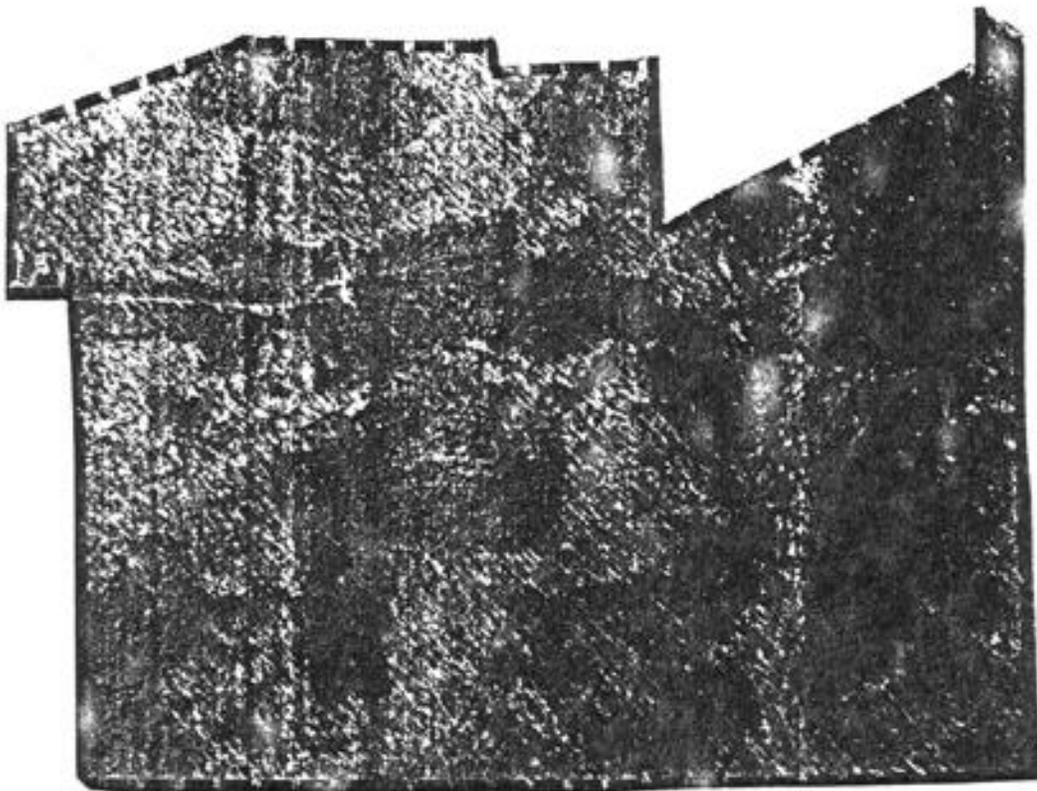


THE COUCH TRACT OF THE  
DURHAM DIVISION OF THE DUKE FOREST:  
A HISTORY OF AGRICULTURAL  
LAND-USE PATTERNS 1750-1950

by

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## INTRODUCTION

For most of us a walk through the Duke Forest is more than fresh air and tall trees. It is an escape from manmade surroundings to Mother Nature's paradise. Walking along a barely distinguishable trail, taking refreshment in what appears to be the virginal out-of-doors, one imagines undisturbed generations of wildlife touched only by the changing seasons. If, by mistake or romantic inclination, the nature-lover leaves the trail and discovers the vacated furrows or abandoned farm houses, the surrounding forest, once perceived as pure and unchanged, takes on a new identity. Here are retired farmlands where fields and pastures have, over the decades and generations, grown into woodlots and meadows.

Who farmed this land and for how long? What crops and livestock did the farmer cultivate and raise? What sorts of agricultural techniques and implements did he employ? Whom, and how many people did the land support? What were the consequences for the land when generations of farmers stripped the forest and tilled the soil? These are but a few of the questions a detailed study of the land-use practices of the Couch Tract of the Durham Division of the Duke Forest answers. Finally, why was this land, after spending two hundred years in the same family, permanently retired and eventually sold to Duke University in 1947?

Such a study relies extensively on primary sources, such as estate papers, wills, personal letters, family papers, land deeds, and population, agricultural and slave census schedules. In addition, this kind of land-use analysis utilizes soil surveys, aerial photographs and forest cover maps. Tax lists, legal papers and oral histories are other important resource tools for land-use research and analysis.

This thesis is a case study of the history of a family of small farmers and their attempts, over five generations, to get a living from their land. This thesis examines the

possibilities and the limits of certain agricultural practices and the intelligent yet doomed approach to landuse the Couchs chose.

This study does not just seek to find out about a family and its farm. Rather, it attempts to discover the different stages of change and the reasons for those changes. For instance; when did the farm begin producing for the market and why, why were some crops cultivated early in the history of the farm and others later?

Most historical studies of agricultural practices in the South focus on the southern plantation. Historians such as William C. Bagley, Philip A. Courtney, Susan Dabney Smedes, and Julius Rubin have studied the failure of the southern plantation and have provided us with rich and detailed information on the southern planter. Although plantations produced the bulk of the staple crops of the South, small farmers made up the majority of rural Southerners. The study of the historical significance of the small southern farm and its agricultural practices--how it adapted to change and its eventual collapse--has just begun. This investigation of the Couch family lands represents a contribution to that history.

## CHAPTER I

### FROM FOREST TO FIELDS

#### I

In 1754, when Thomas Couch received his three hundred acre land grant, he began as a small, almost subsistence farmer. Abundant land resources, new markets, improved roads, slave labor, and intelligent planning allowed Thomas' farm to grow into one which not only supplied his family with an array of homemade and homegrown necessities but also produced a salable surplus for market. By 1832 these same factors would permit Thomas Couch, Jr., to will property to two of his sons; enough to endow them with farms which would provide them with their domestic provisions and create a marketable surplus just as their father's farm had done for him. However, as the land under tillage became exhausted and additional land became scarce, the Couch's farming economy would change and they would have to find new ways to work their farm.

By 1752 four thousand immigrants had settled in Orange County, North Carolina.<sup>1</sup> About half were Virginians of Scotch-Irish descent who came from farmland exhausted by over one hundred years of cultivation<sup>2</sup> in search of fresh ground to till. Immigrants were attracted to Orange County because the land was cheap and appeared to be fertile. In the third quarter of the eighteenth century Orange was rapidly being transformed from a wilderness into a settled area. As the settlers came in they built log cabins, cleared forests for farmland, and opened up roads. Europeans and Northeastern immigrants ventured further and further into the Native American's domain.<sup>3</sup> Generally the method of settling in pre-Revolutionary Orange County was to find a space of King's land and get an order from the Governor. The settler then gave the order to a surveyor.

When the surveyor finished the plan for the space, he drew it out and then returned it to the office of recording where the Governor signed it. This was neither a difficult nor an expensive process.<sup>4</sup> Most settlers were granted anywhere from 100 to 500 acres of land. "From its beginning Orange County was the home of farmers and yeomen."<sup>5</sup> The area's potential for agriculture included numerous creeks and rivers which would provide drinking water for the inhabitants and their livestock, and irrigation for the crops. In addition there were huge forests which could furnish building materials and fuel. The mild climate further promised a longer growing season and shorter winters. Gently rolling hills and valleys characterized the land these immigrants settled. They saw the bottom lands, those beside creeks and streams, as the most fertile ground and that which they would first clear for crop cultivation.

## II

In 1739 Thomas Couch, a Virginian of Scotch-Irish descent, left his farm in Brunswick Country, Virginia, and began a slow migration towards Orange County, North Carolina.<sup>6</sup> In 1754 Thomas Couch acquired a three hundred acre land grant just north of lower New Hope Creek.<sup>7</sup> (See map.) Like the vast majority of the Virginians of Scotch-Irish descent who came to Orange County in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, Thomas Couch was probably a small farmer. According to Thomas J. Wertenbaker, even the poorest farmers in Virginia had cattle, poultry and swine. Virginia farmers marked their hogs and turned them "loose in the woods to feed upon roots and acorns."<sup>8</sup> The Virginia farmer, also according to Wertenbaker "always devoted a part of his land to the production of the grain which was needed for his personal requirements."<sup>9</sup> Wheat and corn were the grains cultivated. Cornbread formed an important part of the eighteenth century Virginian's diet. In addition to livestock and grain crops the farmer kept a garden which produced a variety of vegetables, including potatoes and onions. He also had berries and fruit trees. Honey too was produced. "There were few householders who did not have hives under the eaves of their outbuildings."<sup>10</sup>

Thomas Couch's Land Grant



Thomas, like all those who migrated from Virginia, left because his land had become exhausted. The practice in Virginia was to cultivate only a fraction of land at a time: as yields diminished the farmers' retired old fields and cleared new ones. This system required that a farmer have ample land holdings for the future. Not only did cultivating tobacco, ("the universal crop of the colony and upon it every man depended for his advancement and prosperity,"<sup>11</sup>) by itself exhaust the soil, but the huge influx of slaves in the early eighteenth century lowered the price of tobacco and thus drove many small farmers out of competition. The poor farmers therefore either "sold or deserted his fields and moved away in search of better opportunities."<sup>12</sup>

In 1739 Thomas Couch left Brunswick County, Virginia, for a place where land was abundant and suitable for raising hogs and cattle, cultivating grain, and supporting a farmer and his family.

North Carolina welcomed these immigrants with easy terms. The Royal government was as eager to have new taxpayers settle its lands as these victims of soil exhaustion were hungry to settle them.

In addition to his family, Thomas Couch transported the agricultural practices which he had employed in Virginia to Orange County, North Carolina. Upon his arrival in Orange, labor and capital were important limiting factors.<sup>13</sup> It is doubtful that Thomas Couch had more than a few slaves at this time.<sup>14</sup> What Thomas did have in great quantity after he received the land grant was land. Indeed, his land was so abundant that, as land became exhausted by eighteenth century farming practices, he could afford to clear new ground. Furthermore, Thomas did not have to waste his precious labor and capital resources on low-yielding land. Thus, the most intelligent choice was to produce the greatest yields with the smallest amount of capital and labor. This practice would repeat that which had been implemented in Virginia. As in Virginia, Couch's land-use strategy meant that the Orange lands would eventually become scarce and the soil exhausted.

Until land was cleared and a system of marketing developed, Thomas Couch was compelled to maintain largely a self-sufficient economy. Nonetheless the first years in Orange would dictate the economic future of Thomas Couch's farm. The poor transportation and lack of markets in Orange forced Thomas to be self-sufficient. From the crops and livestock upon which Thomas' family depended, a marketable surplus

would develop. For the first years, Thomas' food probably consisted mostly of the wild game he hunted on his land and the fish he caught in Piney Mountain Creek or New Hope Creek. This was supplemented by cornbread and hominy from his small patches of corn. Vegetable gardens and berries also added variety to Thomas' diet. Soon the patches of corn were replaced by fields of corn and small grains (wheat, rye, oats).

