Historical and Architectural Particulars on the David Reid Murchison House
305 South Third Street

Following the United States Civil War, Wilmington, North Carolina quickly recovered as a shipping and manufacturing hub. The city became an important center for lumber, fertilizer, iron industries, and truck farm wholesaling. There was also a resurgence in the naval stores business. Wilmington’s population grew to 20,976 by the turn of the twentieth century, keeping its status as the state’s most populous city. Central to its growth was the headquarters and repair shops of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad and the Atlantic Coast Line. The ACL, in the 1890s, absorbed the W&W and several other lines. Rail connections with South Carolina and Georgia helped make Wilmington a cotton compressing and exporting nucleus. ¹ This was a period of intense political turbulence entwined with social and economic change.

Wilmington high society, at or near the turn of the twentieth century, consisted of a few rich families. They often vacationed in Europe, while maintaining business investments and a second home in New York City. For example, the Wilmington Messenger reported on June 27, 1897, “Mr. and Mrs. Norwood Giles, of New York, arrived here last evening and went through to their summer residence at Bradley’s Creek.” On September 2, 1900, the newspaper also printed this example, “Mr. Clayton Giles, Jr., received a telegram from New York that Mr. and Mrs. [Lucy Wright Murchison Giles] Clayton

(continued on page three)


Lucile Murchison Marvin, c. 1930
Portrait courtesy of Wallace C. Murchison
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The Bulletin Committee again thanks Anne
Russell, PhD for providing the last edition’s article,
“A Letter of Eliza Yonge Wootten & the Rev. Edward
Wootten” (November 2002). We thank Mrs. Grant
Carver for reading and spell checking the last issue.
We also thank Merle Chamberlain for her expert
proofing.

Our present essay was written by the
Bulletin Committee in gratitude to Dr. and Mrs.
Ronald Demas for their generosity to the Lower Cape
Fear Historical Society’s Designer Showcase, 305
South Third Street. We thank Beverly Tetterton,
Merle Chamberlain and Janet K. Seapker for their
help in making this issue possible.

Manuscripts and first person account stories
are welcome by the Bulletin Committee for review.
Articles may be 3 to 8 pages in length and should
contain researched and primary source documentation
of Lower Cape Fear interest. Enjoy.

Lucy W. Murchison Giles as she appeared
at the Colonial Dames Conference of 1895 in Atlanta,
Georgia. Photo from Lucile Murchison’s scrapbook.
The Wilmington Messenger, October 26, 1895
printed this account of the reception. “Mrs. Clayton
Giles, of Wilmington, NC, vice president of the
Colonial Dames of North Carolina, was wearing a
yellow gown trimmed with pale pink plumes and she
wore diamond ornaments.”
Giles and Miss Lucile Murchison arrived in that port yesterday. They have been on a European tour and spent some time at the Paris Exposition.6

Mrs. Clayton Giles, was born Lucy Wooster Wright on June 30, 1850. Rev. R. B. Drane baptized her on September 8, 1850 in St. James Church, Wilmington, North Carolina.3 She was the daughter of Joshua Grainger Wright (1809-1863)4 and Mary Ann Walker (1819-1865).5 Upon the deaths of their parents, Lucy Wright and her siblings inherited real estate and personal fortune built up from previous generations.6

The Wilmington Star News published on January 14, 1872, “Lucy Wright married David Reid Murchison on the afternoon of January 11, 1872, at the residence of Charles Manly Sedman,”7 by Rev. George Patterson, Rector of St. John’s Church.” Mr. Sedman was Mrs. Murchison’s brother-in-law by his marriage8 to her sister Catherine DeRosset Wright.9

David R. Murchison was born on December 5, 1837, in the Western Division of Cumberland County, a few miles west of Fayetteville, North Carolina. His parents were Duncan Murchison (1801-

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2 Giles Family file, William Reaves Collection (New Hanover Public Library) 18.


5 Mathews, 82.

6 See Grainger and Wright entries in Elizabeth F. McKoy’s, Early New Hanover County, According to the Records (1973).

7 Marriage Register - New Hanover County, Vol. 2, page 161. The marriage was also recorded in St. James Register, Mathews, 62.


9 Kellum, 96.

10 Wilmington Star, April 29, 1870. Murchison Family file, William Reaves Collection (New Hanover Public Library) 1.

11 The Fayetteville Observer, February 6, 1839, page 3, printed a “Frances Murchison, aged 32, consort of Duncan Murchison, died on January 27, 1839.”

