

**From Wadlington to Williams: Clermont as an Evolving Homestead**  
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**July 2011**

One of Clarke County's best-preserved 18<sup>th</sup>-century dwellings, Clermont represents an evolved house where modifications are well articulated and correspond to the changing circumstances of ownership and personal stories of its residents. Owned by only three families and their descendants during its 255-year history, Clermont began as a frontier house built in 1756 by Thomas Wadlington and achieved its current configuration in 1970 during its ownership by the Williams family. This paper will introduce those who occupied Clermont and discuss how they left their mark on it.<sup>1</sup>

During the summer of 2010, Daniel Miles of the Oxford Dendrochronology Lab conducted physical investigations that resulted in the tree-ring dating of multiple phases in Clermont's building chronology. As Dennis Pogue has illustrated, this undoubtedly ranks Clermont as one of the best understood houses in the state when considering its original construction and subsequent additions and alterations. Additional physical investigations including paint analysis and archaeology will likely reveal information that will further expand the understanding of Clermont's building evolution.

I will expand on the theme of Clermont as an evolved house that was introduced in Dennis' paper and suggest that together with the rich documentary evidence pertaining to the history of the site, Clermont provides an opportunity to bind the building's chronological and spatial development to the history of its occupants. I will also introduce some other "early" dwellings in the area to enhance the understanding of how Clermont compares with other homesteads of its type. The 1803 smoke house and 1822 slave quarters will also be compared to other surviving examples in the county.



*Figure 1: The evolution of Clermont’s building history has been confirmed through dendrochronology conducted in 2010.*

One of Clermont’s unique characteristics is how well its different building campaigns are reflected on its exterior. Unlike many dwellings where the earliest sections are buried within subsequent additions, Clermont stands out as an example where the different building phases are both visible and clearly articulated. As shown in *Figure 1*, a significant amount of construction occurred at Clermont during the period between 1756 and 1836, followed by relatively little building activity between 1836 and 1970. Because of the detailed dating information, the changes at Clermont can be related to specific owners and tied to particular events. These associations will contribute not only to potential visitors’ appreciation of why buildings change over time, but will help bring the past owners of Clermont to life.

Although Thomas Wadlington was not the earliest owner of the property, he was the first European settler to build a structure on the site and make it his home. He was responsible for the construction of the east frame in the spring of 1756, three years after purchasing the property from John Vance, who had received a 350-acre grant in 1751

from Lord Fairfax. In the conveyance from Vance to Wadlington, Wadlington is referred to as a “planter” from Fairfax County. No evidence has been found to suggest that he was a Captain in the French and Indian War as contended in earlier histories.<sup>2</sup> Wadlington served on the vestry of Frederick Parish and in the mid-1750s served as an overseer of several roads near the Shenandoah River. From historical documents, we can surmise that he was also a merchant. A receipt dated December 18, 1756, indicates that Wadlington was paid 30 shillings for buckskins he sold to George Washington, commander of Virginia’s frontier troops during the French and Indian War at the time, that were to be used to make moccasins for the Cherokee Indians.<sup>3</sup>

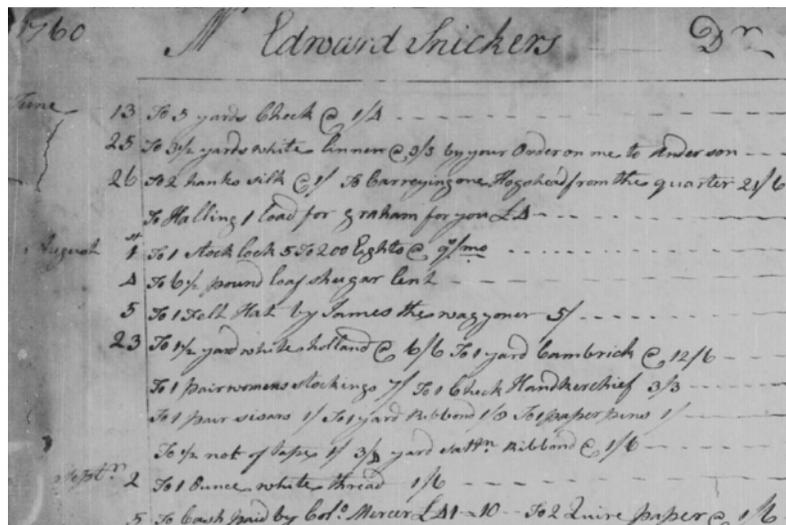


Figure 2: Page from Thomas Wadlington Ledger dated 1760 showing transactions with Edward Snickers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.