According to Charles Christopher Crittenden, corn was an easy crop for the settlers to cultivate. Planted in the spring in holes upon furrows made by hoe and mattock (by hand) or by plow (with work animals), it required only occasional weeding and hilling throughout its growing season. Harvest involved only the pulling and shucking of the ears.<sup>15</sup> Thomas Couch stored his corn in cribs rather than separating the corn from the cob.<sup>16</sup> This fodder would have been used as feed for fattening livestock before slaughter or for the work animals year round.

Southern farmers cultivated winter rather than spring wheat. It is sown in the fall and harvested in the spring. Like corn, wheat culture is not labor intensive. When the grain was ripe it was cut with sickles and then threshed. In Thomas Couch's case the wheat was then taken to Robson's flour mill on New Hope Creek to be ground. Gradually Thomas probably accumulated a herd of hogs, a few steers, heifers, and dairy cows, and possibly a bull. Raising hogs required little human labor or capital. Soon after birth, a young pig was marked. After being weaned he was allowed to run at large in the woods, subsisting on forest growth. Five or six weeks before being sold or slaughtered he was confined and fed on corn in order to improve the quality of his pork. Cattle, like hogs, also roamed at will in the woods. Cattle are not as hardy as hogs and require more care in the winter months. It was wisest to keep cattle primarily for home consumption and to raise large herds of hogs for market, which is what Thomas Couch must have done. Because Thomas Couch, Jr. had many more hogs than cattle one may assume that this was a practice he inherited from his father, Thomas Couch, thus indicating that the beginnings of large herds of swine began with the first generation of Couchs.<sup>17</sup> It probably was not long before Thomas was able to increase his imports, possibly salt, sugar, nails, knives, and other such necessities which could not be produced on the farm. In addition, Thomas Couch sold agricultural surplus, possibly grains, pork, some dairy

products, skins, honey and whiskey by transporting them himself over long distances along crude roads to market.<sup>18</sup>

Progress beyond these stages depended on development of an export market or a diversified community life and the home market.<sup>19</sup> In 1764 Hillsborough, the village closest to the Thomas Couch property, contained only thirty to forty inhabitants.<sup>20</sup> However, within ten years Hillsborough had grown enough to support a market. The development of Hillsborough was not based on a staple crop market but on one of community diversification. Because it was far from the coast, without navigable waterways, transportation costs to and from Hillsborough were high. The eighteenth century staple crops in the South, tobacco and cotton, were too bulky and thus would have been impractical and too costly to export from the Piedmont. The commerce of Hillsborough consisted largely of small shops and mills. The development of Hillsborough's market economy first grew out of the surplus (the first consequence of settlement) created by the nearby local farms. According to Harry Roy Merrens, "corn grew rapidly and well when planted in rough clearings among stumps and could be raised on a variety of sites and soils."<sup>21</sup> He further stated that, "corn was generally the first crop planted by newly arrived farmers."<sup>22</sup> By the late seventeenth hundreds surplus wheat was also being produced. By 1765 wheat was a crop grown for commercial distribution. Not only might it have been preferred by the farm families to use for homemade breads but it was a marketable crop in that it could be ground into grain and therefore affordably exported. By 1770 Orange farmers began exporting their wheat,<sup>23</sup> and possibly their corn.<sup>24</sup> Also surplus in the form of flour, and cornmeal, ground at the mills being built on New Hope Creek-and the Eno River, were being created. Although flour and cornmeal were cheaper to export than other crops, they still had to be taken to the mill in the first place and then transported to markets in Fayetteville and Petersburg.<sup>25</sup>

Livestock was no less important than were crops for Thomas Couch's farm economy. Animals were not raised solely for home consumption and for work animals but also as a source of farm income. Not only could Thomas rent out a bull or stallion to a neighbor for "putting to"<sup>26</sup> a cow or mare but more important he could raise large herds of hogs and either drive them to a slaughter house or transport the pork to market for profit.

# Hillsborough's Markets and Road in 1770



Although roadways were scarce and often nontraversable, they were the lifeblood for market economies and thus for the establishment of markets. Hillsborough, established in 1754, was situated along the Great Western Road, a major routeway which ran southwest from Virginia through western North Carolina. (See map.) This road and others, specifically the old Hillsborough-Fayetteville Road which ran through Thomas Couch's property, were the thoroughfares. It was by these routes that Hillsborough exported its farmers' surplus and imported items which neither the small shops nor the farms could produce themselves. Hillsborough found markets in a variety of places; Petersburg in Virginia, and Cross Creek (Fayetteville) and Halifax in North Carolina. The Great Western Road and the Cross Creek Road (Old Hillsborough-Fayetteville Road) were the roads travelers used and wagons were the means of transportation they employed.<sup>27</sup>

Most Orange County farmers could not conveniently carry their surplus products to Cross Creek (Fayetteville), Petersburg or some other distant market. It was the trade representatives in Hillsborough who purchased farmers' grain, pork or other surplus and transported it to the bigger markets and sold imported goods to the local people. It was the merchant's job to gather the products for export and to provide the import goods which were in demand.<sup>28</sup> It was he who maintained commercial contacts with the outside world. In Orange, at least throughout the eighteenth century cash was in short supply. This scarcity of money meant that trade was often conducted largely by barter.

The influx of immigrants, the surplus they produced on their farms, and the increased use of roadways stimulated Orange County's economic growth and gave the farms markets where they could exchange their surplus for imported commodities. Agriculture in Orange County became increasingly geared towards market conditions, and farmers changed their crop and livestock patterns in order to maximize their profits in the market system. However, agriculture did not experience any significant technical changes.

Unfortunately, the Couchs left no written documentation earlier than 1800. However, the early nineteenth century papers (receipts, bills, wills and Thomas Couch, Jr.'s estate papers) reveal that Thomas Couch, Jr. provided for his family and required few imports. Nonetheless, based on the number of hogs and amount of wheat raised, it

seems certain that Thomas Couch, Jr. produced hogs and wheat for market. It is likely that he was following in his father's footsteps. Not only were these agricultural practices generations old but they were surely important family traditions.

Producing enough to provide for the family's nutritional requirements and producing a surplus for market did not mean anything different for the farm's domestic production. Thomas Couch would continue to plant a vegetable garden, keep bees, raise livestock for pork, beef, chicken and dairy products, and cultivate corn for family and livestock consumption. Thomas would probably also grow enough tobacco for himself, for neighborhood exchange and possibly a bit for market. He also almost certainly grew hemp or flax to provide the family with fiber for clothes making. By the end of the eighteenth century Thomas also might have planted fruit trees and kept a few sheep for wool. Cash was not available for purchasing that which Thomas' farm could produce. Capital had to be reserved only for that which Thomas' farm could not produce itself, such as salt, sugar, coffee and hunting ammunition. Furthermore, the agricultural prices a farmer received for his surplus were always much lower than the price received by the merchant. This, according to John Solomon Otto, implies a safety-first" agricultural system.<sup>29</sup> Thomas first made certain his land would support his family's needs before worrying about salable surplus. Thomas further limited his commodity expenditures for surplus production by devoting acreage, labor and capital to family needs first. What was left in greatest supply for producing a surplus was land. Therefore it was wisest to take advantage of his most abundant resource, land, for surplus production. Land, rather than labor or capital, intensive production was the best strategy. Hog raising and corn and wheat cultivation were the most suitable choices to fit the strategy.

Raising hogs and cultivating wheat and corn took advantage of Thomas' abundant land resources. Yet they required little of his labor and capital. Hogs required enough woodland to provide them with a year-round supply of acorns, pinecones and other growth in addition to corn fodder for a month before their sale or slaughter. Corn cultivation exhausted the land, and thus required fresh ground constantly. This called for a form of shifting agriculture. This meant that Thomas Couch not only needed a continuous supply of fresh ground (woodland which has never been cultivated) to provide his corn cultivation with healthy fresh soils but he would also require forest land with a

dense population and rich variety of forest species to provide his hogs with the nourishment they needed. The impact of wheat was less than that of corn because it did not require particularly fertile soil or intensive cultivation. Wheat was usually sown in the fields where corn had been discontinued due to low yields. According to Lewis Cecil Gray, wheat was sometimes grown as a secondary crop in rotation systems. It followed corn after corn yields fell significantly below the average 35-50 bushels per acre for a good farmer. Wheat was sown until its yields diminished below the average of seven bushels per acre. Unfortunately, a time table for depletion cannot be accurately computed due to the many unpredictable factors which determine yields, such as soil composition, rain fall, seed, and slope.

At the end of the eighteenth century Thomas Couch was maximizing the potential of his resources and thereby he secured himself economically by practicing safety-first" agricultural practices and devoting the remainder of his resources, the land, to profitable market production. Nonetheless this strategy demanded and would continue to demand a continuous supply of land for the future.

#### IV

By the turn of the century the farm begun by Thomas Couch and inherited by Thomas Couch, Jr. was quite productive. Not only did the farm continue to provide for the Couch family and to produce for the market but it had grown considerably through Thomas Couch, Jr.'s land acquisitions. The increased abundance of land these purchases created further permitted Thomas Jr. to retire fields as they began to yield less, just as they would give him property with which to endow his children and to insure the productivity of his farm in the future.

Apparently Thomas Couch, Jr. was the sole heir of his father's estate. The 1790 population census names five Couchs as heads of households. Unfortunately, Thomas Couch left no documentation which would indicate who these men were. However, it is known that in 1760 Thomas Couch's brother, William, received a land grant to the northwest of Thomas. Therefore it seems that these five Couchs were the sons of the two Couch settlers. Although it is not certain how many children Thomas Couch had, the

deeds and Thomas Couch, Jr.'s estate papers and wills indicate that Thomas Couch's original land grant was passed on to Thomas Couch, Jr. in one whole piece.

According to Ruth Couch, one of the original settler's descendents, Thomas Couch, Jr. was a hardworking ambitious man. Not only did he teach himself to read and write, but he helped his father turn their three hundred acres of forest into a productive farm. The early deeds further indicate the growth of the Couch farm. The deeds, which document Thomas' purchases of over one thousand acres of land, indicate that his marketable surplus brought him enough cash for land purchases. The deeds also reveal the changing status of the farm and the farmer. By 1823 Thomas' farm equalled sixteen hundred acres. This acreage meant that Thomas owned a substantial farm; one which would have been considered a small plantation in this region (the Piedmont) of small farmers, thus making Thomas Jr. something of a small planter.

