



Colvin Family Farm

By David Cuff - Feb. 2016

A 300 acre farm near Nokesville, Virginia was in the Colvin family for just shy of 80 years. The farm was home to at least eight Colvins and certainly saw the birth and death of a few them. The farm raised cattle, pigs, goats, and other animals. It also grew crops like hay for the cows and in recent years, soy beans and corn.



(Picture - George McCoy Colvin and Dora Rebecca Ruffner)

On the 1900 census conducted in Prince William County, George McCoy Colvin is listed as living on his father's farm known as Hazelwood. Hazelwood was the longtime family homestead of George's father, former Civil War soldier John Calhoun Colvin. He is buried in a cemetery on the property, as are his mother and a few siblings and other family members. Hazelwood is five miles south west of the farm

George's sons bought in 1936. George and Dora were married in Fauquier County on October 6th, 1904, they were both 27 years old.

During the mid to late 1930s several farms in Prince William County were sold. Several advertisements describing auctions of area farms mentioned people were "getting out of farming". It seems the horrible economy of the time drove people away from farming. Somehow George McCoy Colvin did alright. In the 1920 census it shows he and his family living on the Stafford County farm but it's noted that he is renting the farm. Ten years later, the 1930 census shows mostly the same information except it's noted that he is the owner of the farm. The Colvin family still owns the property in Stafford county. Today it is approximately 100 acres of vacant land, the house and out buildings are all gone.

The Colvins moved from their farm in the Rock Hill area of Stafford County to the Nokesville, Virginia farm in 1936. John Sidney, Woodrow, Wyatt, and Philip bought the farm. George McCoy Colvin and his wife, Dora Rebecca Ruffner, the boy's mother and father, moved from their Stafford farm to the new farm on Colvin Lane with the boys. The large farm needed all the

free family labor it could get. The new farm on Colvin Lane was 506 acres, while the farm in Stafford was only 125 acres. Even though George McCoy Colvin is listed as head of household on the 1940 census, there is some evidence the boys were running the farm. A receipt for 40 tons of ground limestone dated March 10, 1938 was addressed to 29 year old J. S. Colvin (John Sidney Colvin), the oldest of the boys. The boys' sisters, Emma and Genevieve, also moved to the farm on Colvin Lane.

At the time of the move, the new farm was divided by a road running east and west. Roughly 200 acres were north of present day Colvin Lane and 300 acres were south of the road. The main house was just south of the road on the 300 acre parcel. The road wasn't a designated road in 1936. It was known as their driveway. In fact, on the 1933 highway map of Prince William county you can see Route 652, then Crockett Road from Nokesville traveling east takes a sharp left turn at the property line of what would be the Colvin's property a few years later. The road travels north six tenths of a mile and takes a sharp right turn and continues another six tenths of a mile in a southeast direction until it intersects route 611, present day Valley View Drive. Local resident, Kendall Cowne moved to a 175 acre farm north of the Colvin Farm in 1944 says isn't sure when Crockett Road was ended at Valley View Drive and Colvin Lane renamed for the family but he does remember locals drove down the road that split the Colvin property.



(Picture – Philip Colvin in 1941)

After the Colvin Lane farm was purchased, Sidney worked on the farm until he bought a farm near Culpepper in 1949. In the early days the farm probably didn't produce enough income to allow the boys to be full time farmers, plus they were young, even though they stuck to themselves they probably wanted to see the world. Woodrow and Philip got a job in D.C. driving a bus, and Wyatt got a job driving a street cleaner in D.C.. Wyatt also attended Ben Franklin University in D.C. and graduated on June 17, 1939 with a Bachelor's of Science degree in accounting. Nokesville was an intermediate stop on the Orange and Alexandria Railway so it's possible the boys rode the train daily to

and from the city but it's likely they had an apartment in the city. In the 1939 obituary of their grandmother, Lizzie McCoy Colvin, Wyatt and Philip are listed as living in Washington D.C.. In a photo below taken in 1941, Philip is shown sharply dressed standing next to a car with Washington D.C. license plates. It's likely his car, but I don't know for sure. Passenger service on the railroad from Nokesville stopped in the 1950s.