A store ledger (Figure 2) with entries from 1758 to 1761 not only confirms Wadlington’s presence in this area, but further confirms he was a merchant. The names of those with whom he was conducting business are the same as those of other early landowners in the area. Some of these include William Calmes, Tolliver Stribling, Isaac LaRue, Thomas Blakemore, and neighbor Isabella Jump.<sup>4</sup> The ledger is also valuable for

information it provides on the materials that Wadlington was selling, which included fabrics, buttons, hats, stockings, scissors, shoes, ribbons, and handkerchiefs. He also sold shoes, nails, salt, whiskey, other raw materials, as well as services such as hauling goods. A long relationship with Edward Snickers, the next owner of Clermont, is documented in the ledger with transactions between the two men dating from 1758 to 1761. The ledger contains a wealth of information that with closer investigation should yield more data about Wadlington and his neighbors.

Thomas Wadlington and his wife had nine children both before and during their residence at Clermont. The growing family presumably lived in the east frame portion of the house. It is uncertain whether there were other buildings on the site at this time, since no archaeological investigations have been conducted. In 1770, Wadlington sold Clermont to Edward Snickers and moved to South Carolina. The deed describes the property as “whereon the said Thomas Wadlington now lives,” thus confirming his residence at Clermont during that time.

Edward Snickers was a large landholder in what was then Frederick County and he operated a ferry, tavern, and several mills.<sup>5</sup> In 1777, 21 years after the original east frame was erected, Snicker’s constructed a frame building 65 feet west of the original dwelling. Although it is uncertain what its original use was, this once-freestanding building has been referred to as the kitchen. Archaeological research may provide more information about its original function, and perhaps also determine whether there were other parts of the house standing at that time that are no longer extant. Edward Snickers and his wife Elizabeth, who died in 1779, had five children. Snickers presumably

continued to live at Clermont until the early 1780s when he purchased and relocated to Springfield, a nearby farm, leaving his son William to live at Clermont.<sup>6</sup>

When Edward Snickers died in 1790/1791<sup>7</sup>, his son William was 31 years old. William married Mary Stribling in 1788, the same year as when the large west frame section (and possibly the south porch) was added to the west end of the original Wadlington east frame. This substantial expansion may have been constructed in anticipation of or as a result of William's marriage to Mary Stribling. Edward Snickers' will of 1790 confirms that William was living at Clermont and also appears to be the first time the property is specifically referred to as *Clermont* in a document.<sup>8</sup> William's first wife died in 1793, bearing no children and in 1794 he married Frances Washington, daughter of Warner Washington Jr. (George Washington's nephew). Dendrochronology confirms that also in 1794, the east frame underwent a major remodeling of its interior spaces with alterations from a hall-parlor-plan to a more formal, and stylish center-passage plan, perhaps as a result of his marriage to Washington. Some realignment of doors and windows was also conducted at this time to compensate for the new space arrangements. Public records suggest that William Snickers soon encountered financial troubles, and ultimately was forced to mortgage the property to his brother-in-law Thomas Stribling in 1797. Despite these financial setbacks, he constructed the large and well built frame smokehouse on the property in 1803. Other outbuildings that are no longer extant were certainly constructed in this period as well. According to the 1803 personal property tax records, Snickers owned 20 horses, one coach, and 16 slaves. Archeology should be able to confirm where the barns, stables, and slave quarters that were undoubtedly present were located. Clermont is depicted on the 1809 Charles Varle

Map<sup>9</sup> of the area and is marked as a significant dwelling with the label “W. Snickers.”

Snickers’ wife died in 1810, and nine years later, he sold Clermont to Dawson McCormick.

