

## JOSIAH SASSER HOUSE: SITE OF FIRST COURT

By: Charles S. Norwood

John Sasser received a land grant from King George II in 1755. It was for only ninety acres but formed the nucleus for a very large farm. The grant was located on the Little River near Pearson's Bridge. This is where present Highway 581 crosses the Little River and is between Rosewood and Kenly.

The grant says it was located in Johnston County. This would be right for 1755. Later it was Dobbs County. Then in 1779 it became Wayne County. It was 1800, however, before the new dividing line between Wayne and Johnston was formally established. The first publication of the new county lines is shown on Price & Strother's new map entitled, "This First Actual Survey of the State of N. C."

John Sasser died and his land had passed to his son Josiah by 1779. The Sasser plantation was chosen as the site to hold the first court as it was described as the oldest and largest clearing then in Wayne County.

Josiah's wife was Elizabeth Bryan, daughter of William Bryan of Johnston County, and grandfather of Needham Bryan of Snowfield, Bertie County. Needham Bryan was the father of Rachel Bryan who married William Whitfield II of Whitehall, Seven Springs.

The first court held in Wayne County after its formation was held at Josiah Sasser's home in 1780. Josiah died before the second term came around so the court was transferred to James Herring's house, also on the Little River. Josiah left his home and plantation to his son John and his wife Elizabeth, so by 1782 and 1783, court was resumed back at the Sasser house.



JOSIAH SASSER HOUSE — Site of First Wayne County Court  
Photo by Bart Preston

Colonel William McKinnie was authorized to build the first courthouse on the three acre tract given by Dr. Andrew Bass in 1784. It was stipulated in the Bass deed that if the courthouse was moved to another location the land would revert to Bass. The three-acre tract was located on the north bank of the Neuse River near a ferry that Dr. Bass operated and called West Point.

There is today still standing near Pearson's Bridge a house known as the Josiah Sasser house. It is very old and is in very good condition. It has plastered walls and wood ceilings, four fireplaces, the mantles from the first floor room were removed about 1930 by the owner at that time.

The mantles were installed in a new house in Goldsboro being built by a friend. The main block of the house is three stories only one room deep, a one story dining room and kitchen are attached. At one time the kitchen was not attached as it is today. The front porch has been changed.

About forty years ago the porch reached the full width of the front of the house. The cornice or fresco is very handsome and in good condition as well as the windows. Three rooms have wainscot paneling put together with pegs, the large living room on the right, dining room and one bedroom upstairs.

The question arises -- was this house built two hundred years ago or before 1780 when the first court was held? Members of the department of Archives and History have visited the place and think the present house was probably that of the son of Josiah or a grandson of John Sasser and built about 1800.

James Sasser (1775-1807) married Chelly McKinnie (1780-1812), a daughter of Richard McKinnie who was Wayne County's representative in the State House of Commons in 1782-1781-1790 and the Senate in 1788-1789-1792-1792-1799 and later 1803-1806.

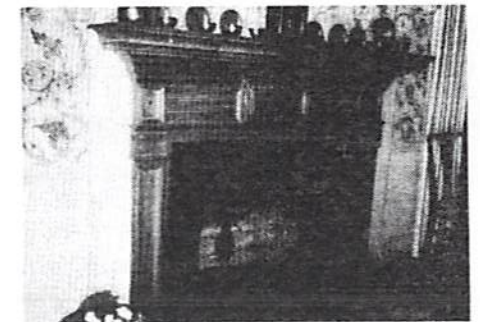
James Sasser's daughter, Ann Elizabeth, married Lemuel Whitfield (1798-1871), son of William Whitfield, III of Whitehall. Their daughter, Georgiana, married E. B. Borden. When General Schofield came to Goldsboro in 1865 he chose the home of E. B. Borden as his headquarters. There he encountered Lemuel Whitfield who was visiting his daughter.

### Sources:

Archives & History, Raleigh  
Copy of Land Grant to John Sasser, father of Josiah Sasser  
Copy of Will of Josiah Sasser



SASSER'S BRANDY HOUSE



LIVING ROOM MANTLE