

Slavery at the Hezekiah Alexander House

Addendum to the Designation Report
September 13, 2021

The history of the Hezekiah Alexander House is intertwined with the history of slavery in Mecklenburg County. Hezekiah Alexander was a slave holder. While little is known about the specific enslaved people who lived and worked on the Alexander property, their lives probably followed a similar trajectory to other enslaved people in Mecklenburg County. This list below summarizes what we know about enslaved people in the Alexander household for different years. Evidence is scant for the 1770s and 1780s, with more information available for the 1790s.

1775-1781 Hezekiah had at least one male enslaved person during the Revolution, possibly a personal servant who traveled with him. Ozwald's son, S. P. Alexander, reminisced that "when I was some 8 or ten years old [i.e. circa 1825] the children used to gather about an old negro man who told us of many wonderful things he and "Mas. Hezekiah" did during the war."¹

1777 In "A Modern Poem" by the Mecklenburg Censor, Squire Subtle (identified by the author as representing Hezekiah Alexander) speaks of "Seeing my grounds by negroes till'd / And all my chests with dollars fill'd . . ." Since this is in a section of the poem in which Subtle expresses his ambitions for the future, it is of limited relevance in determining the extent of his slaveholding at the time.²

1790 The first national census shows Hezekiah as owning thirteen enslaved people.³

1791 (April) Hezekiah purchases

"one Negro girl" for £90 8 s.

"one Negro man" for £150

"one Negro girl" for £136

"one Negro wench" for £163

¹ S. P. Alexander to Lyman Draper, March 11, 1874. Quote taken from transcript in Mary Boyer's HA Black History Collection, 1986.

²Quoted in E. Thomson Shields, Jr. "'A Modern Poem,' by the Mecklenburg Censor: Politics and Satire in Revolutionary North Carolina," *Early American Literature* 29, no. 3 (1994): 223.

³ "Ezekiah Alexander, Esq." United States Census, 1790, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, digitized manuscript version accessed via HeritageQuest 5/10/2009. There has been some past dispute concerning whether or not the entry for "Ezekiah" represents Hezekiah Alexander, owner of the Rock House. I am persuaded that this is Hezekiah for the following reasons. First, use of the term "Esquire" as a mark of status and stature is consistent with the way Hezekiah Alexander is referred to in other records. Second, the demographic profile of the free white people in "Ezekiah's" household (four white males sixteen and older, two white males under sixteen, and three white females) is a much closer match for what would be expected for "our" Hezekiah than is the household profile of the other possible Hezekiah Alexander. (Most likely Hezekiah, Amos, Hezekiah Jr., and Silas were counted as the white males sixteen and over, while Ozwald and Joel were counted as under sixteen, a slight understatement of Joel's actual age. Mary and Keziah would account for two of the white females; the identity of the other is unknown since Esther and Polly were both married and presumably living with their husbands who are listed separately in the census.) Finally, the names of other heads of household surrounding "Ezekiah" show a high degree of overlap with the names surrounding Hezekiah Alexander in the tax rolls of the 1790s.

along with livestock, household, and farm goods from the estate of Agnes Allen (a neighbor).⁴

1796 (Aug.) Hezekiah creates a will mentioning the following eleven enslaved people (along with the person to whom they are willed)

Sam (to Mary Alexander, Hezekiah's wife; enumerated along with land, livestock, and farm implements)

Abram (to Mary; enumerated along with land, livestock, and farm implements)

Bett (to Mary; enumerated along with personal possessions and household goods)

Jack (to William S.)

Mary (had already been sold to John Park Jr.; HA leaves the value of his interest in the sale to James R.)

Anne (to Silas)

Jean (to Esther Garrison and children)

Jean's child Siah (to Esther Garrison and children)

Jean's child Frank (to Esther Garrison and children)

Jean's child Nancy (to Esther Garrison and children)

Hannah (to Keziah)⁵

1797 (Jan.) Hezekiah writes a codicil to the will clarifying that he leaves to Charles Polk all the property his daughter Mary Alexander took with her after her marriage to Polk, including:

Negro Nance⁶

1797 Tax list shows Hezekiah as having six "black polls" (i.e. six enslaved people, male or female, ages twelve to fifty).⁷

1798 Tax list shows Hezekiah as having six black polls.⁸

1800 Oz[ea?] Alexander, is listed as a head of household in the 1800 census. The household includes one white male older than forty-five and one white female older than forty-five, presumably Hezekiah and Mary. The household includes nine enslaved people.⁹

⁴ Agnes Allen Estate Inventory, April 1791, photocopy in CMH R.2009.001.