The purchase in 1819 by Dawson McCormick launched the 185-year McCormick family legacy at Clermont that endured until Elizabeth Rust Williams’ death in 2004. The McCormicks migrated to the Shenandoah Valley in the 1730 wave of settlement from Pennsylvania. Dawson McCormick was a farmer and a justice of the peace for the county. According to dendrochronology, the large two-part log dwelling located west of the main house and referred to as the slave quarters was constructed in 1822. The 1830 census reveals that McCormick owned 16 slaves, and it is assumed there were likely other slave quarters that no longer survive at Clermont. In 1824, McCormick married Florinda Milton of nearby Milton Valley, a property just south of Clermont, and they had three children. During Dawson’s ownership the kitchen was expanded to the east in 1831 with the addition of a frame with brick nogging room (pantry). This addition occurred 37 years after the last alteration to the house in 1794 by William Snickers. Dawson McCormick died in 1834 at age 48. His estate inventory shows a house with a number of pieces of furniture and farming equipment, as well as 17 slaves.<sup>10</sup>

Widowed with three children, Florinda McCormick died in April 1836, just two years after the death of her husband. According to dendrochronology conducted in the floor joists of the large stone section of the Clermont house, those timbers were felled in the winter of 1835 and into early 1836. This is somewhat curious as it raises the question of whether this large stone addition had been planned by Dawson and followed through even after his death and was well underway by the time of Florinda’s death. Dawson’s

estate accounts indicate that he had substantial indebtedness to several local banks and family members. After Florinda's death it is unclear as to where the children, ages twelve, ten, and five, lived. Accounts filed by their guardians, Cyrus, Charles, and Samuel McCormick, do not indicate where the children were after their mother's death and whether they moved in with their relatives or stayed at Clermont. The stone section later referred to as the dining room (downstairs) contained a bedroom upstairs and a fine wooden staircase connecting them. Although the building was located between the kitchen/pantry and the west frame section, it too was a freestanding unit. Unlike the other portions of the house, however, it was of stone and not of timber frame with brick nogging. Further investigation of this portion of the house is needed to more fully understand its function and exact building development.

Edward McCormick, the eldest of Dawson and Florinda's three children, moved back to Clarke County after graduating from Princeton in 1845. He married his second cousin Mary Stribling in 1847, and they moved to Clermont, which he had inherited. In 1849, Edward and his wife remodeled the original east frame, replacing a partition wall, and perhaps rebuilding the east chimney. It appears that they may also have changed the original jerkinhead roof to a gable form. Receipts in the Clermont archives for wallpaper and planed lumbers further confirm that work on the house was occurring in this period. According to the 1850 census, Edward was a 25-year-old farmer and head of a household that consisted of his wife Mary, two-year-old daughter Florinda, a 17-year old white male laborer named Joseph Gooman [sic], and a 70-year old black female name Nancy Thomson. The 1850 slave schedule records Edward as owner of 23 slaves. By 1854, his wife Mary had died, and in 1856, Edward married Ellen Lane Jett from Rappahannock

County. The 1860 census shows Edward aged 35 with wife Ellen 27, daughter Florinda, and two additional children, Edward, age three and Elvia, age one. The 1860 slave schedule lists McCormick owning 28 slaves and three slave houses. Edward continued his ownership through the Civil War years and it is not surprising that little of significance was done to the house between 1849 and Edward's death in 1870. The inventory and appraisal of Edward's estate describes three upstairs chambers, a dining room, a living room, and a kitchen—all components of the house that still survive.<sup>11</sup> After Edward's death, the Clermont estate passed to his widow Ellen Jett McCormick. She died in 1908, and like her husband, appears to have made no substantial improvements to the house, a fact confirmed by the land tax records. It was only after Ellen McCormick's son, Dr. Albert Dupuy McCormick, inherited Clermont in 1908 that there was any measurable investment in the property. According to the 1910 land tax records, Clermont contained \$1,500 worth of buildings. By 1920, \$1,000 of additional improvements had been made. These improvements probably coincided with Dr. McCormick's retirement and his family's relocation from Annapolis, Maryland, to Berryville. During their ownership, the front porch of the main house and the interior of the kitchen were remodeled, and a front porch containing rooms was added to the former slave quarters. Farm buildings including a new barn and tenant houses were also built at this time. In 1932, Dr. McCormick's daughter, Edith Beardall, inherited the property but chose not live there full time. It was only after 1946/1947 that she moved to Clermont and hired architects Walter Peters and Harlow May to draw plans for altering the house. The small hyphen connecting the stone dining room to the kitchen and pantry was constructed and bathrooms added in the oldest portion of Clermont.