The Orange County deeds reveal that throughout the later years of his life, Thomas Couch, Jr. bought ten separate tracts of property but sold only one. All the properties Thomas Couch, Jr. purchased either bordered his own property or were located close to it. (See map.) Not only do the deeds tell how much land was purchased but they tell us something about the property itself. In 1786, when Thomas Couch, Jr. was about forty years old, he bought seventy-five acres of property east of his own. Although it is not known what the property was like (woodland or fields), upon its sale to Thomas Jr., it is known that this particular purchase included a stretch of the Piney Mountain Creek. Over the next forty years Thomas Couch, Jr. would make the following land purchases:

- 1790 ..... 200 acres, east of his property
- 1796 ..... 127 acres, east of his property
- 1798 ..... 141 acres, including a part of Piney Mountain Creek
- 1799 ..... 175 acres, south of his property
- 1802 ..... 180 acres, northwest of his property
- 1803 ..... 122 acres, southeast of his property including a part of Piney Mountain Creek
- 1804 ..... 108 acres, south of his property
- 1815 ..... 75 acres, south of his property
- 1818 ..... 512 acres, about two miles east of his property
- 1823 ..... 219 acres, east of his property

Thomas Couch Junior's  
Property by 1823



These land acquisitions reveal a great deal about Thomas Couch, Jr.'s farm and his agricultural practices. The land Thomas Couch, Jr. acquired was purchased with cash. Cash was a scarce and precious resource on Piedmont farms in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The only way Thomas Jr. could have accumulated cash was to sell more than he purchased. This not only meant that his farm was efficient in providing for the family, but that his farm produced an ample surplus for market. This surplus was great enough to give Thomas Jr. the money needed for land purchases. High yields and marketable surplus depended on a continuous supply of land. As yields diminished, new fields had to be cleared. Thomas Couch had to supply himself with land for the future. He constantly needed fresh ground for cultivation and healthy forests for livestock, fuel, and timber.

In addition to accumulating property, Thomas Couch, Jr. increased his labor supply over the years. By the turn of the century not only did Thomas have nine children to help out on the farm, but he also had slaves who continuously grew in number. In 1754, when Thomas Couch received his land grant he probably had only a few slaves. By 1822 Thomas Jr. had twenty-five slaves.<sup>30</sup> Most slaves were probably either offspring or spouses (which Thomas Jr. either purchased or acquired otherwise).

The Couchs considered their slaves almost as a part of their family and seemed to treat them thoughtfully. In the William Couch papers, William, Thomas Jr's son, writes, "I will give five hundred and eighty-one dollars in cash down merely to accomode (sic) the negro as he don't wish to be separated from his wife and family."<sup>31</sup> Also in his will, Thomas Couch, Jr. allowed "Old Soak be left to Choos (sic) her master."<sup>32</sup> The Couchs probably sought to accommodate their slaves by purchasing spouses for them who belonged to neighbors and by not trading or selling offspring. Not only were these additional hands able to clear more land, but they were a good long term investment. Just as Thomas Couch, Jr. purchased land to endow his children, he acquired slaves to insure that his heirs would have a reliable and renewable labor force to farm their land. Although Thomas Jr. probably did not sell his slaves he certainly might have rented out their labor for which the price steadily rose.<sup>33</sup> Thomas Jr.'s accumulation of land and slaves reveals that he went beyond producing solely for self-sufficiency. Thomas Jr.'s

property accumulations indicate that he was not only building his farm but that he was guaranteeing its future existence in the hands of his children.

The large number of children Thomas Jr. had posed a problem for dividing his property equally. Equal division would not insure a healthy productive future for his farm. Thomas Couch, Jr. would not be able to give his children all that they had grown up having. He had nine children but one estate. Undoubtedly his children recognized that there was not enough to go around for everyone's support. Thus, the first years of the nineteenth century witnessed the migration of three Couch children. Ann and Susannah, the second and third children and the two oldest girls in the family, were the first two children to leave Orange. These women married two brothers. Both couples left for Tennessee in the first years of the new century. It was probably expected that after their marriages were made and dowries arranged, the daughters would not be able to rely any further on their parent's estate for support. Sometime shortly after his sisters' departure, Jacob Bull Couch, the seventh and second to youngest son, left for Pulaski County, Arkansas. Jacob Bull seemed like the most marginal member of his family. Letters he wrote home from Arkansas reveal not only that he was living with a woman out of wedlock, but that he owed debts in Orange. If these reasons were not enough for encouraging him to leave, Jacob Bull suggests in his letters home that he suspected that he would not inherit any land (just money) from his father.

Both places, Arkansas and Tennessee, witnessed great influxes of migrants to their lands in the early nineteenth century. Thousands of people poured into the areas southwest of North Carolina seeking fresh, abundant, cheap land much like their grandparents had done in the eighteenth century. These migrations signified the end of North Carolina's frontier and marked the new southwestern frontier.

Clearly Thomas Couch, Jr. had built up a sizable farm, one which in the Piedmont could be classified as a small plantation. Upon his death Thomas Couch, Jr. left telling evidence of himself and his estate. His estate papers reveal that his possessions included five horses, thirty-three head of cattle, seven sheep, one hundred and thirty-two hogs, eighty-nine barrels of corn, one thousand and fifty-one pounds of bacon, one hundred and ninety-three barrels of brandy, twelve oxen, five plows, six feather beds, four beehives, eleven raw hides, thirty-six slaves, five books and a family Bible. In addition, he had

sixteen hundred acres. These figures do not even take into consideration that Thomas Jr. died in the spring when farm production is lowest. The winter wheat still had a month to go before it would be harvested.

Thomas Couch, Jr. recognized that he would have to make special arrangements to insure that the farm he had successfully built up would survive after he was gone. Dividing up his property had not been easy for Thomas Jr. He wrote out at least three wills, one in 1822, one in 1828 and the final holding one in 1829. The wills reflect the difficulty Thomas Jr. had deciding how he would divide his estate. In his 1822 will, Thomas Couch, Jr. specifically listed his slaves by name to his heirs:

To my son Samuel Couch I give and bequest one Negro boy namely Benjamin.

To my son Issac Couch ... one negro girl namely Jenny.

To my son Jacob Couch two negroes namely Alisey and Jim.

To my son Harden Couch .... three negroes, Kit, Pat and Willis.

To my dearest daughter Elizabeth White's children I give and bequeath one negro namely Demarius.

To my son William Couch ... also eight negroes namely Liz, Silah, Sam, Dannel, Hubbard, Ann, Jack and Abram.

To my son Thomas ... also eight negroes namely Old Jenny, Sarah, Ester, Tiller, Gabriel, Caleb, Manvesa and Guy.

It is my further will that Old Sook be left to to Choos (sic) her master amongst any of my children she pleases to live with.<sup>34</sup>

By 1829, in his last will, Thomas Jr. changed his mind:

I give and bequeath all my negroes which I may have at my death to my six sons, Samuel Couch, Issac Couch, William Couch, Thomas Couch, Harden Couch and Jacob Couch. To e equally (sic) dividedded (sic) amongst my six sons.<sup>35</sup>

The wills further reflect changes in Thomas Jr.'s decisions on how to divide his land, money and livestock. In the 1822 will Thomas wills to his "daughter Ann Horn I give and bequeath ten dollars in monie (sic),"<sup>36</sup> in 1829, Thomas Jr. wrote, "I give and bequeath to my daughter Ann Horn forty dollars."<sup>37</sup> Also in 1822 Thomas Jr. wrote,

I lend to my son Jacob Couch two negroes namely Alisey and Jim during his natural life and it is further my will that after his death these two negroes with their increase to be equally divided between all his children that may be living.<sup>38</sup>

In 1828 Thomas Jr. wrote,

I give and bequeath to my son Jacob Couch all the residue of the Peelor Tracts of land also all the Monie (sic) I may leave at my death after paying all my just debts.<sup>39</sup>

By 1829 Thomas Jr. decided to "give and bequeath to my son Jacob the balance of the Peelor Tract of land"<sup>40</sup> and one sixth of his slaves and money.<sup>41</sup> The three wills reflect more than Thomas Jr.'s indecisiveness. They reveal that he believed that careful thought was due to the future of his farm.

Thomas Couch, Jr. clearly favored or saw the most promise in his fourth and fifth sons, Thomas and William. He endowed them with the most property and that which was necessary for running a farm comparable to his own. He left them more acreage than any of his other sons. Thomas inherited two hundred and nineteen acres and William received four hundred acres. The other sons received no more than two hundred acres each. Thomas Jr. also left Thomas and William his livestock to be divided equally, "I give and bequeath to my son Thomas Couch...one half of my stock of cattel (sic) and hogs."<sup>42</sup> and to William the other half of stock of cattel (sic) and hoggs (sic)."<sup>43</sup> Thomas must have been the most favored; he inherited all of his father's brandy and cider and the farming implements additionally.

To my son Thomas I give and bequeath ...the choice of my wagons and geer (sic). Two choice horses, two stills, all my brandy, and all my cyder (sic) and brandy casts, two feather beds and their furniture, smith tools, plantation tools and kitchen furniture.<sup>44</sup>

In his final will Thomas Jr. bequeathed his slaves and money from the estate to be equally divided among the six sons. Thomas Jr.'s daughters had already received their dowries in landed property. Except for forty dollars, Thomas Jr. willed to Ann and Susannah, his daughters were not included in his will.

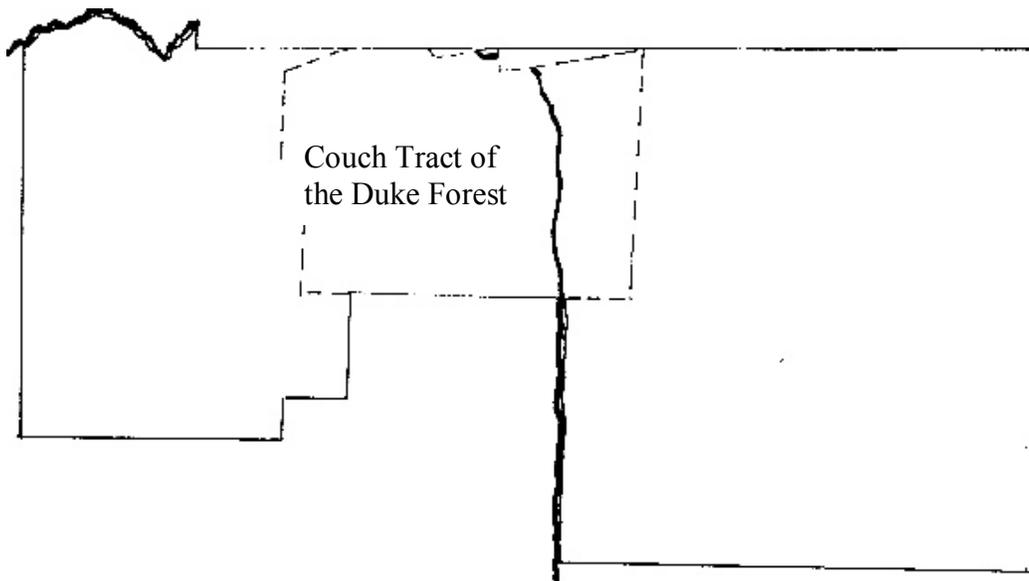
Thomas Couch, Jr. envisioned his plantation providing for future Couch generations. He carefully and thoughtfully willed his estate in order that his plantation survive and so that each child would receive some support. In his first will Thomas Jr. went so far as to lend" his property to his son to insure that the property stay in the family and provide for his legitimate grandchildren.