⁵ Will of Hezekiah Alexander, August 8, 1796, North Carolina State Archives.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Mecklenburg County Tax Lists, 1797, 1798, 1799, 1806 & 1807*, transcribed by Ralph B. and Herman W. Ferguson. (Rocky Mount, NC: Herman W. Ferguson, 1993) p. 273.

⁸ *Mecklenburg County Tax Lists, 1797, 1798, 1799, 1806 & 1807*, transcribed by Ralph B. and Herman W. Ferguson. (Rocky Mount, NC: Herman W. Ferguson, 1993) p. 281.

⁹ "Oz[ea?] Alexander" United States Census, 1800, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, digitized manuscript version accessed via HeritageQuest 5/10/2009. In addition to the older man and woman, the household included two white men and two white women in the twenty-six to forty-four age range, plus two boys under ten. This would match up with Ozwald, his wife Sarah, Keziah, and probably Joel. One of the boys could have been James Amzi Alexander, born to Ozwald and Sarah that July, but the identity of the other is uncertain.

1801 (Oct.) Inventory of Hezekiah's estate following his death includes two enslaved children not mentioned in the will

Nance "a Negroe Child" valued at \$150

Rachel "a Negroe Child" valued at \$130¹⁰

1803 (Sept.) Mary writes a will mentioning:

Bet (to Joel)

Fanny [Jenny?] child of Bet, born Sept. 5, 1799, (to Keziah)¹¹

Enslaved People in the Alexander Household

Based on the same information used for the timeline, this section is organized by personal name rather than date. Keep in mind that there were probably other enslaved people here whose names are unknown because they either died or were sold before Hezekiah wrote his will.

Abram: A "Negro man." Hezekiah bequeathed Abram to Mary Sample Alexander in his 1796 will.¹²

Ann: A "Negro girl." In his will, Hezekiah left Ann to his son Silas.¹³

Bet: A "Negro woman." Hezekiah Alexander left Bet to his wife, Mary Sample Alexander. She in turn left Bet to their son Joel when she made out her will in 1803. We know that Bet was of child-bearing age around the turn of the century because Mary's will specifically mention Bet's child Fanny/Jenny (accounts and spellings vary), born on Sept. 5, 1799. Mary left Fanny/Jenny to Keziah.¹⁴

Fanny or Jenny: Fanny/Jenny was Bet's daughter, and was described in Mary Alexander's will as having been born on Sept. 5, 1799. Mary left the child Fanny/Jenny to her daughter Keziah.¹⁵

Frank: Frank, son of Jean, was born into slavery. In the 1796 will of Hezekiah Alexander, he left Jean, Frank, and Frank's siblings, Siah and Nancy, to his daughter Esther Garrison.¹⁶

¹⁰ Inventory of the Estate of Hezekiah Alexander, October 16, 1801

¹¹ Will of Mary Alexander, Sept. 30, 1803, Mecklenburg County Will Book A, pp 47-48, photocopy at CMH in R.2009.001 (attached to Hezekiah's Will).

¹² Will of Hezekiah Alexander, August 8, 1796, North Carolina State Archives.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid. Will of Mary Alexander, Sept. 30, 1803, Mecklenburg County Will Book A, pp 47-48, photocopy at CMH in R.2009.001 (attached to Hezekiah's Will).

¹⁵ Will of Mary Alexander, Sept. 30, 1803, Mecklenburg County Will Book A, pp 47-48, photocopy at CMH in R.2009.001 (attached to Hezekiah's Will). The manuscript of Mary's will is faded and the handwriting is open to multiple interpretations. Some readers have seen "Jenny" rather than "Fanny."

The docent manual originally contained a sentence stating that "Kezia then transferred ownership of Fanny to her brother William Sample Alexander." I have not been able to find a citation for this information so I have deleted the reference pending further documentation. Leslie Kesler, Historian and Curator, June 1, 2009.

¹⁶ Will of Hezekiah Alexander, August 8, 1796, North Carolina State Archives.

