

The Dr. William and Elizabeth Davidson House

Ingleside



William Speight MacLean Davidson (1817-1873) was born at Rural Hill, the 3500-acre plantation established by his great grandfather, Major John Davidson, in the mid-1700s.¹ A member of the first graduating class at Davidson College (1840), Davidson went on to earn a degree from the Medical College of South Carolina in 1842.² He returned to Mecklenburg County and was a doctor for the rest of his life. Davidson also superintended a large plantation. He possessed 32 slaves in 1860, making him one of the individuals owning the largest number of slaves in Mecklenburg County.³ Davidson's first wife, Jane Elizabeth Torrence Davidson (1823-1844), died at the age of twenty-one.⁴ Davidson subsequently married Mary Johnston Davidson (1827-1897).⁵

William Davidson was a wealthy man. His plantation had orchards of peaches and apples. It had dairy cows and meadows. Davidson grew cash crops, principally cotton and wheat.⁶ The plantation contained an array of buildings to support Davidson's expansive agricultural enterprises, including a "large barn and stables, gin house and cotton press and all necessary outbuildings."⁷

The date when the main house or Ingleside was constructed is uncertain. The evidence suggests that it was built to replace an earlier residence during or soon after the Civil War. After Dr. Davidson's death on December 15, 1873, his widow placed the homeplace up for sale. The newspaper advertisement stated that Ingleside was "large and commodious and comparatively new."⁸ One assumes that Dr. Davidson possessed sufficient cash reserves to allow him to erect his new imposing home despite the economic hardships produced by the defeat of the Confederacy.



Dr. William Davidson's Grave



Mary Johnston Davidson's Grave

¹ https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/8582018/william-speight_maclean-davidson

² *The Semi-centennial Catalogue of Davidson College* (Davidson, N.C., n.d.), 36.

³ *Slave Schedule of 1860 U. S. Census*. This writer first visited the property in the mid-1970s. I remember seeing a cluster of small frame homes directly across Bud Henderson Road from the main house. I assume that these homes, now destroyed, were first used by enslaved inhabitants.

⁴ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/8582013/jane-elizabeth-davidson>.

⁵ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/49869343/mary-davidson>.

⁶ *Daily Carolina Times*, June 19, 1869; *The Southern Home*, October 5, 1874; *The Southern Home*, October 31, 1879. An interesting episode involving Dr. Davidson occurred in September 1860. Riding through the countryside he came upon a farm family planting wheat. He told them that a successful wheat crop was the result of "good preparation." (see *The Southern Home*, October 31, 1879).

⁷ *The Southern Home*, October 5, 1874.

⁸ *Ibid.*