I lend to my son Harden Couch two hundred acres of land a part of the land I purchased of Allen Peelor, Samuel Peelor, and Benjamin Peelor bounded on the west by Aqualla Rhodes, Benjamin Rhodes south by Jason Hutchins. Running north and south so as to include the plantation he now occupyes (sic) also three negroes Kit, Pat and Willis and it is further my desire that the land and negroes at his death be equally divided amongst his children that then shall be living which is born in wedlock.<sup>45</sup>

## V

The third generation of the Couch farm would not be much different from the second one with one major exception. Like his father, Thomas Jr., William raised hogs, cattle, wheat, corn, and small grains and also provided for his family and marketed his salable surplus. The difference between William's farm and his father's was that William's farm had weaker soil and less fresh ground to sow than his father's had had. In 1832, upon his father's death, William Couch inherited the land lying east of Piney Mountain Creek. This property had been accumulated through the various purchases Thomas Couch, Jr. had made in his lifetime. In 1833 William purchased, from his brother Jacob Bull, the one hundred acres he had inherited from his father the previous year. Likewise, in 1833, William bought the three hundred and forty-eight acre tract his sister Sussannah, in Tennessee, had received as a dowry. Thus by 1833 William owned what eventually became in 1947 an isolated section of the Durham Division of the Duke Forest (from now on referred to as the Couch Tract of the Durham Division of the Duke Forest). (See map.) This land is relatively sloping for the area. Piney Mountain Creek runs south on the east side of the Couch Tract. Also there is a stream running perpendicular to Piney Mountain Creek.

# William Couch's Property in 1833



- ~ Piney Mountain Creek
- William Couch's boundary lines
- - Couch Tract boundary line

There are twenty different types of soil in Orange County.<sup>46</sup> Eleven of those types are found within the Couch Tract. (See map.) Although every soil is unique and will vary characteristically within the context of its location, some generalizations can be made about the soils on the Couch Tract.

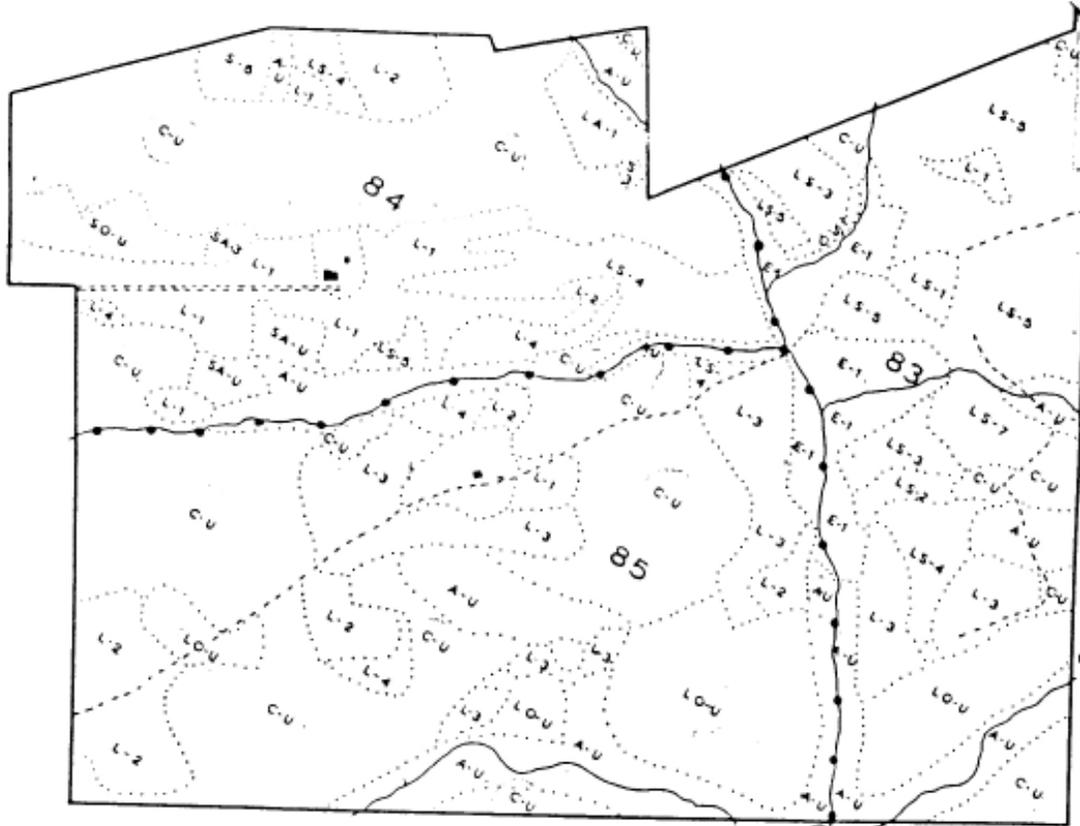
All the soils found on the Couch Tract are moderately permeable. In other words, they have a slight tendency to become waterlogged which means that oxygen cannot penetrate the soil and thus many plants will not thrive. These soils are Chewalca loam, Georgeville silt loam, Goldstan slaty silt loam, Appling sandy loam and Cecil fine sandy loam (the last four having two varieties distinguished by slope). Moderately permeable soils are not the best for crop production. Generally the soils on the Couch Tract are acidic. Some are extremely reactive. This translates into nutrient poor soils which do not provide fertile land for farming.

Based on the 1977 United States Department of Agriculture soil survey recommendations, less than one-third of the Couch Tract is suitable for crop land. Because slope, surface run-off, erosion and moderate permeability limit the soil, crop production-demanding nutrient rich soil and flat ground will not be very successful. Most of the soils on the Couch Tract are not of sufficient quality to sustain row crop (corn) cultivation and certainly will not provide fertile ground over any extended time period without applying soil conservation practices.

Where soil surveys indicate the natural characteristics of the Couch Tract, the forest cover map for the Couch Tract of the Durham Division of the Duke Forest reveals the Tract's historic evolution. (See map.) According to the forest cover map, which describes the ages and species of the different tree clusters, at least two thirds of the Tract were at one time cleared and cultivated. Today various tree stands cover the Couch Tract.

Although it is impossible to know how long ago some areas were first cleared, it is safe to say, judging by the forest cover, that certain areas were under cultivation by William and that a small part might have been cultivated by his predecessors. (See map.) Furthermore, it can be surmised that Thomas Couch, Jr. left William, one of the two whom he expected to sustain the plantation, mostly fresh fertile ground (that which had never been cultivated and was in woodland).

Couch Tract of the Duke Forest  
1957 Forest Cover



Forest Cover Types

Conifer:  
 L... Loblolly Pine  
 S... Shortleaf Pine  
 LS... Loblolly Pine-Shortleaf

Hardwood:  
 A... Red Gum-Yellow Poplar  
 C... White Oak-Black Oak-Red Oak  
 E... Misc. Hardwoods

Pine-Hardwood  
 LO... Loblolly Pine-Oak  
 SA... Shortleaf Pine-Red Gum  
 SO... Shortleaf Pine-Oak

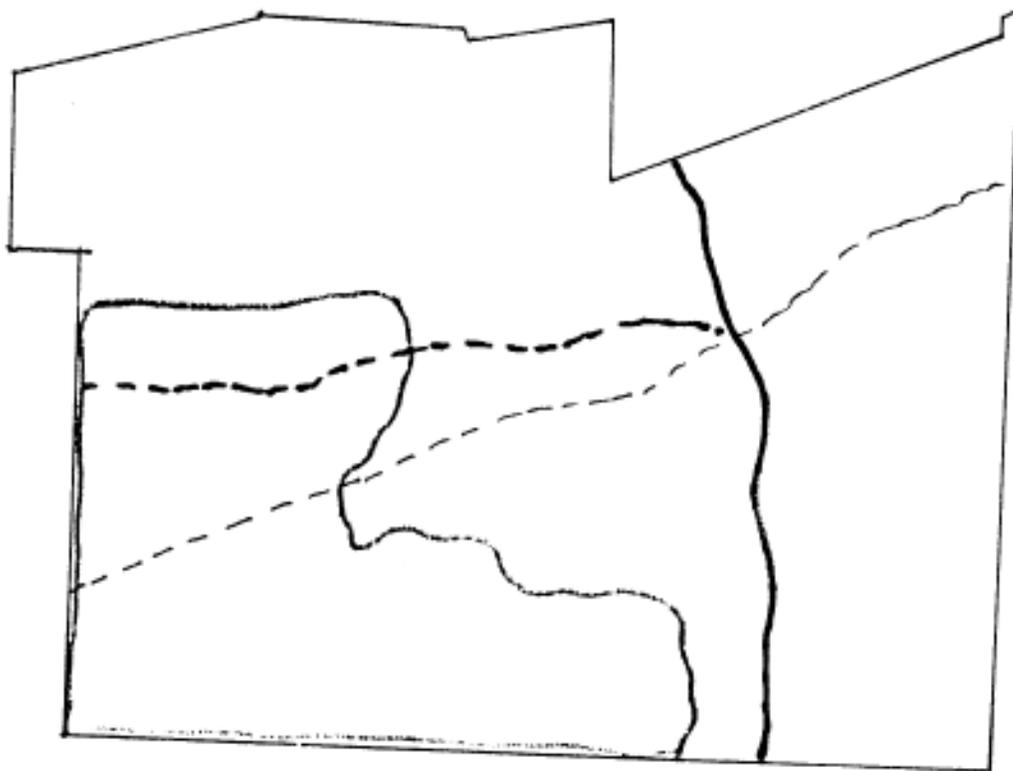
Age Classes

Pine:  
 0...1-10 years  
 1...11-20 years  
 2...21-30 years  
 3...31-40 years  
 4...41-50 years  
 5...51-60 years  
 6...61-70 years  
 7...71-80 years  
 8...81-90 years

Pine-Hardwood and Hardwood  
 1...1-20 years  
 2...21-40 years  
 3...41-60 years  
 4...61-80 years  
 5...81-100 years  
 U...uneven aged