Hannah: a “negro Girl.” Hezekiah Alexander bequeathed Hannah to his daughter Keziah Alexander in his 1796 will.¹⁷

Jack: A “negro man.” Hezekiah left Jack to his oldest son, William Sample Alexander.¹⁸

Jean: A “negro wench.” She was the mother of at least three children, Siah, Frank, and Nancy, when Hezekiah Alexander made out his will in 1796. He left the family of four, along with any future children of Jean, to his daughter Esther Garrison.¹⁹

Mary: Before making out his will in 1796, Hezekiah had already sold Mary to John Parks, Jr. According to the will, Hezekiah’s son, James R. Alexander, had acted as his father’s agent in arranging the sale. Apparently payment had not yet been made, because Hezekiah left James “my right, Title & Claim to the value of a negro Girl named Mary now in possession of John Parks Junr.”²⁰

Nance (adult): In a 1797 codicil to his will, Hezekiah Alexander clarified that ownership of “Negro Nance” was to pass to his daughter Mary’s widower, Charles Polk, and to their children. The document implies that Nance had been living in the Polk household since their marriage more than a decade earlier.²¹

Nance (child): a “Negro child named Nance” was listed as part of Hezekiah Alexander’s estate inventory in 1801.²² It is highly unlikely that the enslaved woman Nance that Mary “Polly” Alexander took with her when she married in 1786 would have been referred to as a “child” fifteen years later. Therefore, this is presumably a different person, possibly a child who had come into the household in the five years between the writing of Hezekiah’s will and his death.

Rachel: Like the child Nance, Rachel is mentioned in Hezekiah Alexander’s estate inventory of 1801, but not in his will. Perhaps Hezekiah purchased her after 1796 or she was born after this date.²³

Sam: In his 1796 will, Hezekiah Alexander leaves the “negro man” Sam to his wife, Mary Sample Alexander.²⁴

This information on the enslaved people associated with the Hezekiah Alexander House was provided by the staff of the Charlotte Museum of History.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

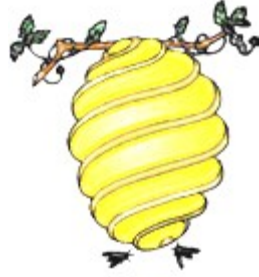
²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

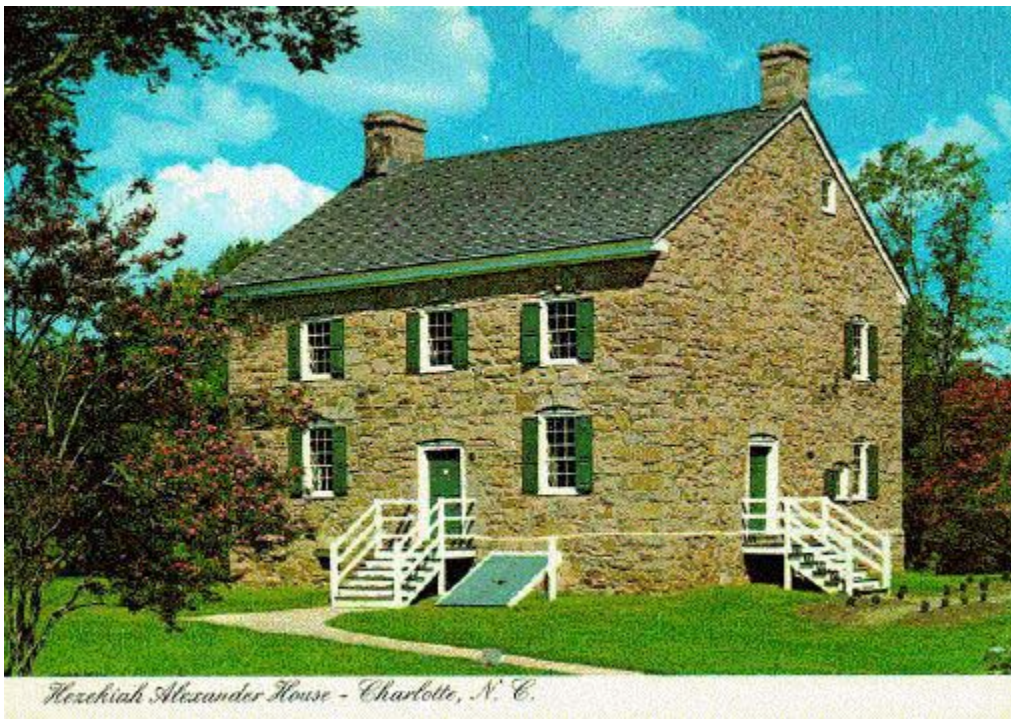
²² Inventory of the Estate of Hezekiah Alexander, October 16, 1801.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Will of Hezekiah Alexander, August 8, 1796, North Carolina State Archives.



