



A Touch of History

Botetourt County Historical Society, Inc
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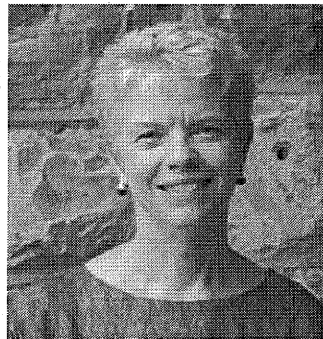
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Recipes, Diary, Correspondence: Untangling the 1860s Web of Ann Godwin and Nancy Figgat

This story began when Museum Volunteer, Jean Robbins, at the Botetourt County Historical Museum, reviewed Robert Stoner's book, **A Seed-Bed of the Republic**. She suggested to Gail McMillan, Director (DLA), Digital Library and Archives at Virginia Tech's University Libraries, that the two analyze the hand-written cookbook recipes of Nancy G. Figgat, October 29, 1890, housed in Virginia Tech's Special Collections. The same manuscript collection held a memorandum book inscribed by Ann Godwin, January 5, 1856, and a few letters between her mother and father (Martha M. and Thomas G. Godwin, 1835-1885).

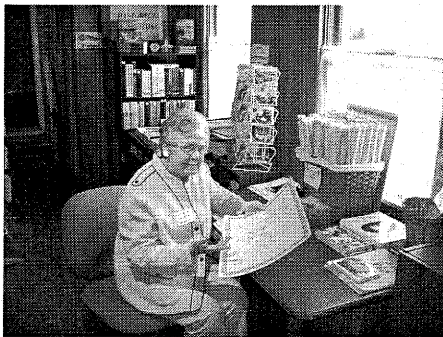
The manuscript collection was offered for purchase by a Philadelphia book dealer, and the Special Collections Department at Virginia Tech University bought it in 2000. After the discovery of the link to the two Fincastle families, Robbins and McMillan became interested in researching the Figgats and the Godwins.

McMillan made an online search, perused the international bibliographic database, WorldCat, and made a fantastic discovery. A 2007 thesis at William and Mary, "Again in the Providence of God": Two Appalachian Women Inscribe Community, Family, and Faith on the Civil War" by Elizabeth Jean Anderson, featured Nancy Godwin Figgat. This led to the discovery that secreted within Godwin's Memorandum Books the inscription "N. G. Figgat", followed by a diary begun on July 1, 1862, and ending on January 11, 1865.



Gail McMillan is Director of Digital Library and Archives at VA Tech.

At the same time, Robbins was assisted by Loreta Wolfe, docent at the Museum, Loretta Caldwell, genealogist, in the Clerk of Court Office in Fincastle, and Sally Eads, local historian in Fincastle, with accumulating a wealth of information from documented sources. Another online search by McMillan compelled the two to travel to Richmond to peruse the correspondence of Charles Miles Figgat briefly described in the online catalogs of both the Library of Virginia and the Virginia Historical Society. He was quite a prolific letter writer to his wife, Nancy Godwin Figgat. Additional research by Rob



Volunteer Jean Robbins is conducting research at the Botetourt County Historical Museum.

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"Thank you Botetourt County for allowing the historical society to use this wonderful, historic old building for our museum, and for maintaining it!"