12 Reaves ibid, pages 20-21.

13 Rev. R. A. McLeod, Historical Sketch of Long Street Presbyterian Church, 1756 to 1923 (1924) 15.

14 Wilmington Star, September 7, 1890. Reaves ibid, page 5.

15 Bill Reaves, Gems of Old Wilmington, Wilmington Morning Star, November 27, 1975, 5-C.


in the firm of Murray & Murchison, with the New York operation being conducted by Kenneth M. Murchison and J. T. Murray. In 1866, David Murchison withdrew from this firm and established the banking, cotton and export firms of Williams & Murchison in Wilmington, J. D. Williams & Company in Fayetteville, and Murchison & Co., in New York. The partners being John D. and George W. Williams and Kenneth M. and David R. Murchison. The highly successful careers of these men produced great fortunes. David Murchison had a phenomenal business ability. After his marriage to Lucy Wright, when the Bank of New Hanover was organized, Murchison became a strong friend of the enterprise and was made a member of its first board of directors.18

Under Mrs. Murchison’s name, the couple purchased the property at the southeast corner of Ann and South Third streets in 1872.19 Their Second Empire style residence was completed by 1876.20

Mr. and Mrs. David Reid Murchison’s only child, Lucile Wright Murchison, was born on January 19, 1880. She was baptized at St. James Church on April 11, 1880 by the Rt. Rev. Alfred A. Watson.21 Unfortunately, two years later, Mr. Murchison’s health failed. The firms he helped build separated to pursue distinct branches of the business. This undoubtedly produced a continued strain upon his mental and physical vitality. David R. Murchison died in New York on February 28, 1882. His remains were returned to Wilmington and interred in Oakdale Cemetery.22

Nearly seven years later, Lucy Murchison married Clayton Giles. Mr. and Mrs. Giles had known each other all their lives. Her great uncle, Richard Bradley, was in business with Mr. Giles’ father and her cousin, Mary A. Wright, was Clayton Giles’ first wife.

Clayton Giles was born in Wilmington on July 5, 1844. He was baptized at St. James Church on October 30, 1844.23 Mr. Giles was the son of William Burke Giles (1812-1883)24 and Almira Reston (1816-1887).25 In early life his father, William B. Giles, had entered the counting house of Lazarus & Whitmarsh, a commission merchant house in Wilmington. Here, it was believed, is where he learned the commercial probity for which he was so well known. Years later, in connection with Richard Bradley, he engaged in the steam mill and turpentine distilling business, under the firm name of William B. Giles & Co. The company Mr. Giles headed moved to Savannah, Georgia in the 1850s. There they erected a lucrative steam saw mill business. The Giles family returned to Wilmington at the outbreak of the Civil War.26

Clayton Giles entered St. James College in Maryland. He enlisted for the Confederacy in 1861 in the Georgia 63rd Inf. Co. F., and then Co. I.27 After service, Giles became connected with the Wilmington firm of Oscar Grant Parsley & Co. Later he entered the wholesale grocers firm of Williams & Murchison.28 By 1873, Mr. Giles joined with Joel Williams Murchison (1847-1926)29 and established a dealership in hardware and agricultural implements known as Giles & Murchison.30 Later, in addition to their hardware business, the partners opened a

19 Purchased for $4000.00. New Hanover County Deed Book FFF, 55.
20 David Reid Murchison file, Historic Buildings files (New Hanover Public Library).
21 Mathews, 22.
22 Haskett, 226. For more on David R. Murchison see Samuel Ashe’s, *Biographical History of NC, Vol. 1*, 391.
23 Kellum, 99.
24 Kellum, 77.
26 Kellum, 80.
27 Haskett, 113.
30 Haddons Wilmington City Directory 1871, pages 112 and 238.
wholesale and retail imported crockery store in 1878.\textsuperscript{33}

Joel W. Murchison moved to Wilmington in 1872. He was David Reid Murchison's nephew. His father, John R. Murchison and David R. Murchison were full brothers. Joel Murchison named his two sons for his father and uncle.\textsuperscript{34} After the partnership of Giles & Murchison was dissolved the firm became known as J. W. Murchison & Co., and became one of the largest wholesale hardware dealerships in North Carolina.\textsuperscript{35}

Clayton Giles was married to Mary Augustus Wright on October 29, 1868 at Dr. William Halls, 54 St., New York. The marriage was recorded in St. James Register.\textsuperscript{36} Mary A. Wright was born in 1848.\textsuperscript{37} Her parents were Dr. Thomas H. Wright (1819-1861) and Mary Allen (1819-1866).\textsuperscript{38} She was first cousin to Lucy Wooster Wright, nee Murchison-Giles.\textsuperscript{39}

Sadly, Mary Giles succumbed to typhoid fever on December 17, 1883. A daughter, Almeria R., had died a few days earlier of the same ailment. Separate funeral services were held at St. James and burials were in Oakdale Cemetery.\textsuperscript{40}

On January 9, 1889, in New York, at the Church of the Heavenly Rest by Rev. Dr. Morgan, Clayton Giles and Lucy W. Murchison were married. The couple made their residence at 305 South Third Street\textsuperscript{41} and opened their home to friends, family and social affairs.

