

## Griffin Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>       | Rockingham Co. Historical Collections<br>Gerald B. James Library<br>Rockingham Community College<br>P. O. Box 38<br>Wentworth, NC 27375   |
| <b>Title:</b>            | Griffin Collection  |
| <b>Accession No.:</b>    | 95-032  |
| <b>Extent:</b>           | 2 boxes   |
| <b>Provenance:</b>       | The original Griffin papers are owned by Mrs. Fred Allred of the Bethany community of Rockingham County, NC who loaned the material to be copied for the Rockingham County Historical Collections in 1995.  |
| <b>Inclusive Dates:</b>  | 1824-1965   |
| <b>Subject Headings:</b> | Agriculture – Rockingham County (N. C.) – 19 <sup>th</sup> century<br>Bason School – Rockingham County (N. C.)<br>Brim, Arie Anne, d.1886<br>Civil War veterans – Rockingham County (N. C.)<br>Dye family -- Genealogy<br>Gallaway, John M.<br>Griffin, Anderson<br>Griffin, Anna Bell, d.1897<br>Griffin, Charley C., d.1950<br>Griffin, John Thomas, d.1909<br>Griffin, Lee Giley, d.1913<br>Griffin, Lue Ely, d.1938<br>Griffin, Mary Jane, d.1897<br>Griffin, Patrick R., d.1948<br>Griffin, Robert R., d.1965<br>Griffin, Sarah Dye<br>Griffin, William L., 1832-1920<br>Griffin, William L., Jr., d.1954<br>Grist mills – Rockingham County (N. C.)<br>New Lebanon Church<br>Rockingham County (N. C.) -- Genealogy |

Sawmills – Rockingham County (N. C.)  
Schools – Rockingham County (N. C.) – 1900-1925  
Smothers, A. Jack

**Items Separated:**

**Related Collections:**

**Preferred Citation:** *Griffin Collection. 95-032. Rockingham Co. Historical Collections, Gerald B. James Library, Rockingham Community College.*

**Descriptive Note:** This collection consists of copies of original papers which are owned by a descendent of William L. Griffin (1832-1920), a mill owner and farmer, who resided in the Rockingham County community of Bason, now Bethany. He was involved in activities at New Lebanon Church and in fraternal organizations. The oldest papers in the collection relate to the Dye family who were William L. Griffin's maternal relatives. These papers relate to the settlement of the Dye estate 1824-1826. Other items include records from the Griffin family Bible, tax receipts, accounts, bills from area merchants in the community and in Reidsville and other areas.

Correspondence includes a number of letters written during the Civil War by William L. Griffin and his relatives. The collection also includes letters written by various relatives in the 1880s and 1890s.

One of the most significant items in the collection is a copy of William L. "Bill" Griffin's account book which contains entries from 1875-1905. The account book contains information on the operation of his grist, flour and sawmill businesses. It also has many farming operation and tenant account entries. The accounts contain much information on how a late 19<sup>th</sup> century milling and farming operation were carried on in a rural piedmont county. Entries include the names of customers and the prices they were charged for sawing lumber and grinding grain. Other information reflects the cost of goods and the prevailing cost of labor during the period.

**Family Sketch:** William Lawson Griffin was born in Rockingham County, NC on 12 January 1832. He was the son of Anderson and Sarah Dye Griffin who were married in August of 1829 and resided in

southern Rockingham County. Anderson Griffin was a longtime blacksmith in the county.

William, or Bill as he was known, seems to have left the home fires early in life for he is listed as an 18 year old laborer in 1850, living in another household. In 1858, he purchased 100 acres of land on Bushy Fork of Rockhouse Creek which he sold the next year after he moved to Henry County, VA. Bill returned to Rockingham County by 1862 and listed his occupation as mechanic. He evidently had a natural mechanical ability and learned the millwright trade from some experienced person. Later in life he was also a farmer.

With the coming of the Civil War, Bill enlisted on 7 July 1862, joining Company D of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, North Carolina Cavalry "Rockingham Rangers" under Captain John M. Gallaway. The 63<sup>rd</sup> later became the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment of North Carolina Cavalry. He was mustered in as a corporal and achieved the rank of sergeant during the period of March-April of 1863. His regiment served in eastern NC, Virginia and was later at Gettysburg. He was captured at Goods Mill, Maryland on 12 July 1863 and was confined at Point Lookout, Maryland until he was paroled and exchanged at City Point, Virginia on 20 March 1864. He returned to the Confederate Army and was paroled at Greensboro, NC on the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> of May, 1865.