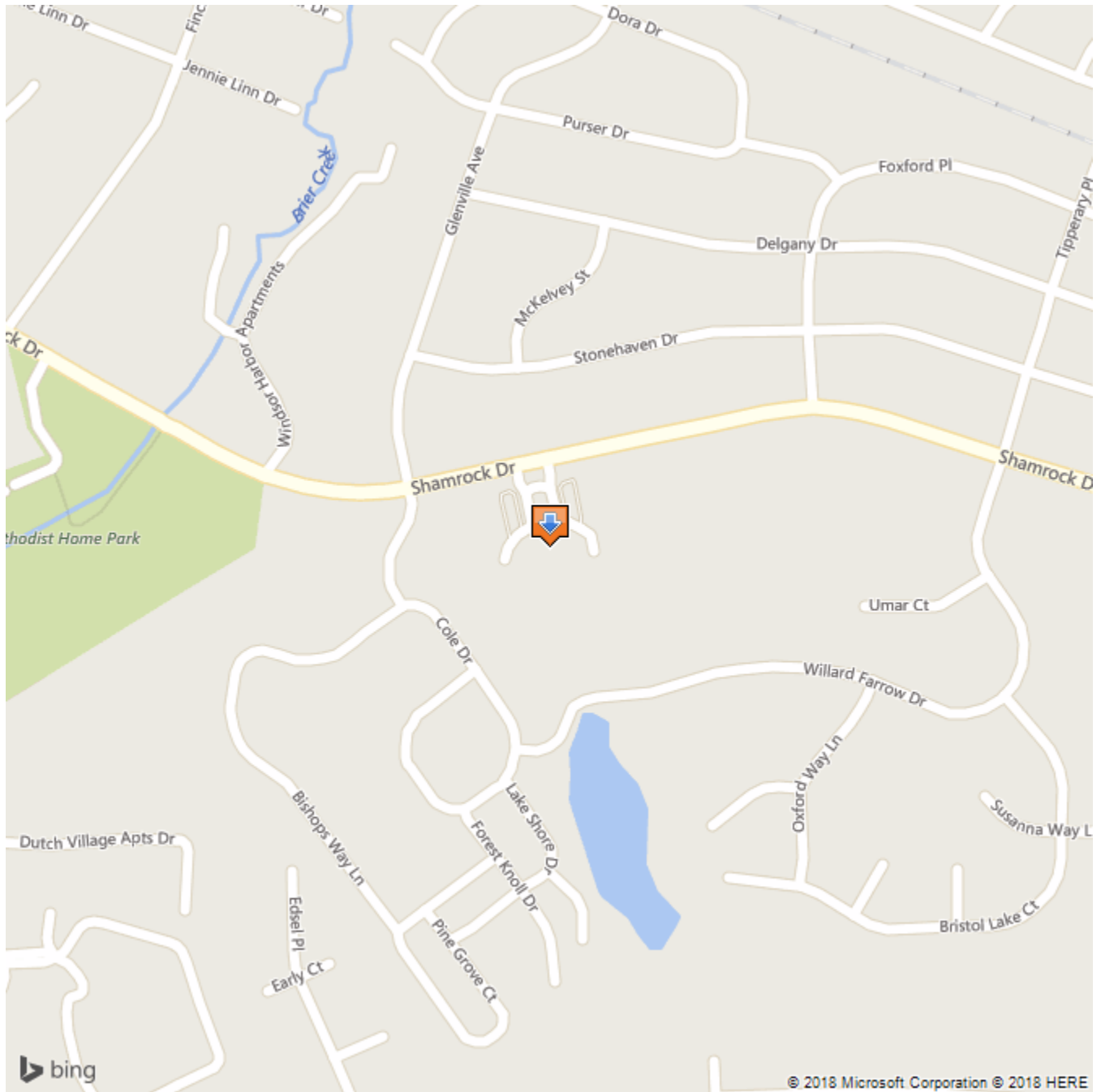
Survey and Research Report
On The
Hezekiah Alexander House



Hezekiah Alexander House - Charlotte, N. C.