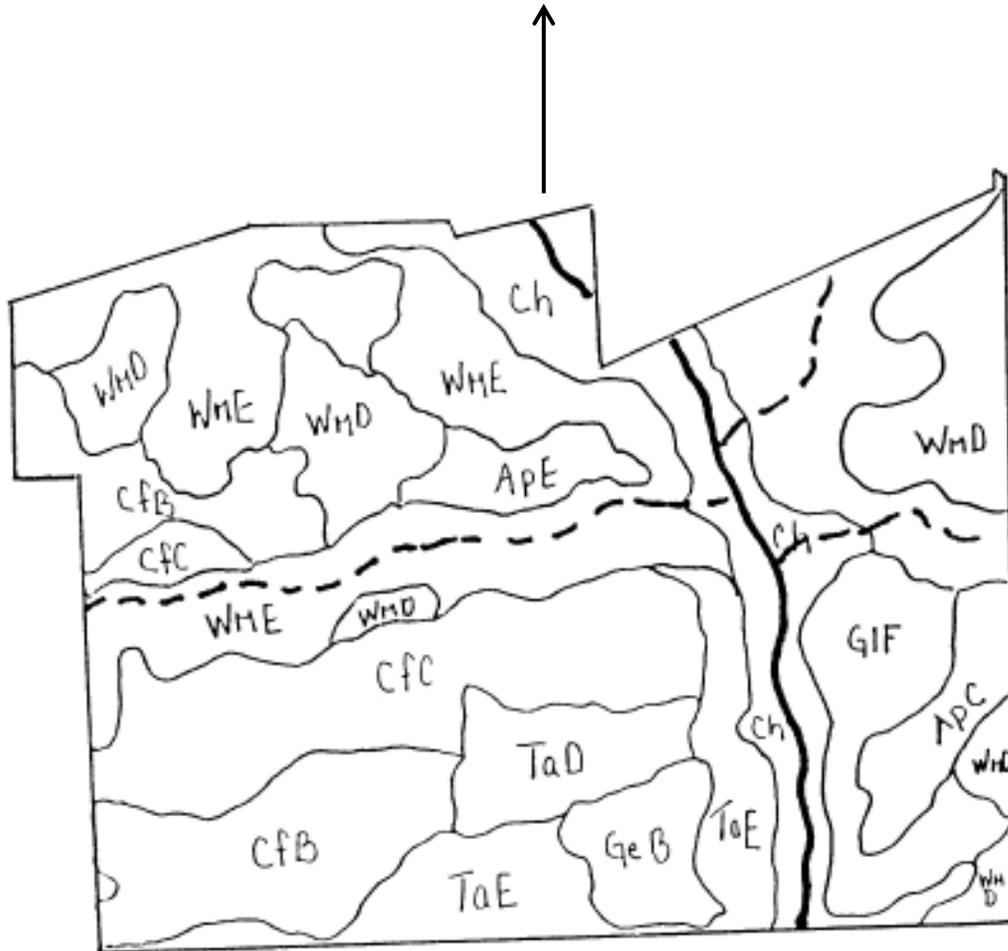
Couch Tract of the Duke Forest

Cultivated Lands until 1850



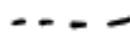
-  ...Cultivated Lands
-  ...Old Hillsborough-Fayetteville Road
-  ...stream
-  ...Piney Mountain Creek

Couch Tract of the Duke Forest  
Soil Composition



SOIL

- ApB... Appling sandy loam. 2-6% slopes
- ApC... Appling sandy loam. 6-10% slopes
- Ch... Chewalca loam.
- CfB... Cecil fine sandy loam. 2-6% slopes
- CfC... Cecil fine sandy loam. 6-10% slopes
- GeB... Georgeville silt loam. 2-6% slopes
- TaD... Tatum silt loam. 8-15% slopes
- TaE... Tatum silt loam. 15-25% slopes
- WmD... Wedowee sandy loam. 8-15% slopes
- WmE... Wedowee sandy loam. 15-25% slopes
- GiF... Goldston slaty silt loam. 15-45% slopes

-  ...Piney Mtn Creek
-  ... streams
-  ... soil group

In 1833, although land was becoming increasingly scarce and the soil more exhausted in Orange County, William Couch's agricultural strategy was not much different nor much less successful than that of his father's. Throughout his years as a farmer, William Couch, like his father, purchased additional tracts of land. After his 1833 acquisitions and his 1832 inheritance William owned roughly eight hundred and fifty acres. In 1843 William added eighty-one acres to his small plantation. Two years later he purchased two hundred and fifty-eight more acres. Also like his father, William had horses, cattle, sheep and hogs. Also he cultivated corn, wheat and other small grains as Thomas Couch, Jr. had done. William also had slaves, about half as many as his father had owned.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately it is impossible to compare William's farm production to his father's yields because of the differences and lack of detailed information in the sources available. However, it is possible to compare the two generations' agricultural techniques by examining what and how they produced. The Inventories Sales List<sup>48</sup> and census data reveal that William grew the same crops and raised the same livestock as his father had. The only notable exceptions are the discontinuance of bees and the introduction of a small potato crop. However, these are not significant changes. Furthermore, like his father,<sup>49</sup> William had hoes, mattocks, spades, sythes and cradles.<sup>50</sup> Thus revealing that, like his father, William mused comparatively crude implements of husbandry."<sup>51</sup>

The significant difference between the plantation William farmed and the one his father had, resulted as a consequence of the practice of field rotations and the constant need for fresh land. Where Thomas Couch, Jr. had farmed in a period when land was plentiful, William began farming when fertile and fresh Orange County land had already begun to grow scarce. The scarcity was enough to force Orange residents to migrate to the south and west where land was untouched and abundant. Field rotation required an ample store of land which had been available to in Thomas Jr.'s generation. However, by William's generation soil had become increasingly depleted and fresh land to which to escape had grown quite scarce.

Nonetheless it seems that Thomas Jr.'s agricultural practices worked well enough for his son. The figures show that like his father, William supported his family and had a marketable surplus. According to William's inventory papers, the Agricultural Census of 1850 and Thomas Couch, Jr.'s estate papers, upon or close to his death, William had

thirty-seven hogs, four hundred bushels of corn and one hundred and fifty bushels of wheat. Similarly Thomas Couch, Jr., upon his death, had one hundred and thirty-two hogs, six hundred pounds of corn and seventy-one bushels of wheat. These large quantities of agricultural production went beyond fulfilling the demand the domestic economy generated for pork, corn and flour, and thus they produced a marketable surplus. Neither Thomas Jr. nor William had as many cattle (beef and dairy) as they had swine. Thomas Jr. had nineteen head of cattle and William had eighteen. They also both grew flax in small quantities. Thomas had three piles and William had thirty pounds. The agricultural production figures for William resemble his father's in a way revealing that Williams' farm was self-sufficient just as Thomas Couch, Jr.'s had been. If William had any anxieties about the farm's future he really had no other feasible or affordable alternatives to choose.

Although the second and third decades of the nineteenth century saw the beginning of a great interest in agricultural reform in the South, such reforms were limited to those who could afford to pay the dues the societies demanded or buy the published materials they printed. Also, because of its relative remoteness in the hills of Piedmont, it is doubtful that Orange County had access to such societies. Most of the agricultural societies were born in big plantation areas. Even if the Hillsborough Recorder printed agricultural reform techniques or theories in its agricultural column, there was a great distrust of what agricultural reformers called "scientific farming."<sup>52</sup> among farmers. This attitude was not without justification. Many farmers either heard of other farmers having or they themselves had disappointing experiences with agricultural fads or crazes.<sup>53</sup> The lack of local markets where William might have been able to view and purchase improved implements further retarded agricultural reform.

Therefore, as long as the traditional farming practices provided William with enough meat, bread, vegetables, and fruit to feed his family and slaves and enabled him to afford imported necessities and to purchase land, they were suitable. Thus William had no real reason to risk experimentation. Rather he continued to plant corn on freshly cleared land and to follow it with wheat cultivation until the yields produced were not worth the costs of cultivation. William also continued to allow his pigs to roam freely in the woods as his father had. This practice did not permit better care and more ample

provisions which barns and improved breeding would have created but it was an inexpensive, profitable, and sure way to produce pork for his family and for the market. Similarly the system of field rotation did not allow William to practice soil conservation but it did give him a reliable and sure system for providing for his family's livelihood.

William, like his father, Thomas Couch, Jr., and grandfather, Thomas Couch, intelligently took advantage of his landed resources and depended on the land to provide for himself, his family and the market. However, unlike his father and grandfather, William would soon have to cope with increasingly more old exhausted fields and fewer fresh new acres. In order to continue farming William would have to either learn to practice land conservation or change his expectations for the farm.

Ironically, after three generations (about seventy-five years) and the close of the North Carolina frontier, the Couch's farm experienced little change. Like his father and grandfather William Couch practiced field rotation, provided his family with most of their necessities and produced a wheat and pork surplus for market. Although between 1770 and 1850 Orange County's population increased by more than four hundred percent,<sup>54</sup> thousands of acres of Orange land had been cleared, cultivated and retired, and sons and daughters had left the county in search of a new frontier, William Couch continued to employ the same agricultural practices and farming strategies begun by his grandfather and built upon and followed by Thomas Couch, Jr.

## CHAPTER II

### WEAKENING SOILS AND CHANGING STRATEGIES

#### I

By 1850 William Couch and his farm's legacy were nearing the century mark. Both had produced much in their lifetime: William, seven children; the land, bountiful harvests. By midcentury William had given two hundred and thirty-eight acres to his oldest son, Samuel<sup>1</sup>, who, with the help of his family and four slaves<sup>2</sup>, farmed the land. William Jr., the second oldest son, ran the remainder of his father's thirteen hundred acre farm and helped his mother look after his four younger siblings and care for his ailing and infirm father. Everyone recognized that one lifetime had yielded what it could and that strong young blood was required to take the place of the worn-out and old. Like their father and ancestors before them, William Couch, Jr. and his brothers would take over, providing fresh mind and muscle to the Couch family tradition in order to produce healthy and fruitful generations for the future.

The story would not be the same for the land.

In 1850, almost one hundred years after the land had originally been settled, parts of the Couch Tract of the Durham Division of the Duke Forest, were either already retired, under cultivation, in permanent woodlot, or soon to be cleared for sowing. Like his father, William practiced field rotation. This meant that he cleared new ground for cultivation and retired the fields where yield production had begun to diminish. Thus William cleared woodland in order to provide fresh ground for growing crops and left the exhausted fields empty to grow wild grasses for grazing his livestock. Based on the age and composition of the forest cover, the southwest quarter of the tract (see map) was a

