp

Important Book and Information
for Rockbridge County, Virginia

A book, titled *Rockbridge County, Virginia Heritage Book, 1778-1997*, was published by the Rockbridge Genealogical Society and can be found in libraries or through used book stores.

This book provides a wealth of information on Rockbridge County and its residents. I would recommend including it in your research library if you are interested in this area.

Information on the Rockbridge Area Genealogical Society can be found at:
http://www.rootsweb.com/~varockbr/rock.htm

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Rose Hill was the home of Elisha and Elizabeth Hawkins Porter Grigsby. Elisha was the sixth child of Solider John and Elizabeth. Elisha served as a Cornet[3] in the Third Regiment of Calvary, Virginia Militia, War of 1812, from 1811-1815.

> Note: The rank of cornet was the lowest commissioned officer rank in the dragoons of the time. Cornet in the dragoons was the equivalent of ensign in the infantry. In 1799 both ranks were abolished in the Regular Army and replaced by that of second lieutenant. Cornet, as a rank, survives today in the First Troop Philadelphia City Cavalry of the National Guard[5].

Rose Hill

From Memorabilia I, page 63, we have the following description[4]:
"This home of all brick construction and a full 2 1/2 stories has a chimney at either end, basement and porches. The grounds around the house have been frequently described, and the formal garden with its walks of brick between the boxwoods and flowers were a significant feature. A teahouse stood at the rear and was surrounded by lilacs and boxwoods. […] Present [1976] owner of Rose Hill is Mr. J. C. Kostelni."

The house is also known as "Hidden Valley" now[6].

(Left) Picture of Rose Hill from Rockbridge Genealogical Society, 1997.

Fancy Hill was the home of Sarah (Sally) Grigsby and Thomas Welch II[3]. Sarah was the fourth child (and only known daughter) of John and Rosanna Etchison Grigsby. They married in Culpepper County in 1775 and moved to Rockbridge County in 1779 with Soldier John and the rest of his family. Thomas and Sarah bought the property from her brother, James, on September 7, 1779. Fancy Hill was probably erected in 1780.

From Memorabilia I, page 62, we have the following description[4]:
"This is a large, impressive, two story brick home that has been restored and well maintained. Rear of house is visible from I-81."

Fancy Hill was inherited by Sarah and Thomas' oldest son (seventh child), Benjamin, who married Charlotte Pitzer. Benjamin operated a tavern and stage stop at Fancy Hill, known as Welch's Tavern, until he sold it in 1830. During the Civil War, it was owned by Lucy Maria Grigsby and her husband Norborne E. Chandler. Lucy Maria was the eighth child of Reuben and Verlinda Porter Grigsby. It later became a boys' preparatory school, known as Fancy Hill Academy, operated by David E. Laird[4].

(above) Picture of Fancy Hill in 2005 from Brian Grigsby.

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(above and above right) Fancy Hill in 1979 during the first NGFS reunion.

Clover Hill was the home of Hannah Ingram Grigsby and David Greenlee[3]. Hannah was the second child (and oldest daughter) of Elisha Grigsby and Elizabeth Hawkins Porter. David had inherited the property in 1808 and built the current mansion in 1832 fourteen years after their marriage[6]. The house is now called Herring Hall and was owned by Effinger Herring of Natural Bridge in 1976.

From Memorabilia I, page 64, we have the following description[4]:
"This brick house is large, 2 1/2 story, with several wings and out-buildings intact. The center hall, stair, and ornamental woodwork are a typical feature of the fine homes of the period."

The house was operated as a dining room and public accommodations for guests from 1926 to 1970 by Frances and Catherine Herring. William Grigsby McCormick, the grandson of Reuben Grigsby and the nephew of the reaper inventor, Cyrus McCormick, was often a guest at the house when visiting the area[4].

(left) Picture of Fancy Hill in 2005 from Brian Grigsby.

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Liberty Hill was the home of Elizabeth Porter Grigsby and her first cousin, Thomas Welch III[3]. Elizabeth was the fourth child of Elisha Grigsby and Elizabeth Hawkins Porter. Thomas, the son of Sarah Grigsby and Thomas Welch II, had inherited the Liberty Hill from his father in 1821. Thomas and Elizabeth were both buried on the property in a small enclosure at the edge of the orchard.

From Memorabilia I, page 65, we have the following description[4]:

"[…] the great rooms with their wealth of ornamental woodwork, the carved and embellished mantels, and elaborately paneled wainscoting, we learned something of their tastes and the refinement of their surroundings; when we descend to the large kitchen, with its immense fireplace, fitted with enormous crane, we go back to the day when the competent and alert mistress of the household directed the labor of her slave women; when we peep into the wine cellar discreetly tucked in back of the main cellar and guarded from unauthorized approach by a heavy barred oaken door, we shrewdly suspect that the occupants of this household were not accustomed to all the creature comforts."

(above) Picture of Liberty Hill in 2005 from Brian Grigsby.