When the family purchased the property there were two houses and a couple outbuildings on the property. The main house was very close to the road, the other house was further back on the property with its own 780 foot driveway.

The main house is a two story, six bedroom, no bathroom, 2456 square foot structure on a stone foundation, according to county records gathered present day.

The second house, which was a lodging or farm hand house for years, is a two story, four bedroom, one bathroom, 1224 square foot structure on a stone foundation, according to county records gathered present day.

In the late 1930s and 1940s the farm raised goats and pigs. It also grew crops needed to feed the animals and humans. The Colvins were avid hunters and always had several dogs on the property. They built a rather large dog pen across Colvin Lane from the main farm house. It's still standing today just west of Memory Lane. Daughter of Sidney, Marilyn Davis, says Philip was an avid fox hunter and had as many as 50 dogs at a time. He would get all dressed up and take his dogs fox hunting often.

On January 14, 1939 George McCoy Colvin's mother died. The funeral for Lizzie McCoy Colvin was on January 16th at the family home for more than a century, Hazelwood. She was laid to rest at what is referred to in her obituary as the "Old Foote Cemetery". Today, this cemetery is known as "Hazelwood and Truro" cemetery. The clipping from the Manassas Journal Messenger also tells us that Wyatt, Philip, and Genevieve are all living in Washington D.C. It also tells us Woodrow, Sidney, and Emma are living in Nokesville. Presuming on the Colvin Farm.



(Picture- Dora Colvin with sons Philip and Wyatt)

In the 1940 census conducted in Prince William County, George McCoy Colvin is listed as a white male, 63 years of age and is noted as head of household. Also listed is his wife, Dora, age 63, and daughter Emma, age 34. Also listed were three sons, Sidney, age 30, Woodrow, age 29, and Wyatt, age 28. Philip, is noticeably missing from the 1940 census data. Their occupation was listed as "farm laborer". Also noted on the census were lodgers. Listed as residing on the farm was a 15 year old white male farm laborer named Milton Cooper, a 12 year old white female named Beatrice Smallwood and a 60 year old white female named Martha Brownham, her occupation is listed as domestic laborer.

World War II took Sidney and Woodrow away from the farm. Both brothers wrote letters to their "Mama" from the battlefield. From information Ron Mayer provided we know John Sydney and Woodrow were drafted into the Army. John Sydney was first. He joined on the 27th of March 1941 in Baltimore, Maryland, he was 32 years old. Woodrow joined on the 20th of August 1942 in Richmond, Virginia, he was 31 years old. Their data sheets were basically the same, both born in Stafford County Virginia, both completed four years of high school, both are listed as "General farmers" and both are noted as being "Single, without dependants".

From Army Post Office numbers on letters Woodrow sent to his mother we know he was in Mansfield, England between February 2, 1944 and February 5, 1945. Ron adds "In 1944 Wollaton Park, in Mansfield, was turned into a camp for the 82nd Airborne Division shortly before D-Day where over 2000 paratroopers were billeted on the Park. The American army built what is now King's Mill hospital and took over buildings in the surrounding district. Woodrow's unit (Dept of PTS) is unknown to me. He could have been a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne, or a member of the large German-Italian prisoner of war camp located nearby".



(Picture – The Colvin farmhouse)

The Army Post Office number at the top of letters written by John Sydney Colvin indicates he was in Knutsford, England, the Headquarters of General George Patton's Third Army. Ron adds "On New Year's Eve 1943, the Third Army was put on alert for overseas movement. They would travel to England where they would train for participation in the coming European

invasions. They would make their journey aboard three ships of an English steamship line. When the staff of the Third Army docked at Glasgow, Scotland, they were met by their new commanding general, Lieutenant General George S. Patton, Jr. He explained to them, "I'm your new commander. I'm glad to meet you. I hope it's mutual. There's a lot of work to be done and there's little time to do it. There's a special train waiting on the dock to take you to our Command Post. We will leave in one hour." The day after the staff were safely in their guarded billets, all of the men, enlisted and officers, were assembled on the large terrace in front of Peover Hall, outside of Knutsford, England, Patton's headquarters".