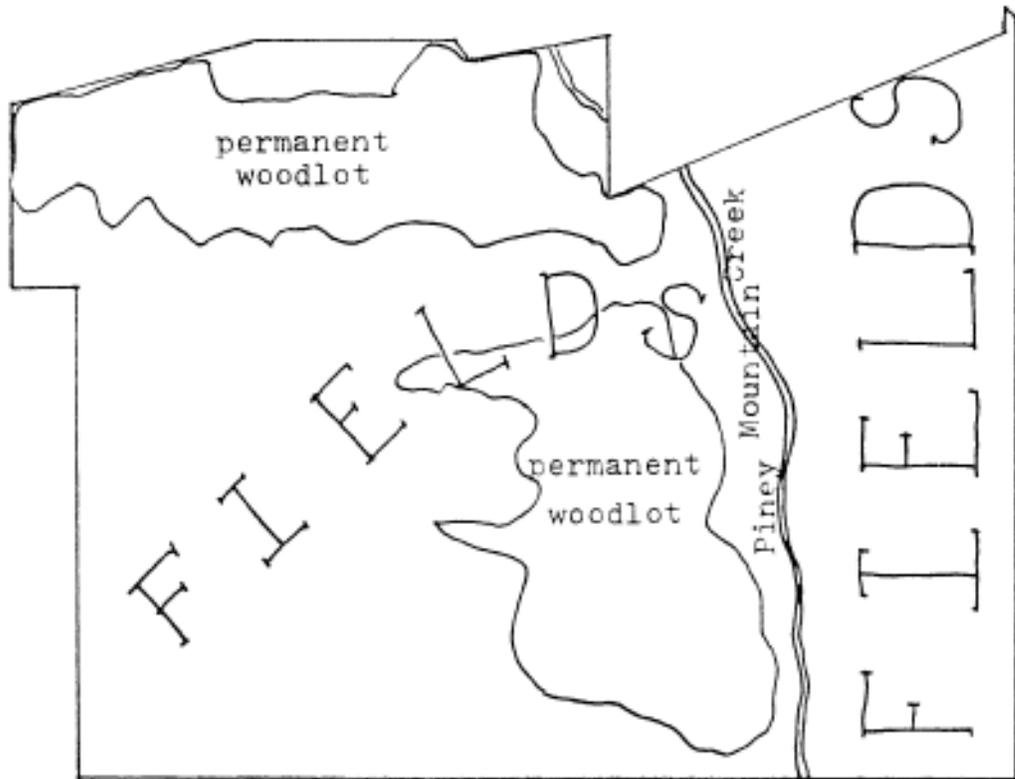
seventy-five acre field in 1850. Today this area is covered with uneven-aged hardwoods, most of which are less than fifty years old. Hardwoods only grow where other trees and vegetation already exist. These hardwoods established in the shade of pines that established in that field not much more than one hundred years ago. Pine trees grow best where vegetation has been removed; in open harsh, nutrient poor fields, characteristically on abandoned farmland. In 1850 the land lying east of Piney Mountain Creek, roughly seventy-five acres, was also under cultivation, as it had been for decades. Here the forest cover is young. Only within recent generations had this land been allowed to grow trees. These sandy rich<sup>3</sup> soils could be easily plowed and the flat terrain retarded erosion; this land could be farmed indefinitely.

Just as the southwestern and eastern areas of the Couch Tract had been designated for cultivation by way of field rotation, the northwestern and central areas (see map), about one hundred acres in all, had been reserved for woodlots. Most importantly, William Couch maintained woodlots in order to provide his hogs with a place to roam about and to feed upon acorns, roots and forest growth. The woodlots also provided William with a plentiful and renewable supply of lumber and fuel. William might have had plans to eventually clear the woodlots but only by the time retired fields in the southwestern and eastern areas had grown into woodland.

Therefore, in 1850, almost two-thirds of the Couch Tract were either under cultivation or lying fallow. According to the 1850 Agricultural Census Schedules, William Couch grew four hundred bushels of Indian corn, one hundred and fifty bushels of winter wheat, twenty bushels of oats, thirty pounds of flax, five bushels of potatoes and five tons of hay. Although it is impossible to determine where William planted the various crops (with the exception of hay which was just wild grasses growing in the empty fields) and how much of the yields were grown on the Couch Tract of the Duke Forest (do not forget that the Couch Tract constituted only a fifth of William Couch's landholdings), it is possible to determine what effects these crops had upon the soil by considering the methods used to cultivate them.

Couch Tract (Duke Forest)

1850 Land-use Practice



Before the close of the eighteenth century agricultural reform had begun to spread to the South, as was already mentioned in the first chapter. According to Lewis Cecil Gray:

"The decade beginning with 1830 witnessed the establishment of more than a dozen journals, and from this time until the Civil War they continued to spring up like mushrooms."<sup>4</sup>

However, Gray also states that:

"Except for the informal experimentation of individual farmers and planters and the educational influence of agricultural societies and journals, there was but slight development of facilities for agricultural education."<sup>5</sup>

This meant that there was general and widespread ignorance among farmers as to better methods of soil conservation and erosion prevention.

Unfortunately, neither William Couch's farm nor the vast majority of those in Orange County implemented agricultural reforms. Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, J. W. Norwood, a highly respected native of Orange County, addressed his fellow farmers on the state of farming in Orange and criticized the farmers for continuing to practice backward and unscientific farming.

All three of our great natural laws of agriculture have been disregarded and violated.

1. No remains of vegetable matter have by it been supplied as food to the growing crops.
2. No rotation of crops has been practiced-or nothing which deserves the name. But a ceaseless succession of corn and small grain without change, and without rest.
3. No precaution has been used to prevent the soil from being carried away by every washing rain.

And behold the melancholy consequence of such a system of cultivation in the exhausted and wornout condition of our lands, as of this moment they lie spread out before us to our view...<sup>6</sup>

What were the reasons for neither fertilizing fields, rotating crops, nor preserving soils? First one must recognize that all plants (except legumes, none of which William Couch planted) deplete nitrogen from the soil. Plants also consume the soil's potassium, phosphorous, calcium, magnesium and other nutrients. In a natural state, one in which plants are not harvested but where they live and die without human interruption, these chemicals are returned to the soil through decomposition. Each time the farmers harvested their crops, quantities of these nutrients were lost forever (i.e. hauled to market) unless they were restored by legumes, commercial fertilizers or manure.<sup>7</sup> Poor transportation in the Piedmont and high costs prevented commercial fertilizers from being used, at least not in the quantity they were required. According to Rosser H. Taylor at least "one load" of fertilizer was required for every twenty square feet in the 1880's.<sup>8</sup> While the use of domestic or lot manure was nearly universal throughout the Piedmont, the supply was never sufficient: not only was livestock kept out of the fields year round by wooden fences required by law, but the animals, for the most part, roamed free in the wooded areas, such that their waste could not be collected for manure.<sup>9</sup>

One outstanding factor explains why William Couch in particular did not rotate his crops. His land was abundant and, therefore, he saw no need to conserve it or the soil. Land was William's most abundant commodity. In 1850, before William gave two hundred and thirty-eight acres to his son Samuel, one hundred and eighty-six to his son William, six to his son John, and six to his daughter Mary, he owned fifteen hundred and seventy-eight acres.<sup>10</sup> Labor was less plentiful. According to the 1850 Population Schedule, William owned twelve slaves; five adult males, five adult females and two infants. Two or three of the slaves must have served as domestics thus leaving William with only a handful of bodies to work his fields. The agricultural economy of the nineteenth century was such that a farmer's capital was his scarcest commodity.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, William found it most economical in the short run, or as far as he could see, to exploit the land without spending the effort and expense to maintain its fertility.

Land conservation would have cost William the price of sacrificing trusted and traditional agricultural practices in exchange for ones which farmers still considered highly experimental. In some places farmers received these practices with ridicule.

Where William employed traditional implements, agricultural reformers would have suggested progressive ones. William used a one-horse plow<sup>12</sup> which meant he did not deep plow his soil.<sup>13</sup> In addition, William used the "shovel plow" and "bare shear plow"<sup>14</sup>. These plows were of "the crudest character."<sup>15</sup> They were "clumsy, unscientific in shape and capable of only scratching the soil."<sup>16</sup>

William Couch's estate papers list only one progressive farming implement; a two-horse plow. This is notable because it suggests that William was not a subsistence farmer. According to Edmund Ruffin, a nineteenth century agricultural reformist, the two-horse plow was seldom used, and only on well cultivated, well-to-do farms.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, the fact that William's crude traditional plows outnumbered his effective two-horse plow, eleven to one, infers that William had neither the capital nor complete faith in agricultural reform.

In addition to maintaining the use of traditional agricultural implements, William was also loyal to traditional methods of cultivation. He did not terrace his fields nor did he build hillside ditches. Had he done so there would be evidence apparent in the land today of which there is none. Rather, William continued to encourage soil erosion by sowing and reaping his crops up and down the slopes and hillsides.

The fact that William did not practice crop rotation but rather a form of shifting agriculture" is not surprising. Not only did he have an abundant supply of land but also a loyalty to traditional farming. These two factors would have disregarded replacing crop rotation for land conservation. Furthermore, William had neither access nor capital for purchasing most of the progressive implements and commercial fertilizers.

According to the 1850 Agricultural Census Schedules, William Couch produced two crops in greatest quantity; Indian corn and winter wheat--bushels of corn exceeding wheat by two hundred and sixty-six per cent. These data indicates that a three shift system was in practice. Practicing the three-shift system meant that William planted corn on fresh ground until its yields fell below a profitable level. Wheat then followed until its yields equaled four or five bushels per acre. In the third shift the land was left to grow wild grasses for grazing until the field was either reclaimed for corn cultivation or left empty to grow trees.<sup>18</sup> Arthur R. Hall illustrates this practice:

In Orange County, North Carolina, it was said that the corn was left in rough tith, without much preparation before putting in the succeeding crop of wheat, and that the wheat yield had probably declined for years past, until in 1850, it was not more than five bushels.<sup>19</sup>

A threeshift system is not as profitable as a single crop system which repeatedly and lucratively produces one staple crop, usually tobacco or cotton, for market. This suggests one of two things. Either William's land was too worn to support single crop culture or that William saw the three-shift system as being safer than the monoculture of a non-food (i.e. cotton or tobacco) crop. Although cotton and tobacco might have brought a higher price, they were also much more dependent on the market than were corn and wheat. Because a farmer who grows cotton and tobacco cannot feed his family with these crops he relies on the market for selling his non-food products so that he can purchase foodstuffs for his family. If market prices were low for cotton or tobacco the cotton or tobacco producing farmer would not be able to adequately feed his family. The threeshift system, producing wheat for flour and corn for family and livestock consumption, might have brought in lower market returns than cotton or tobacco, but it guaranteed food for the family and livestock.

In the nineteenth century Mr. Norwood was led to comment on the problems of soil erosion on Orange farms for a variety of reasons. The Couch Tract of the Duke Forest and all of Orange County reside in Piedmont country where gently rolling hills encourage soil erosion. In addition, shallow plowing<sup>20</sup> induces erosion because it turns over only the surface layer of the soil; breaking up the top layer of soil and making it loose and unable to withstand rain and wind whereas deep plowing digs at least a foot into the soil and thus helps retain the top layer of soil. Thus it allows better drainage and less runoff. Furthermore, corn cultivation adds to soil erosion because it is a row crop. It is planted along rows, on top of furrows. Not only do furrows leave much of the soil open and exposed, but they provide watercourses for rain to wash away soil. According to Albert E. Cowdrey corn takes:

...thirteen nutrient elements from the soil and is a heavy user of nitrogen and phosphorous. Two thirds to three-fourths of the plant's uptake of the elements enters the grain as it matures and so is removed by the harvest.<sup>21</sup>

Cowdrey also stated that:

By conventional measures of erosion intensity, row-crops grown without conservation measures permitted 500 times that of deep forest cover.<sup>22</sup>

Lastly, again according to Cowdrey, erosion is hastened because:

...natural systems, almost always complex, contain multitudes of checks which prevent any single event from threatening the whole with destruction,

and when the number of species cultivated are limited,

...soil toxins develop and parasites of many sorts are encouraged to multiply explosively.<sup>23</sup>

The dangers of limited species culture in this temperate region are further stressed by Julius Rubin who states that in most of North Carolina, "the freezing of the ground during the winter was not sufficiently prolonged to destroy the parasites in the soil."<sup>24</sup>