Hickory Hill was the home of Reuben Grigsby and his wife Verlinda Alexander Porter[3]. Elizabeth was the fourth child of Elisha Grigsby and Elizabeth Hawkins Porter. Reuben was the only child of Soldier John Grigsby to be born at Rose Hill after it was built. In 1961, Hickory Hill was said to be the summer home of the then President of Washington and Lee University.

From Memorabilia I, page 65, we have the following description[4]:
"Although somewhat larger than some of the "Hills", Hickory Hill was constructed along the same classic lines. High verandas with Doric columns were a feature of the house which was owned for a period in the 1930's by Chauncey Y. McCormick (a grandson of Reuben and Verlinda Grigsby) of Chicago who added the beautiful silver chandelier that hangs in the front hall."

(left) Picture of Hickory Hill in 2005 from Brian Grigsby.

(right) Hickory Hill in 1979 during the first NGFS reunion.

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The article “Life at Hickory Hill” can be found on page 85 of Memorabilia I.

(left) Hickory Hill in 1979 during the first NGFS reunion.

Cherry Hill was the home of David Greenlee and his wife Jane White [3]. There is not a direct relationship for this family, of this Seven Hills home, with the Grigsby’s except as the uncle of David and Hannah Grigsby Greenlee. It is now known as “Marlbrook”.

From Memorabilia I, page 71, we have the following description[4]:
“[…] was probably constructed about 1790 with a later addition bearing a dated brick over door, June 15, 1804 and the initials “D.G.”. Two long rows of cherry trees once graced the entrance to make good the name.”

A further description[3] is given as “the house, like the others, is of red brick, long and rambling, with little architectural embellishment, but of excellent lines and massive walls. […] Each large farm had its smokehouse, lye hopper, turkey pen, henhouse, barns, pig pens, office, carpenter shop, blacksmith shop, kitchen, granary, corn cribs, springhouse, root cellar, loom house, stable, privies, and servant quarters.”

It is also described[6] as with “an unusual interior feature is the use in common by two side by side adjoining rooms, of a single chimney. A visitor can stand in the hall, look through the adjoining doors, and see both fireplaces.”

(left) Picture of Hickory Hill in 2005 from Brian Grigsby.

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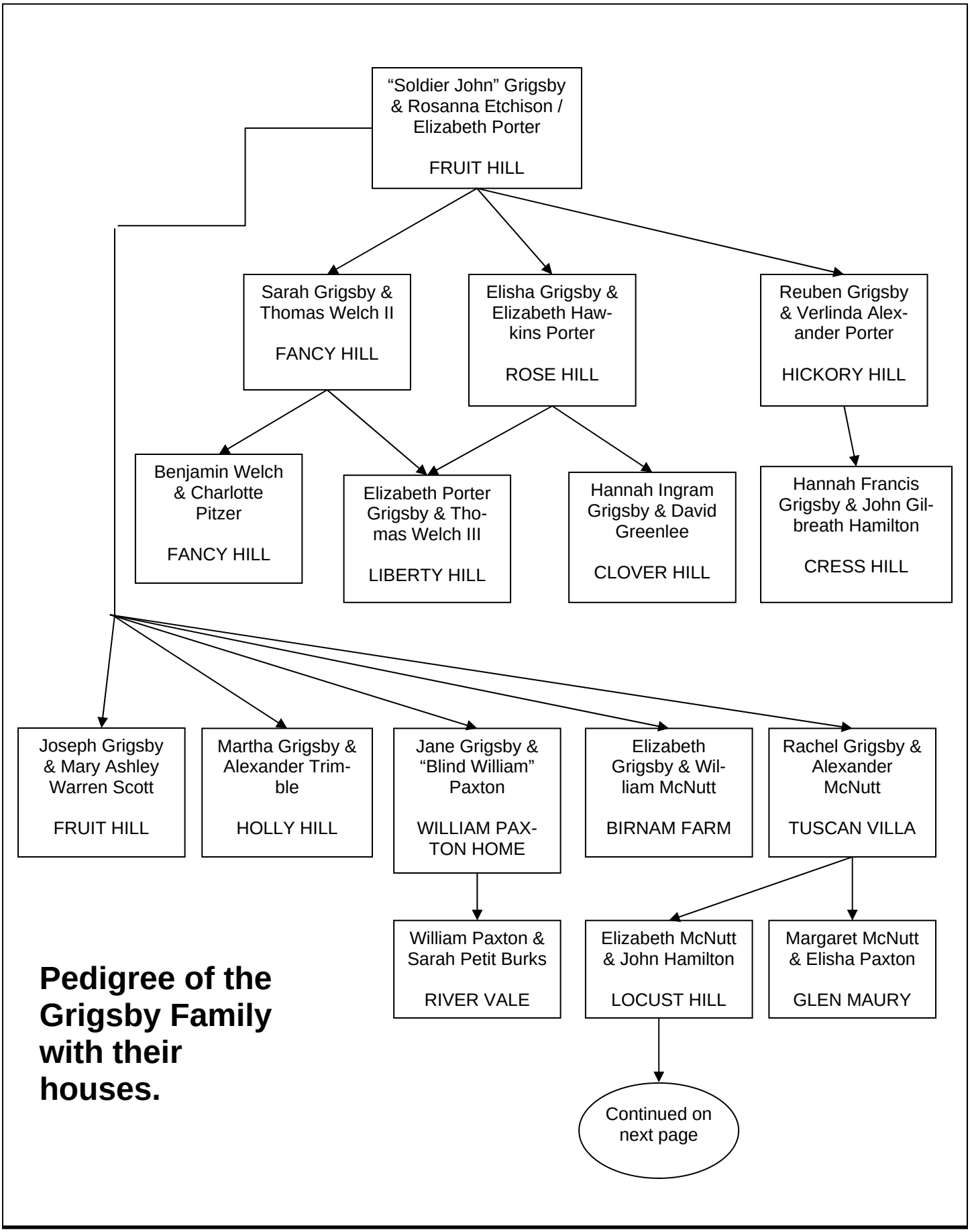