(Picture - Sidney, Emma, and Philip)

Long time Nokesville resident, Robert Beahm, told me the Colvins built the large dairy barn right after World War II. The barn measures 200 feet long but only 35 feet wide. It's the typical dairy barn design seen in the northeast between 1900 and 1955. Robert has been to the Colvin Farm many times and remembers all of the boys. He mentioned they were "characters".

In 1949 Sidney moved to a farm in Culpeper County. He remained there for the rest of his life and was buried in the Culpeper National Cemetery following his death on June 9, 1994 at 85 years of age.

In 1951 a one and a half story craftsman style house was built in the western most section of the property along Colvin Lane. This house is really cute. It has a little porch on the back side

that overlooks acres and acres of farmland and is on a full basement with a concrete floor. This house was a farm hand house and later rented.

On Dec. 12, 1955, the boys' father, George McCoy Colvin died. The family was Methodist and George and several other Colvins from this immediate family are laid to rest at the Catlett Methodist Cemetery, just south of Nokesville in Catlett, Virginia.

The brothers continued to build their cow empire in the 1950s by purchasing a selected pedigree bull from renowned cattle breeder Charles R. Hope & Son from Purcellville, Virginia. On October 8, 1956 the brothers bought a Round Oak Montvic Tradition bull that was born on March 3, 1956.

Local longtime resident Morgan Breeden worked on the Colvin Farm for three months in 1959 before he joined the Navy. Morgan was in high school at the time and recalls "At that time they had milking machines but we had to strip the cows out by hand because they wanted to get every last drop! We would then carry the pails of milk to the cooler room and pour it into the holding tank. Each person had control of four milking machines at one time and it was hectic work. We would start around 4 a.m. and finish around 7:30 a.m. with just enough time to wash our hands and get to school. We worked every day, after school until around 7:30 at night and by then you were so tired there was no thought of social life". The large barn that still stands, as of this writing, is a "100-stall milking parlor but we milked 125 cows, twice a day", says Morgan. Morgan also remembers, "Saturday was an all-day event with crops or cleaning or whatever was needed. Sunday was only milking. They went to church faithfully every Sunday." The final memory from Morgan about working on the Colvin farm is, "Work was hard, but fair. They didn't ask us to do anything they didn't do themselves so we didn't mind."



(Picture – Large dairy barn built just after WWII)

It's likely that the Colvin Brothers continued sending milk from their cows to Washington D.C. in the 1960s as evident by a Dairy Farm Permit issued in 1962 by the Washington D.C. Department of Public Health. This permit, which expired at the end of each year, allowed the brothers to send or bring milk and cream into Washington D.C. for the

purpose of sale.

Dora McCoy Colvin died on August 3, 1967. The death of their mother deeply affected the boys and started the slow decline of the house and property on Colvin Lane. Wyatt and Philip, who both never married, continued living in the six bedroom house. The house wasn't built with a bathroom and one was never put in. With their mother not in the house anymore housekeeping was something that fell to the wayside.

The 1970s on the farm is a mystery. I didn't find any documents supporting farm activity. Following the death of their mother the boys didn't do much around the farm. They would be in their 60's at this time and it was likely their sister, Emma, who never married, was living on the farm with them.



(Picture – Image of the farmhouse in 1989) Now in their 70's it's likely the farmland was rented during the 1980's. Aerial photos courtesy of Vintage Aerials show a lot of activity at the farm. The fences holding in the cows are still in place and there are several large round bales of hay lined up west of the large barn. In the mid-1980s, Wyatt sold the 200 acres on the north side of Colvin Lane and a neighborhood

named Colvin Farms starts to take shape. From mail found in the house it's known that at least Philip was living in the house at this time. Wyatt is most likely living in the farmhouse as well.