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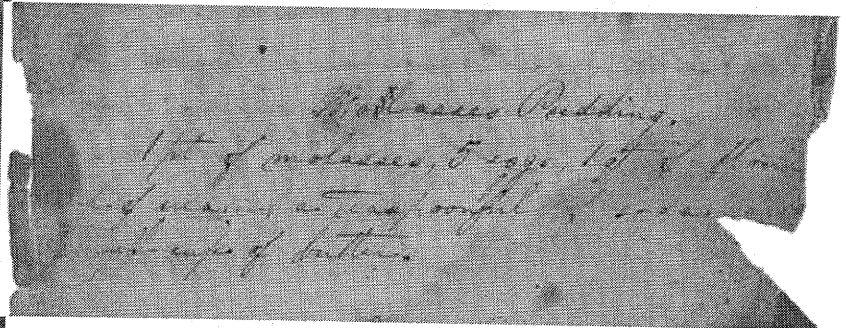
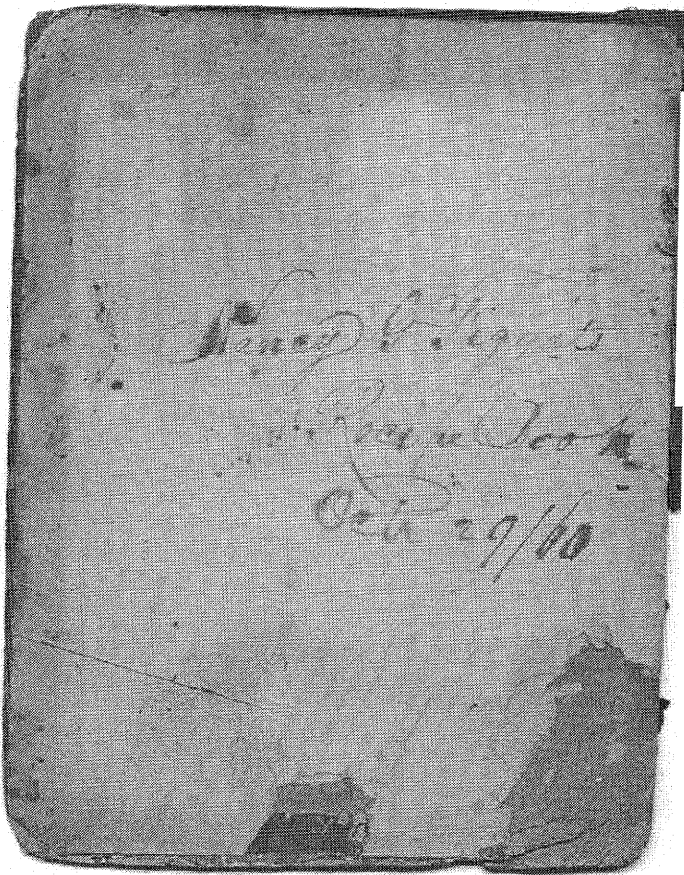
bins in her local historical resources for Fincastle, Botetourt County and Lexington confirmed that Ann Godwin was, indeed, Nannie G. Figgat.

The next part of the research was to complete the transcription of the manuscript collection. McMillan worked on snow days during the winter transcribing the old cursive handwriting, while Robbins spent days analyzing the two manuscript cookbooks—one by Martha Mary Godwin and one by her daughter, Nancy Godwin Figgat. This was an interesting task but difficult when pages were torn, words were stained beyond reading, information was cryptic, especially the use of archaic terms, and when there were missing measurements. To assist, facsimile copies of cookbooks of the 1800s were used to complete the recipes. Nancy Godwin Figgat identified sources by placing a name under many of the recipes. Often she mentioned “Mrs. Randolph” as the source; Mrs. Randolph was the author of “The Virginia House-wife, 1824.” The cookbook was named the most influential American cookbook of the nineteenth century by Karen Hess, a nationally known culinary historian.

The completion of this research project is a work in progress with a great story developing of two prominent Fincastle families. The Godwins and the Figgats gave leadership in many ways to their community. Within the two families were bankers, lawyers, doctors, business men, judges, and board members to establish schools, along with leaders in the two oldest churches in Fincastle. Also their story includes Civil War participation by the men in the families and the women's role at home during the War. As the two researchers complete their analysis of the information, they plan to write and share this great story.

Gail McMillan

Jean Robbins



Transcribed Copy:

Molasses Pudding

- 1 pint of molasses
- 5 eggs
- 1 pint of flour
- 1 cup of cream
- 1 teaspoonful of soda
- 1 cup of butter
- 1 cup of sugar
- 1 tablespoon of ginger
- Bake in a paste

The images above are courtesy of the Peacock Harper Culinary Collection, University Libraries at Virginia Tech.