These factors have serious implications for the soil. They either contribute to soil exhaustion, which according to Bagley refers to land that, "through loss of fertility," continually reduces "crop yields from cultivated yields,"<sup>25</sup> which eventually leads to soil erosion, or they directly contribute to erosion itself. Continual corn cultivation forces the food elements, which the plant uses to the greatest extent, to become destroyed. This then forces the land to "become extinguished relative to that crop."<sup>26</sup> In turn this leads to barren fields where the absence of protective vegetative cover adds to the damage which row crop cultivation, shallow plowing and wind and rain have already done to the surface layer of soil, destroying the only adequate environment for the growth of plants (thus further weakening the land and making it increasingly less fertile). Leaving land open only encourages further erosion. Combined with the neglect to fertilize or rotate crops, soil erosion becomes extreme and thus fatal to agricultural production. According to Bagley, "observers of the phenomenon did not refer to even fifty per cent reductions of

crop yields as soil exhaustion." Exhaustion alone "meant yields of hardly twenty-five per cent of the capacity of fresh soil."<sup>27</sup>

William Couch cannot be blamed completely for the damage done to his land. Just as the soil was subject to the farmer, the farmer was at the mercy of the market. While the 1850 Agriculture Census Schedules show that William produced enough food and fiber to meet his family's needs, there were necessities which could not be produced locally. In order to afford imported goods, William had to produce a surplus with which to trade. A receipt in the Couch family papers dated November 25, 1852, reveals that William took flour, flaxseed and wax (beeswax) to Fayetteville, where he exchanged them for salt and coffee.<sup>28</sup> Much to Orange County farmer's inconvenience, flour inspection was required and the closest station was in Fayetteville.<sup>29</sup> One may assume that William took most of his surplus to local stores where he might have traded tobacco for shoe leather,<sup>30</sup> corn for sugar, or wood<sup>31</sup> for knives.

Like his corn and wheat, William's hogs and sheep produced more pork and wool than his family needed, leaving a surplus for market. Swine were particularly profitable. They required minimal care and could transport themselves to market. William probably herded his hogs either north, just over the Virginia border, or east, to the North Carolina coastal plain, where they were sold for cash which provided the Orange farmer with money to pay his taxes and purchase goods he could not always acquire through trade. While family papers reveal that William carried on the tradition of neighborhood barter as his father had, trading at the local store or livestock barn continued to dictate his farming practices. Not any agricultural surplus could be traded at the local store. The merchant was generally not an intermediary for butter and eggs amongst locals. He was the middleman for the farmers and those who sent agricultural goods north or abroad. Thus, in order to get a good trade at the local store, a farmer had to produce a surplus which the merchant could exchange at the other end. At midcentury the main crops in Orange County were wheat, tobacco, oats, corn, and cotton.<sup>32</sup> It is logical to conclude that it was these few staples for which markets existed. Unfortunately, the crops which favor the soil, legumes such as clover and alfalfa, were neither in demand up north or abroad, nor were they grown for sillage. Wheat, tobacco, oats, corn, and cotton were in demand, either for market or for feed (which contributed to a market good): Crops which when not

properly cultivated destroyed the earth which produces them, as did corn produced by the three-shift system, injure the Couch land.

## II

In the fall of 1856, the head of the Couch family farm passed along with the summer days and the growing season, thus introducing a new generation of Couch farmers and a brief yet worthless rest for their harvested fields.

The previous section described the state of William's fields at mid century. This description in no way illustrates the "worn-out hillsides seamed with gullies,"<sup>33</sup> or the "cleared land not more than one quarter having been lately in cultivation; the rest grown over with briars and bushes, and a long coarse grass of no value."<sup>34</sup> What Thomas Couch, Jr. had seen as a plantation-one which would survive in tact, and provide for his grandchildren,<sup>35</sup> was not a reality two generations later. Not only was there less land available for cultivation and fewer slaves to work the land, as the plantation was divided up amongst six children and a widow, but there was less fertile land: Land which was producing a fraction of what it had in Thomas Jr.'s day when it was freshly cleared and initially cultivated.

Unlike his father, William did not plan for the farm's future after his death. William left no will or testament behind. The fact that William left no documentation of how he wished his plantation to be divided suggests that William did not see the farm as his father had viewed it. Where Thomas, Jr. had made plans for the farm in the hands of unborn generations, William apparently did not even have thoughts for the farm in the immediate generation. Perhaps William could not decide how to divide his land so that it could remain productive and be equally distributed. In the face of steadily weakening soils and less fresh land, William might have felt that any kind of division would have seriously injured the farm's future. Perhaps the decision to divide and hence destroy the farm was one which was too difficult for William to make.

Therefore the court divided William Couch's property in an attempt to make 'the several shares as equal in value as they could conveniently be made and charging the more valuable shares to pay the difference to the less valuable shares for equality."<sup>36</sup>

Because William left no will the court was forced to divide the property equally amongst William's heirs and assigns. John W. Couch, William's fifth child, inherited the property which today almost exactly comprises the Couch Tract of the Durham Division of the Duke Forest. In addition, John W. was allotted two male slaves, "valued at eight hundred dollars and two hundred and twenty four dollars in cash paid to him by two of his siblings, making his lot equal to theirs."<sup>37</sup> At the time of his father's death, John W. was only seventeen years old and not yet mature enough to run his own farm. From the family papers it is apparent that William Couch, Jr., the oldest son living at home upon his father's death, was in charge of his father's farm. It was only logical then that William Jr. administer John W.'s property until he was old enough to farm for himself. This plan made additional sense because the land inherited by John N. bordered on William Jr. 's own.

William Couch, Jr. ran his and John N.'s inherited farmland as their father had, continuing to practice the three-shift system of field rotation and taking care to provide for the domestic and market economies. According to the 1860 Agricultural Census Schedules, William Jr. planted corn and wheat in the greatest quantities. He had one hundred and eighty-eight bushels of wheat and seven hundred and fifty bushels of Indian corn. William Jr. also had fifty swine compared to fifteen cattle and seven sheep. The use of cash to pay taxes and for other expenses, documented in the family papers, reveals that William Jr. produced an agricultural surplus, as his father had, and traded it at market for money. Planting the same crops and raising the same livestock not only meant that William Jr. adopted his father's production strategies but that he followed the same erosive land-use practices his father had exercised. It is important to understand that the damage done to the soil by such practices snowballs as the modes continue to be used, causing soil, already weak, to become increasingly susceptible. Furthermore, exhausted lands and diminishing yields force farmers to add pressure to lands already in cultivation. Such consequences manifested throughout the nineteenth century.

In 1861 John W. Couch left the farm in order to serve as an Orange County Guard in Company A of the Twenty-Seventh Regiment.<sup>38</sup> William Couch, Jr. also left the farm for the service. The Civil War brought four terrible years of hardship and suffering for families on the home front: wives were without husbands, plantations without masters

and prices without control. However, the war did not introduce any new evils to Orange farmland. According to Robert Kenzer, in his portrait study of Orange County, "the crops had been planted in the spring of 1861 before the soldiers left the county and there were enough hands present in the fall for harvest."<sup>39</sup> This left the wives, younger sons, daughters and slaves at home where for three planting seasons and harvests they would have to manage alone.

Ironically, hard times for the Confederacy sometimes implied better times for farmland for a variety of reasons. There was a great effort on the part of those at home, in Orange County, and throughout North Carolina, to provide for their men and for themselves without outside help. This often meant sacrificing the produce which brought them money or a good trade for those which could feed hungry mouths and empty stomachs. For some it was not patriotism, but necessity, due to inflation and blockades, which forced them to replace market oriented crops, such as tobacco, corn, and cotton (row crops), with practical foodstuffs, such as peas, potatoes, and beans, which are less soil intensive cultivars

Also, on some farms, such as William Couch, Jr.'s, where there were but a few slaves and no children,<sup>40</sup> there simply was not enough labor available for farming all the land normally under cultivation. This meant that some fields lay fallow and thus were given a full year, if not a few, to rest and possibly even to partially restore their soils.

The Civil War, which so many blame for any ills incurred in the Post-bellum period, cannot be held responsible as the destructive force which exhausted the Couch's soil and eroded their land. The War did nothing additional to encourage soil exhaustion on the Couch Tract. If anything it provided temporary relief for the weakening land. It was the Couch's repeated use of field rotation practices and traditional agricultural methods which were the important factors in the Couch's nineteenth century land use.

### III

The Post-bellum period introduced a new farmer, John W. Couch, to the Couch Tract. John W. 's presence would introduce many significant changes in farming practices. Unlike his father and grandfather, John W. would not employ slave labor nor would he

acquire any acreage additional to his original two hundred and seventy-six acre inheritance. Furthermore, he would never produce the high crop yields nor would he ever raise as many hogs or cattle as Thomas, Jr. or William. The socio-economic changes introduced in the Postbellum period and the deteriorated soils on the Couch Tract would force John W. to change his agricultural practices and would thus lead him to create a new strategy for farming his land and providing for his family.

Outstandingly, the Civil War introduced emancipation to the South in 1865. The close of the war also brought the Couch brothers home: William Jr. to his young bride and John W. to his fiancée and what would soon be his own farm independent of William Jr.'s. In addition to poor soil, John W. was without slaves and faced with high reconstruction prices. John W., even more so than his father or grandfather, had to produce a cash crop in order to survive. Not only would the young farmer have to pay higher taxes than his father had, but he would have to hire labor and pay a wage.

John W. thought he would solve his cash problem by planting tobacco. According to historian Dolores Janiewski, tobacco had been grown in the area since the eighteenth century, but inadequate transportation had limited its sale to the local farming community and personal use. The coming of the railroad at mid-century and the rise of warehouses and tobacco auctions in Durham, sponsored by local manufacturers, strengthened the crop's attraction for cashpoor farmers.<sup>41</sup>

Unlike his father and grandfather, John W. had less than three hundred acres and produced tobacco. Also unlike his ancestors, John W. had to afford to pay a cash wage for farm labor. The 1870 Agricultural Census Schedules document these significant differences. In 1870 John W. owned two hundred and seventy-six acres of land which today is the Couch Tract of the Duke Forest. According to the 1870 Agricultural Census Schedule, fifty of those acres were improved (under cultivation), one hundred and fifty were in woodland, and the remaining seventy-six were unimproved (lying fallow). The hundred and fifty acres of woodland lay where they always had (see map). The young hardwoods in the southwest corner of the tract reveal where the seventy-six acres of fallow land lay. The fifty acres under cultivation were mostly on the east side of the creek where rich soil and relatively flat land continued to provide fertile, productive farmland. The 1870 schedules also report that John W. Couch harvested two hundred bushels of

Indian corn, one hundred and twenty bushels of winter wheat and fifty pounds of tobacco. He also had twenty-two hogs. These harvests and the hogs provided John W. with a surplus with which he could sell for cash. Nonetheless, in order to produce the surplus, John W. had to hire help, which in 1870 cost him one hundred dollars.<sup>42</sup> In addition, John W. also probably had to incur expenses for commercial fertilizer for his tobacco plants.