In 1958, Edward McCormick Williams and wife Caroline Rust bought out the Beardall cousins' interest in the Clermont property. Williams was a local farmer and also the Clarke County Commonwealth's Attorney. In 1970/71, Williams and his wife engaged Washington DC architect Walter Peters, who had designed the addition for the Beardalls 23 years earlier, to make improvements to the house. A large addition was constructed in the space between the 1788 west frame and the 1836 stone sections that included a kitchen, bedrooms, and bathrooms. This finally connected all portions of the house and permitted circulation without having to go outside. In using similar materials, proportions, and forms as had been used in the older parts of the house, the Williamses created a more uniform appearance to the Clermont house, while simultaneously respecting the older portions. The installation of a wood shingle roof to cover both the new addition and the rest of the historic portions of the house contributed further to the sense of blending and a blurring of the lines between what was old and what was new.

Elizabeth Rust Williams, only child of Edward and Caroline, inherited the property in the mid-1980s after their deaths. She made minor changes that included removal of some of the earlier alterations, the installation of book shelves in the east parlor, and the commencement of renovations to the old kitchen. Otherwise she maintained the house in its current condition.

Writing in 1890, valley historian, J. E. Norris, characterized the McCormick family succinctly:

The early members of the McCormick family were singularly unobtrusive people, content in the happiness derived from their own family relations, being extremely clanish, and at least one branch of the family were evidently people of the strongest local attachments, for a large family settled and remained until death in the vicinity of their birthplace. Both the men and the women of the

family, so far as the writer's observation could reach, were without guile, strictly honorable, affectionate, domestic and courteous. One of their most marked characteristics was their great regard for the truth.<sup>12</sup>

The depiction of the McCormicks and their strong ties toward family and heritage appear to have contributed to the unusually well-preserved condition of Clermont today. This pride of ownership and commitment to family were particularly evident in the case of the last of the McCormick-family owners, the Williamses. They painstakingly altered the historic parts of the house as little as possible when they updated it. Elizabeth's pride in the 185-year McCormick-family ownership undoubtedly contributed to her decision in 2004 to leave the property to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, with the hope that Clermont would be protected and preserved in perpetuity.

The architecture of this seemingly complex house helps tell the story of its occupants. Because the modifications are well articulated, it is easy to understand them and tie physical changes to the altered circumstances of ownership and personal stories of Clermont's inhabitants. Many architectural changes occurred at Clermont between 1756 and 1836 as counterbalanced with relatively few changes between 1836 and 1947. Most of these can be linked to specific events or conditions. The history of Clermont is still a work in progress. The wealth of documents yet to be analyzed will help color in the blanks and provide a better understanding of the people who lived there and the changing uses of the spaces.

Clermont is also significant as an example of a house that was built by and modified not by the rich Tidewater planters that tended to dominate the 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century architectural stage of Clarke. Instead, Clermont's builders were far more of the typical yeoman farmer. Furthermore, the technique of construction—frame with brick

nogging—was used early on in the dwelling’s construction, and continued into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, providing a rare opportunity to study subtle changes that occurred in building technology during that era.

Clermont is portrayed as atypical of the architecture of the area during the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. Much of this characterization has to do with the fact that other early houses that have survived tend to be of masonry construction- a more durable material. As Dennis Pogue has suggested, there are many things about Clermont that fit the norm of the period. These include its frame construction with brick nogging, its size, and its original two-room hall-parlor plan.<sup>13</sup> Clermont is significant as a vernacular dwelling of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century that has been well preserved and where the evolution of building phases can be easily read.