Bill Griffin returned to Rockingham County and on 25 February 1868 he married Arie Anne Brim (Brame) of the Bethany area. On 17 October 1868, he purchased a 210 acre tract of land which lay on the Rocky Fork of Jacob's Creek in the Bethany area. Being an expert millwright, Bill decided he wanted to build his own mill. He found a suitable location on Rocky Fork and secured a partner, A. Jack Smothers. The two men erected a substantial mill under a 50/50 partnership agreement. Before building the mill, they first built a water-powered sawmill with which they sawed lumber for the construction of the mill. The framing was hand hewn and held together with wooden pegs. The mill sat on a substantial rock foundation, 26 feet by 40 feet. A dirt and wooden dam was built across the creek to secure water power to operate the waterwheel. Construction may have begun in May 1874 when Griffin deeded Smothers one half interest in the 10 acre mill tract. The surviving mill account book shows that the sawmill was in successful operation by March 1875. The partners named their operation the Rocky

Fork Mills but the name never caught on and the business was always referred to as the Griffin and Smothers Mill.

In addition to the sawmill, the mill also had stones to grind both corn and wheat. A. Jack Smothers lived on the property in the miller's house and operated the mills. Bill Griffin used part of the mill to manufacture coffins for residents of the area. While he worked at the mill, his main occupation seems to have been farming his land near the New Bethel (Bethany) Road. A mortgage on the mill was never paid off and in 1894 Bill lost his share. Five years later, Smothers sold his interest so the mill passed out of the hands of the original builders and owners.

Bill spent the remainder of his life as a farmer and blacksmith on his home tract of land. On 4 November 1887, he was appointed postmaster of a rural post office named Bason. He kept the post office in a small building near his home. The post office closed in July of 1904. Bill's wife, Arie Anne, died on 20 September 1886. He never remarried. They had 9 children: Mary Jane (d. 1897), John Thomas (d.1909), William L., Jr. (d.1954), Anna Bell (d.1897), Lue Ely (d.1938), Lee Giley (d.1913), Robert R. (d.1965), Patrick R. (d.1948) and Charley C. (d.1950).

William L. "Bill" Griffin lived to an advanced age and died on 8 June 1920 at the age of 88. He was buried at Mount Bethel Christian Church in the Bethany community of Rockingham County.

#### Bibliography

Appointments of United States Postmasters, 1832-1929, U. S. Post Office Department Records, North Carolina Section.

Griffin Collection. 95-032. Rockingham Co. Historical Collections, Gerald B. James Library, Rockingham Community College.

Hamilton, Charlie. "Griffin's Mill in Rockingham," Greensboro Record, 23 Oct. 1958, p.B9.

Manarin, Louis H., *North Carolina Troops, 1861-1865, Roster*, Raleigh, NC, NC State Print Shop, 1968, vol II, p.398.

Rockingham County Census Records, 1850-1880.

Rockingham County Death Records, vol.7 p.500.

Rockingham County Deeds, 2dV, p.285; 2dW, p.260; 2dY, p.376; Book 95, p.434; Book 122, p.355.

Rockingham County Marriage Bonds and Licenses.

"Griffin's Mill, Ownership and Operation", no author, no date (possibly 1960s).

Robert W. Carter, Jr.  
RCC Historical Consultant  
13 Oct 1995

## **Contents:**

### Folder list:

#### Box 1:

1. Bason Home Demonstration Club, minute books, clippings, etc.
2. NC Sunday School Association and New Bethany Association
3. Newspaper clippings – Miscellaneous
4. Bason 4-H Club Secretary's Record Book, 1930-32
5. Bethany High School – Clippings, photos, etc.
6. Gold Hill School Public School Register, 1916-17
7. Reidsville Seminary – Catalog, 1907-08
8. Rock Hill School Register, 1910-11
9. Mid-Term Exam, 7<sup>th</sup> grade, 1916-17, Rockingham County Public Schools
10. Rockingham County School Messenger (newsletter type publication), November, 1926 and December, 1926
11. Sharp Institute – Catalog, 1903-04 (original); 1904-05 (photocopy); 1905-06 (photocopy); 1906-07 (original)
12. Sylvania School, Huntsville Township – School Register, 1914-15
13. NC Farmers Protective Association flyer and various tobacco sales receipts from many local tobacco warehouses, mostly made out to C. C. Griffin

Box 2:

1. Account Book, 1875-1905, Part I, pages 1-49
2. Account Book, 1875-1905, Part II, pages 50-99
3. Account Book, 1875-1905, Part III, pages 100-149
4. Account Book, 1875-1905, Part IV, pages 150-194
5. Bason School, 1880s
6. Bible records, 1832-1965
7. Church – New Lebanon Church Sunday School, photograph
8. Correspondence – Civil War, 1861-1864
9. Correspondence – Miscellaneous, 1860-1895
10. Dye family material, 1824-1826
11. Griffin's Mill History, 1958, c.1965
12. Receipts, Accounts, Bills, 1824-1965