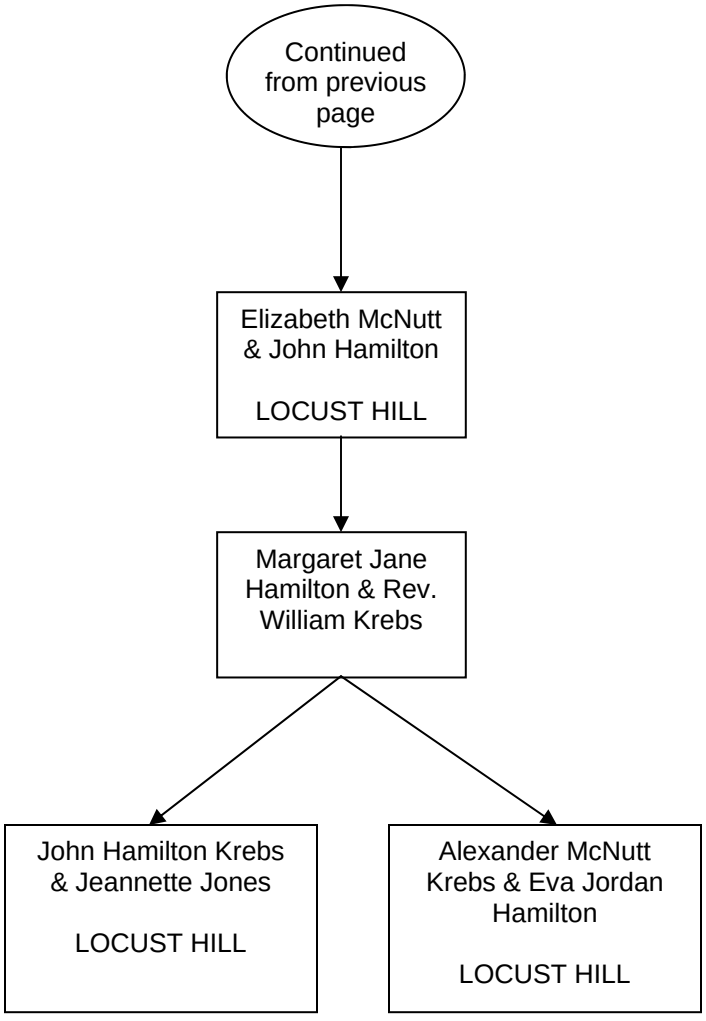
Pedigree of the Grigsby Family with their houses.

(Continued from page 10, The Grigsby Homes...)

Remaining homes - the other homes listed previously can be found in Memorabilia I and no new information has been found, so additional descriptions cannot be provided. However, pictures were taken during the previous reunion of William McNutt's house:

(above) Birnam Farm in 1979 during the first NGFS reunion.

Pedigree of the Grigsby Family with their houses.



(Continued from page 15, The Grigsby Homes...)

Sources:

[1] - Nicholson, Elizabeth M. (ed), 1979, "*Grigsby Homes in Rockbridge County, Virginia"*, Memorabilia, The Grigsby Family Reunion Book, 1779-1979. Wampeter Press, Green Harbor, MA., pp. 210-211.

[2] - Nicholson, Elizabeth M. (ed), 1979, "*Soldier John Grigsby and the Expedition To Cartagena, Columbia, 1740-1741"*, Memorabilia, The Grigsby Family Reunion Book, 1779-1979. Wampeter Press, Green Harbor, MA., pp. 36-45.

[3] - unknown author, *The Early Grigsby's in Virginia, Part 1*, typed paper in NGFS files.

[4] - Nicholson, Elizabeth M. (ed), 1979, "*Early Grigsby and Related Homes in Rockbridge County, VA"*, Memorabilia, The Grigsby Family Reunion Book, 1779-1979. Wampeter Press, Green Harbor, MA., pp. 60-72.

[5] - Pike, John, *Dragoons*, 2005, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/army/dragoon.htm, retrieved on June 25, 2005.

[6] - Rockbridge Genealogical Society, 1997, *The Seven Hills of Rockbridge*, Rockbridge County, Virginia Heritage Book, 1778-1997, located at Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah in April 2005, US/CAN 975.5852 H2rc, pp. 120-121.