Other early houses that survive in Clarke and the surrounding area include Helmley, where the traditional date assigned to the frame and masonry building is the 1730s.<sup>14</sup> While the house shares some of Clermont’s characteristics such as frame with brick nogging, wide weatherboard siding, a full-width porch, and a steeply-pitched gable roof, Helmley has undergone quite a bit more remodeling than Clermont and a fire greatly damaged it in the 1970s. The Goat House (John Ashby House) located off Route 50 at Ashby’s Gap is a double-crib log dwelling that has been assigned the date of 1744. It has undergone several expansions and remodeling yet shares the characteristics of full-width porch, dormers, and a steeply-pitched gable roof with Clermont. North Hill contains an 18<sup>th</sup>-century log cabin that shares these same characteristics as well but has been remodeled and now acts as a small wing off a much larger later addition. Meadea in White Post and Sweet Water near the Shenandoah River are two other 18<sup>th</sup>-century

dwellings but are of log construction. Another unique log dwelling is the Cooke-Byrd House off Route 340 near the West Virginia state line. It is comprised of two, freestanding one-and-one-half-story log units connected by an enclosed breezeway. Although it has undergone many additions and alterations, Soldier's Rest, which is partially constructed of frame with brick nogging is also believed to date to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. Brookside and Three Pounds, located in Millwood are both of frame construction and are believed to have been constructed in the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Frame with brick nogging as a construction technique continued to be used well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is found in multiple dwellings in Clarke including The Glen, Hazelwood, and a tenant house at Saratoga. Clarke also has multiple examples of mid-to-late-18<sup>th</sup> century stone dwellings including Saratoga, Bloomfield, and Fairfield. Most have been greatly remodeled and enlarged over time. These also provide examples of different ways of adding on to a building.

The Peter Burr House located outside of Charles Town, West Virginia, is believed to have been constructed ca. 1751-1755 and is touted as “the oldest standing wood frame structure in West Virginia.”<sup>15</sup> Parts of the house are timber framed with brick nogging and although different in several ways from Clermont, the two buildings share many similarities and warrant further comparison.

This cursory examination confirms that Clermont is not only one of a very few surviving mid-18<sup>th</sup>-century buildings in Clarke, but is also one of an even smaller number that are of frame construction.<sup>16</sup> Clermont is particularly valuable to visitors interested in understanding the architectural evolution of a mid-18<sup>th</sup>-century vernacular dwelling. Its precise dating allows the successive building phases to be tied directly to events and

conditions in the lives of its owners, providing a deep insight into the history of the property. The nature of the additions and alterations to Clermont also offer a rich opportunity to instruct visitors about a variety of construction techniques and architectural forms. This information should be presented in a manner where the knowledge gained can be applied to other places, encouraging the visitor to become more observant and engaged with their own surroundings.

### Addendum

#### **Slave Quarters:**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Clarke County's enslaved African-American population was larger than that of whites. According to the 1840 census, 3,325 slaves lived in Clarke County at that time while the population for whites that same year was 2,866, and free blacks numbered 162.<sup>17</sup>

The 1860 Slave Census revealed 346 slave owners in the county, owning a total of 3,375 slaves. The average slave owner did not own ten slaves. Instead, at least one third owned four or less, and the other two-thirds owned anywhere from five to 97 slaves. In addition to indicating the number of slaves owned, the census noted the "number of slave houses." It is unclear whether this number included all the slave houses on the property, because in most cases, the living conditions would have been almost unbearably crowded.

The slave quarters at Clermont are significant as a rare surviving example in Clarke County of that building type constructed of log. Dendrochronology confirms the construction date of the building as 1822 and receipts for carpentry work in 1861 held by

the Clermont Foundation correlate with alterations made to the building. Furthermore, the receipts refer to the building as the “negro House.”<sup>18</sup>

A cursory survey of former slave quarters in Clarke suggests that as with dwellings, most that survive are ones of stone or brick construction. The majority have been remodeled for new use as either a guest house, tenant house, or enlarged into a primary residence. These include slave quarters at the following properties in Clarke: Milton Valley, River House, Air Hill, Mesilla, Clay Hill, Guilford, Federal Hill, Carter Hall, Llewellyn, Chapel Hill, Arcadia, Runnymede, Audley, Elmington, Smithfield, Hill and Dale, Morgan Spring, Tuleyries, Bel Voi, Clifton, Avenel, Pagebrook, Monterey, Farnley, and Fairfield.