In the 1990s the farmland was flourishing with hay. Wyatt and Philip aren't the ones doing the farm work now, a family member is working the farm during this time. The death of Philip Colvin on February 21, 1994 is the first of the brothers. He is buried at the Catlett Methodist Cemetery, 7.5 miles southwest of the Colvin Farm. Three months later on June 9th, John Sidney Colvin passed away in Culpeper. In a 1998 aerial image of the property a large combine can be seen in the field just east of the farmhouse next to several bales of hay.

In 2000 Wyatt was living at the farm but got to the point where he couldn't live on his own so he went to live with his niece, Marilyn and her husband Rev. Paul Davis near Standardsville. Wyatt also has an auction at the farm to sell items on the farm like old tractors, farm implements, household items, and even trim and doors from inside the house. After the auction fees the sale netted Wyatt almost \$25,000. During the four years Wyatt lived with the Davis' he traveled all over the country with them. His first time on a plane was just a couple years before his death. From the pictures I saw of him at different tourist destinations it looked like he was having a great time. On October 29, 2004, Wyatt passed away. His obituary published in the Potomac News noted "Wyatt graduated from Ben Franklin University in Washington, D.C. on June 17, 1939 with a Bachelor of Science degree in accounting. Mr. Colvin was one of the original directors on the Prince William Hospital Board of Directors. He was also very involved and instrumental in the planning, development and construction of the Prince William Hospital."

Local longtime resident Kendall Cowne said Wyatt was a "character". He remembered a time when Wyatt was on his way to Manassas on Rt. 28 and recently sworn in Sheriff Deputy Rollins pulled Wyatt over for a dead inspection sticker. Deputy Rollins said "I'm going to have to give you a ticket" and to that, Wyatt replied, "I'd be disappointed if you didn't". Kendall said that's just the way he was, the way the whole family was, simple and honest.

The oldest of the children of George McCoy Colvin, Emma, never married. She lived at the farm for years, and lived to be the oldest of the children. She passed away at Annaburg Manor in Manassas, Virginia on November 2, 2002. Annaburg Manor was a retirement home operated by Prince William Health System until 2006 in a 35 room, 14,000 sq. ft. mansion built in 1892 by businessman Robert Portner. The building is not used as a retirement home any longer but it still stands at the corner of Maple and Portner Streets in Manassas, Virginia.

Genevieve, the second born married into the DeRatt family and became a nurse. Not much has been found of her life, including her husband's name, where they called home, or when she died.

Woodrow lived on the farm until he got married. While you might assume he got married young like most people. Woodrow said "I do" for the first time in 1971, when he was 60 years old. Long time Nokesville resident J. Robert Beahm remembers him and said Woodrow once said marrying his wife, Woodena, was the "best thing I did". As of this writing Woodena is alive and calls Charlottesville, Virginia home. Woodrow passed away in March of 2007. He was 96 years old.



(Picture – Hay barn under construction)
Neighbor Pam Dean who has lived across from the Colvin Farm since 1996 remembers the Colvin's moved to the farm in 1936 because she said, "that's the year I was born". She also remembers Wyatt Colvin and mentioned "he was a really nice man". She remembers the old hay barn and when it came down. The silo is still standing as of this writing.

In December 2015 the 300 acre property was sold to a developer in Fredericksburg, Virginia for \$3.3 million. The farm was listed for sale for two years before Jacobs and Company in Nokesville was able to get the deal done. In 2005, during the housing boom and catastrophic bust, the property was listed for sale but failed to produce a buyer.

This area of Prince William county lies within the 80,000 acre rural crescent. This county ordinance states that all new building lots must be at least 10 acres and only one house per 10 acres is allowed. After providing a road for access the developer may be able to build 29 houses on the 300 acre property. Hopefully the 29 new families who will eventually call the Colvin Farm property home will have as much joy and prosperity as the Colvin Family did.

Many more images, family letters, and store receipts from the Nokesville area can be seen on the original version of this write up at <http://www.historicprincewilliam.org/colvin-farm.html>