The Wilmington newspapers ran stories about these elaborate functions. For example, on February 15, 1901, the \textit{Wilmington Star News} reported, "Pleasing Society Event, Mr. and Mrs. Giles entertained nearly three hundred guests last night, in compliment to their daughter Miss Lucile Murchison. Hollowbrush's Orchestra, of Raleigh, was engaged for the occasion." The article continues with descriptions of the home's decorations, the guests who attended and even described the jewelry the hostess wore.

Out of town relations visited, such as Mrs. Giles' brother and sister-in-law, Thomas H. and Mary Katherine Wright. Mr. Wright was an auditor for the Seaboard Air Line Railroad, in Portsmouth, Virginia.\textsuperscript{42} Mrs. Wright certainly visited with her mother, Catherine Fulton, at 114 North Fourth Street, and St. Thomas Church where she was baptized and married.\textsuperscript{43}

Clayton Giles formed a partnership with M. S. Willard in the insurance business (1895) which lasted until Mr. Willard disposed of his interest (1906). Giles and his son continued the firm.\textsuperscript{44} The family lived long years of unbroken happiness. They traveled continuously to various cities and it was in New York on October 11, 1913, when Lucy Giles suddenly died. She was attending an Episcopal conference there with her husband and daughter. Her remains were returned to Wilmington and interred in Oakdale Cemetery.\textsuperscript{45}

Less than four years later Clayton Giles died on May 19, 1917. He was survived by his daughter, Mrs. John D. Bellamy Jr., a son Clayton Giles Jr., and his step-daughter, Miss Lucile W. Murchison, with whom he resided at the time of his death. Mr. Giles was a senior warden and vestry man of St. James.

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Wilmington Morning Star}, March 10, 1878.

\textsuperscript{34} Obituary, \textit{Wilmington News Dispatch}, January 29, 1926.

\textsuperscript{35} Murchison Family file, William Reaves Collection (New Hanover Public Library) 22.

\textsuperscript{36} Mathews, 60.

\textsuperscript{37} Kellum, 101.

\textsuperscript{38} Mathews, 72, 84.

\textsuperscript{39} The will of Susan Bradley Wright names her children, among them, Thomas and Joshua Grainger. WB AB, 366. Mae B. Graves (Ab.), \textit{New Hanover County Abstracts of Wills} (Wilmington: Old New Hanover Genealogical Society, 1981, 1999) 100.

\textsuperscript{40} Secton K, Lot No. 110. Giles Family file, William Reaves Collection (New Hanover Public Library) 7.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Wilmington Messenger}, January 11, 1889. Giles Family file, William Reaves Collection (New Hanover Public Lib.) 10.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Wilmington Messenger}, April 30, 1895. Giles file \textit{ibid}, 14.


\textsuperscript{44} Giles Family file, Reaves, 14 & 20.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Wilmington Evening Dispatch}, October 13, 1913.
Church. He also was preparing a history of St. James Parish at the time of his death. His remains were placed in Oakdale Cemetery. 46

Miss Lucile Murchison was a well traveled woman. Her diary of 1899 through 1902, inscribed in French and English, mentions the performances she saw in Paris and London. Her scrapbook is full of the various programs she attended. The scrapbook also has a list of the books in her room at the Third Street home. 47 Miss Murchison graduated on May 25, 1899, from Miss Spence’s School for Girls, 6 West 46th Street, New York. 48 After her parents deaths, she spent most of her remaining decades in New York. During some of those years she rented out the Third Street house. 49

In New York, Miss Murchison married Walter Rumsey Marvin in 1929. Mr. Marvin was born August 7, 1872 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the son of S. S. Marvin and Matilda Earl Rumsey. After graduating from Yale University in 1893, he entered the employ of what became the National Biscuit Company. Later he became the company’s general manager and vice-president. In 1918, he left this company and became active head of the Pennsylvania Chocolate Company. He lived until February 17, 1934 and his obituary noted he was President of the Trust Company of Larchmont, New York, an institution he helped found. The Marlins were in Wilmington, at their ‘winter residence, 305 South Third Street,’ when Mr. Marvin died. Obsequies were held at the home, conducted by the Rev. Fr. William H. Milton, rector of St. James Church. Mr. Marvin’s remains were conveyed to New York and burial was at New Rochelle. 50