One of the very few examples of log construction, the slave quarters at Clermont was used after the Civil War to house those who continued to work on the property, particularly as domestic servants. Although in fair condition, the building is relatively unaltered and could provide insight into early-19<sup>th</sup>-century buildings of this type.

### **Meat House:**

The frame meat house at Clermont was constructed in 1803 while the property was owned by William Snickers. Its unusual frame construction consists of vertical members spaced closely together. As is the case with surviving slave quarters, the majority of extant examples of this building type in Clarke are of masonry construction. An earlier frame meat house exists at Greenway Court and possibly one at Federal Hill. The meat house at Clermont is significant not only for its construction technique, but for its large size and well preserved condition.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The history of Clermont and its owners is currently underway. Archivist Mary Morris is compiling genealogical information about the different owners and their families. Historian Margaret T. Peters will be conducting further research as part of the Historic Structures Report to be completed in the spring of 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Rust Williams. *Clermont: The McCormick Family Estate Near Berryville, now Clarke County, Virginia*. (Berryville, Va: not published, 1995-1996), *Clermont: The Place*, 18.

<sup>3</sup> George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 5 Financial Papers. Thomas Wadlington to George Washington, December 18, 1756. Virginia Colonial Militia Accounts. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/P?mgw:1:./temp/~ammem\\_1cqP:](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/P?mgw:1:./temp/~ammem_1cqP:)

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Wadlington Ledger 1758-1761, in Thomas Ellison Keitt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.

<sup>5</sup> Ingrid Jewell Jones. *Edward Snickers, Yeoman*. Proceedings of the Clarke County Historical Association, Volume XVII, 1971-1974, 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 14-15.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Snickers' will was written in June 1790 and recorded on February 1, 1791. The exact date of his death is uncertain.

<sup>8</sup> Frederick County Will Book 5: 296.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Varle. *Map of Frederick, Berkeley, and Jefferson Counties Situated in the State of Virginia*. Philadelphia: Benjamin Jones, 1809.

<sup>10</sup> Frederick County Will Book 19:274-292.

<sup>11</sup> Clarke County Will Book 1A:153-158.

<sup>12</sup> J. E. Norris, ed. *History of the Lower Shenandoah Valley Counties of Frederick, Berkeley, Jefferson, and Clarke*. Chicago: A. Warner, 1890. Reprinted 1972 (Virginia Book Company: Berryville, Va.), 629-630.

<sup>13</sup> Camille Wells. "The Planter's Prospect: Houses, Outbuildings, and Rural Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Winterthur Portfolio*, no.1 (Spring 1993). In this study of dwellings advertised for sale in the *Virginia Gazette* between 1736 and 1780, 77% of the houses advertised were of frame construction.

<sup>14</sup> Dates for these early dwelling come from: Stuart Brown. *Clarke County: A Brief History*. (White Post, Va.: Clarke County Sesquicentennial, Inc., 1986) and Mary Gray Farland and Beverley Byrd Greenhalgh. *In the Shadow of the Blue Ridge* (Richmond: William Byrd Press, 1985). The accuracy of these dates is uncertain until more detailed study is conducted on the buildings.

<sup>15</sup> <http://jeffersoncountyhlc.org/peterburthouse.html> and <http://www.relivinghistoryinc.org/>

<sup>16</sup> The Jonathan Clark Notebook of 1786 provides surveys of properties that were visited that year within the Northern Shenandoah Valley as part of Hite-Fairfax lawsuit and land dispute. Descriptions of dwellings and outbuildings are given. The majority are log buildings but some are described as frame. Deeper study of this document could yield interesting information about other early dwellings, helping to place Clermont in a bigger context.

<sup>17</sup> Maral S. Kalbian and Leila O.W. Boyer. *Final Report: African-American Historic Context: Clarke County, VA*, CLG Project no.66014. (Berryville, VA: Prepared of the County of Clarke, 26 September 2002), 12.

<sup>18</sup> Receipt, Mrs. Ellen McCormick to Thompson & Ogden, April 8, 1861. Personal Papers of Elizabeth Rust Williams. The Clermont Foundation, Berryville, Virginia.