Hezekiah Alexander was born January 13, 1722, in Cecil County, Maryland. He was the son of James Alexander and Margaret McKnitt. His grandfather, Joseph Alexander, had emigrated to Maryland in the early years of the eighteenth century. Sometime after 1754, Hezekiah, as well as his brother, John McKnitt, emigrated to North Carolina.

The Alexanders quickly established themselves in their new home, Mecklenburg County. Although Hezekiah had come to North Carolina as a blacksmith, it was as a farmer that he made his fortune. On April 1, 1767, he purchased, from his brother John, a tract of land containing over three hundred acres located on a branch of Sugar Creek. It was here that in 1774 he built a stone house to accommodate his wife, Mary Sample, and their growing family. The house was to remain Hezekiah's residence until his death in 1801, and became the center of his expanding farming enterprises. Both Hezekiah and John McKnitt Alexander were active in the affairs of their county. John was a crown surveyor and county magistrate. Hezekiah played an active role in the church, being an elder in the Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church. He was also a trustee of Queens College, chartered in 1771, renamed Liberty Hall in 1774. Both brothers numbered among their friends and associates the prominent community leaders of Mecklenburg; among these were Thomas Polk, William Sample, Ephraim Brevard, the Phifers, the Averys, and Jeremiah MaCafforty.





With the approach of the Revolution, both of the Alexander brothers became increasingly involved in the events which would culminate in independence from Great Britain. In 1775 both men were members of the Mecklenburg County Committee of Safety. On August 21, 1775, Hezekiah was appointed by the Provincial Congress meeting in Hillsborough to the Salisbury District Committee of Safety which was to serve as the local governing body for a multi-county area. In November, 1776, Hezekiah joined other state delegates at Halifax to form the Fifth Provincial Congress which was charged with the task of writing the first state constitution. After the Halifax Congress, Hezekiah joined the Fourth Regiment of North Carolina Troops as Paymaster.

Hezekiah Alexander's stone house is possibly the only extant structure belonging to a framer of the state's first constitution.

Architecturally, the Hezekiah Alexander House reflects the influence of the German emigrants who came to North Carolina from Pennsylvania in the 1750s and 60s. During that period several thousand families settled in Mecklenburg and the adjoining counties. Many of those settlers constructed houses of native stone similar to that of Alexander's. They were quite similar in form to houses built by the Germans in Pennsylvania and the Dutch in the Hudson Valley. The Hezekiah Alexander House is one of the few surviving examples of this architectural type in North Carolina.



Exterior: The Hezekiah Alexander House was constructed of native Piedmont stone in a random pattern with oyster shell mortar. The walls are two feet thick. The structure is two full stories over a high basement. The front and rear facades are each of three bays with contour doors. The attic is lit by a pair of small windows in the west gable and one in the northeast corner of the east gable. The windows are six-over-six in configuration, all having batten shutters. Segmental arches were originally constructed over all windows and doorways. Those on the front and rear facades have keystones. Some of these arches were eliminated during alterations to the house, probably at sometime during the nineteenth century. In the west gable there is an intersecting blind round window. The roof is now covered with asbestos shingles; originally it was covered with cypress shakes. The wide overhang of the eaves is not original. The exterior dimensions of the house are length 36' 5" and width 35' 5".

Interior: The present interior plan has one long room across the front of the house with an open stair in one end and a corner fireplace in the other. Originally there was a wooden partition dividing the stair hall from the parlor. The present stair is a replacement from the original enclosed one. Behind this room are two smaller rooms, a kitchen and bedroom, divided by a small passage leading to the rear door. The right-hand wall is one of a later date. Originally there were two rooms of unequal size on the rear. There are corner fireplaces in both rear rooms. The chimney breasts were originally plastered. There is a warming cupboard over the fire place in the right-hand rear room. This room must have been used as the kitchen.

On the second floor there are three rooms and a stair hall. The wall between the stair hall and the room behind it is of dubious form and may not be original. There are no fireplaces on the second floor. The basement is divided into two rooms of unequal size by a transverse stone wall. There is a stair to the second floor and an exterior entrance in the southeast corner of the east room. All ceilings show exposed structural members. All of the stone walls are plastered on the interior. The other interior partitions are composed of simple vertical wooden sheathing.