Mrs. Marvin continued living in New York and occasionally visited her residence until 1953. In the fall of that year she gave her home to the Diocese of East Carolina. By gift and bequest of Mrs. Marvin to the Episcopal Foundation, income was made available every year for maintenance and program at the Diocesan House. Mrs. Marvin also left many of her furnishings to the diocese. 51 She died on December 5, 1968 and burial was in Oakdale Cemetery. 52

The 305 South Third Street residence and known as the David Reid Murchison House was constructed by 1876 in the Second Empire style. Considered to imitate the French building fashion during the reign of Napoleon III (France’s Second Empire), the style spread to the United States after the Paris Exhibition in 1855. Second Empire style is characterized by a mansard roof set on bracketed eaves. The boxy mansard roof line named after the 17th century French architect, Francois Mansart, was considered functional because it permitted a full upper story of usable space. The roof often featured dormers and was augmented by a tower. 53

Architectural historians say that James Walker (1826-1901), 54 a local contractor, was the builder of the David Reid Murchison House. 55 In 1857, John Walker’s winning bid to build the U. S. Marine Hospital brought he and his brother James to Wilmington. An enduring legacy of James Walker was his donation for the building of the James Walker Memorial Hospital. He personally supervised the construction until his death on March 15, 1901.

47 Lucile Murchison, Diary & scrapbook. New Hanover Public Library, Manuscript Collection, LCDF 41.
49 Wilmington Morning Star, November 8, 1925, page 13. “For Rent. Residence of Miss Lucile Murchison, located at the southeast corner of Third and Ann streets. This house has six sleeping rooms, three tiled baths, parlor, reception room, library, den, servants’ quarters and garage that will accommodate four cars. An elegant residence with every modern convenience, completely furnished. References required. D. R. Foster & Co. 112 Princess St.”
53 This information was obtained from conversations with Janet K. Seapker (2003) and attending Edward F. Turberg’s ‘Historic Architecture’ lecture series periodically held at New Hanover Public Library.
54 Obituary from Wilmington Morning Star, March 16, 1901, 1. Haskett, 332.
55 Wrenn, 102.
Alterations to the 305 South Third Street house were underway between 1893 through 1915.56 According to Tony Wrenn’s, *Wilmington, North Carolina, an Architectural and Historical Portrait*, “Sanborn maps list the house as two stories with ‘French roof,’” and at the entrance a tower of three and one-half or four stories.” Porches were added, filled in, and/or removed.57 In 1897, James F. Post (1818-1899),58 provided Mrs. Giles an estimate for an addition to the butler’s pantry and bathroom. He estimated the cost of press bricks, plastering, plate glass windows, and other contingencies.59 The 1898 Sanborn map shows a two story addition which is in the location of the butler’s pantry and Mrs. Giles might have accepted Post’s bid. Historians speculate that her architect nephew, Kenneth M. Murchison Jr., an 1894 graduate of Columbia College, New York, was the designer.60

A notice in the *Wilmington Morning Star*, on July 11, 1902, stated, “Mr. Clayton Giles is having improvements made to his residence corner Third and Ann streets. Among other additions will be an octagonal pavilion on the south side.” Mr. Giles added ‘modern’ conveniences, such as, a telephone in 1903,61 and altering the stable into an ‘auto’ garage.62

The house changed by the time the 1910 Sanborn map was published, with the addition of the wing to the north and the bay window in the extension to the building. It had changed again by the publication of the 1915 map. By that year, the tower and the mansard roof had been removed and the structure had received a low roof parapet. It is likely that framing of all the window openings is from the circa 1915 era.63 The last edition of the Sanborn maps show the sizeable additions were made and outbuildings were constructed.64 The modified house is what most people presently saw until current renovations by Dr. and Mrs. Ronald Demas.

The Diocese of East Carolina operated from 305 South Third Street and adapted the space for use by its professional staff. The diocese also rented rooms and an apartment to the rear of the house. An interesting thread of history, Rev. Clem Jordan, rector of the Church of the Servant, ran his parish from an office in the house. The Church of the Servant is now located at 4925 Oriole Drive, in Wilmington. In 1983, the Diocese voted to move offices to a central location in Kinston, North Carolina.

The 305 South Third Street house was sold to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Curry who operated a bed and breakfast and then to Dr. and Mrs. Ronald Demas who purchased the property in 1997. They are restoring the home following its 1900 design. The end.

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56 That area of town is first covered by Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.


61 *Wilmington Morning Star* February 23, 1903, page 1.


63 Wrenn, 102.

64 Seapker, *ibid.*
We will be holding our Annual Meeting at 3:00 p.m. on May 4th