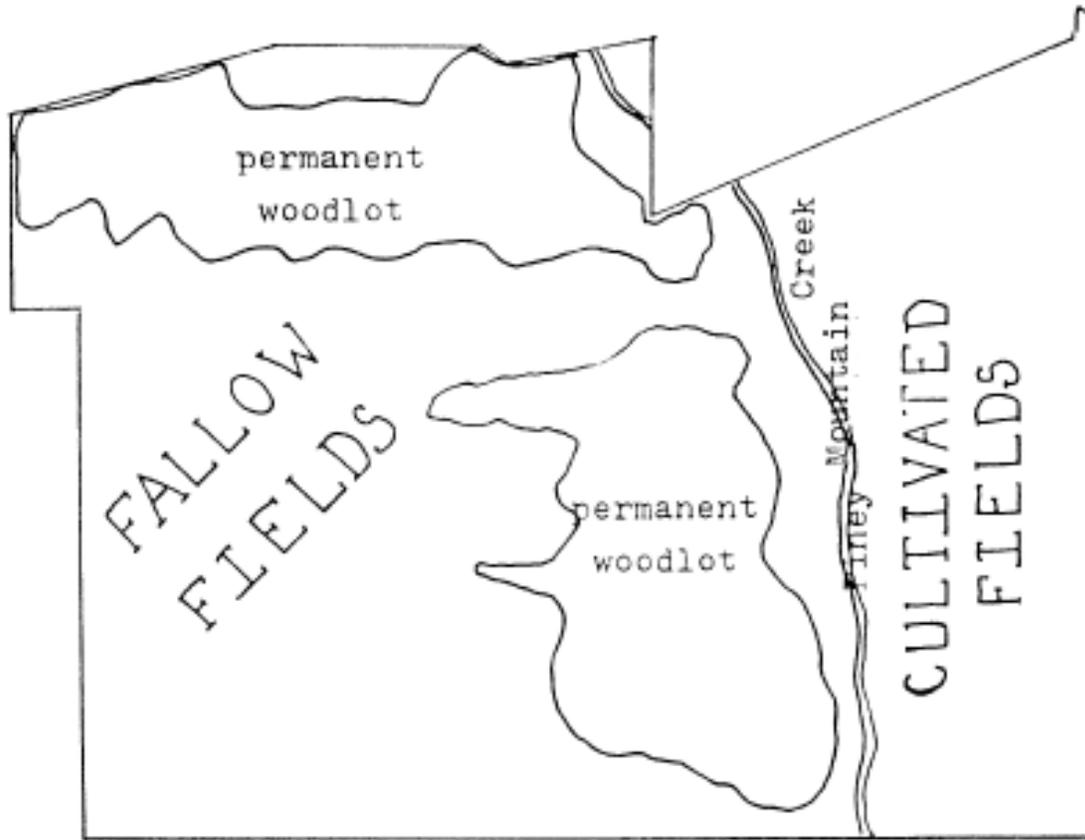
While fertilizer had been available, to some extent, in Orange by the 1850's, its popularity increased in the following years for a variety of reasons. First of all transportation had improved, but more important was the need to revive exhausted fields. Furthermore, in the absence of slave labor, it was more expensive to clear new fields. In addition, the fresh lands were rapidly dwindling. Also important was that commercial fertilizers were sold on long-term credit by local merchants who had contacts with wholesalers and fertilizer manufacturers. In addition, fertilizer for tobacco, a crop which had recently become a staple one for orange County, was generally more popular than for corn. According to Arthur Hall, the proper kind and amount of fertilizer to be applied to corn seems to have been a matter of doubt for a long time. Greater attention was given to the application of commercial fertilizers to tobacco.<sup>43</sup>

The Agricultural Census Schedules do not disclose the same story for John W. Couch's farm in 1880. Not only do they reveal what John W. harvested in 1880, but they indicate which of the 1870 plans had not been successful enough to continue. The 1880 Schedules report less woodland and more improved acreage. In addition the Schedules report three times as many cattle for John W. and for the first time fruit bearing trees. The 1880 Schedules do not record any tobacco harvested on John W. Couch's farm.

By 1870 the demand for Brightleaf tobacco had peaked. Brightleaf, the fanciest and highest priced of the tobaccos, grows best in the soils of the Triassic Basin. Unfortunately, the John W. Couch property was just west of this fertile area. However, it is doubtful that John W. was aware of this geographic complexity. Although he paid Orange County taxes, John w. did his business in Durham (east of Orange in the Triassic Basin) where it is certain that he saw friends and neighbors growing and profiting by Brightleaf tobacco. Judging from the 1870 Agricultural Schedules, the young farmer had planned to produce this valuable leaf for profit as his eastern neighbors were doing.

Couch Tract (Duke Forest)

1870 Land-use Practice



By 1880 John W.'s illusion that tobacco would bring him prosperity had faded. His soil simply could not produce Brightleaf tobacco. However, according to Arthur Hall the growth of Durham as a textile and tobacco town in the 1880's is noteworthy because to some extent it "increased the demand for animal products and other products of diversified farming."<sup>44</sup>

In order to compensate for his loss in tobacco, John W. had to produce more of the other cash crops. The Agricultural Census Schedules report that by 1880 John W. had increased his improved acreage by twenty-five acres (either by clearing woodland or by bringing retired fields back under cultivation). He also harvested one hundred and seventy-five more bushels of corn and two hundred and twenty-five more bushels of oats than he had in 1870. The 1880 Schedules document an increase in John W.'s potato harvest and dairy cattle as well. In addition, John W. harvested fifteen bushels of fruit from his peach and apple orchards. The first two increases indicate surplus probably produced for far away markets while the latter ones suggest surplus produced for the new local urban market.

While 1880 brought increased corn cultivation it did not introduce any improved agricultural techniques. The 1880 Schedules prove that John W. still did not possess enough horse power for deep plowing nor was he purchasing fertilizer for or applying sufficient amounts of manure to his corn fields.<sup>45</sup> Thus old fields continued to be tapped without replenishment.

The steady depletion of the soil and the bleak outlook it created for the farm did not evade John W. Couch. Where William Couch had realized that his farm would not provide for his six children as it had for him, John W. saw that his farm might not provide for his offspring. Thus in 1892, J.W.T. Couch, the youngest of John W. and Julia A. Couch's four children and the only boy, was sent to the Preparatory Department of Guilford College, the Quaker School in Greensboro, and then to Siler City Business School in Chatham County, where it was hoped that he would acquire a new resource to make up for those which the farm had lost.

## CHAPTER III

### LIVING OFF THE LAND: THE LAST GENERATION

#### I

In September of 1892, J.W.T. Couch, the sixteen year old farm boy, left the family farm in Orange for Guilford College Preparatory Department near Greensboro. This marked the first Couch, in five generations, to leave the family farm in order to acquire a secondary education. If, upon the young man's departure, he had not had his head filled with thoughts about his future as a student at Guilford, he might have been able to take a look around at his family's property and consider the historical significance of his leaving. Although John W. Couch's property documented over one hundred years of adequate, if not profitable, land use, apparently John w. did not perceive his land providing a lucrative future for his son. However, it would be more difficult for J.W.T. to make the permanent break of moving off the farm than it had been to prepare for (i.e. leave the farm for school) the life off the farm. Although John W. would prepare his son for a new kind of life, the decision to have J.W.T. live in town and work in a business after his schooling would be rescinded and there would be an encore generation of Couch farmers. Making a living off the land his father had predicted would not sustain another generation meant that J.W.T. would have to be extra thrifty and hardworking if he wished to support himself and his family by the farm alone.

The last decade of the nineteenth century--the decade which J.W.T. spent either at Guilford Preparatory or in Siler City--did not witness much demand placed on John W. Couch's two hundred and seventy-six acres. Near the close of the century the family members were few in number. By 1892 Julia A. Couch, John W.'s wife, had died. Jennie,

the youngest daughter, had married and moved off the farm. This left only John W. and his two oldest daughters Nettie and Hiberrria, at home for the farm to support. It was not difficult for the farm to provide the threesome with food. However, the money necessary to pay J.W.T.'s tuition was more than the land alone could provide without a substantial agricultural surplus or other source of cash income.

John W. seems to have been the inspiration for the higher education of his son, J.W.T. According to Catherine Melinius, her grandfather, John W. Couch, taught school. John W.'s teaching indicates that he was a man who valued education. It was John W. who was responsible for sending his son, J.W.T., off to Guilford College Preparatory Department for a year before encouraging the young man to attend Siler City Business School, and paying his way there. John W. wanted his son to get a good education.<sup>1</sup>

John W. Couch thought his son would fare better in the twentieth century with tools which had not been necessary in his own time. A look at John W.'s farm in the 1890's suggests why J.W.T.'s father might have thought that a comfortable and reliable livelihood for his son depended upon him gaining a professional education.

Due to the limits of land availability and the expense of wage labor, John W. Couch contended with the limited capacities of the soil and the inherently difficult characteristics of the land more so than his ancestors. Only one-third of John W.'s acreage, that which is on the east banks of Piney Mountain Creek, has rich soil. In addition to its inherent limitations, John W.'s soil was steadily being depleted by erosion due to land clearing and traditional methods of cultivation. This deterioration continued throughout the years due to the continuation of shallow plowing fields only six to eight inches into the soil with a one or two horse plow. Although agricultural reformers had advocated deep plowing for decades, men like John W. Couch did not have the horse power for doing so. Deep plowing would have required John W. to afford at least four or five horses and a multiple horse plow. Moreover, John W. saw shallow plowing as a way to save the soil from washing: "The idea was that you don't plow too deep and you won't get such big gullies when it washes."<sup>2</sup> Shallow plowing not only seemed to be the best way but it was also the only way affordable for John W. Couch. In addition, the cleared or once cleared hills and slopes (which did not have or had not yet grown trees and

ground cover to arrest soil erosion) J.W.T. had on his property did further damage to the land by hastening soil erosion.

John W. faced a host of problems throughout the second half of the nineteenth century unique to his generation. These conditions introduced drastic changes on the Couch farm. Finally, the labor shortage was outstanding. Unlike his father and grandfather John W. had neither slaves nor sons. A combination of field rotation practices and the labor shortage meant that of the two hundred and seventy-six acres John W. inherited, only a fraction would be cultivated. Fewer farm hands also compelled John W. to cultivate the least labor intensive crops. The non labor intensive crops require less human labor for cultivation and less frequent rotation to new ground. Crops, rotated by field rather than by each other, (that is to say, instead of rotating different crops amongst a fixed amount of cleared land, the same crops were repeatedly cultivated on new ground and the old fields were retired from cultivation) called for a continual supply of fresh land. In addition to a supply of land for the future, such a crop as corn, whose cultivation thrives on fresh ground, demands strong hands to provide the manpower land clearing requires. The time and labor costs of clearing without motorized vehicles and powered chain saws were enormous. After all the trees were removed one still "had to grub it with a mattock to clear the land and then you had to go back and clean up the roots by hand."<sup>3</sup>

Not only did John W. have less land and labor for crop cultivation than his ancestors had had, but, because of the agricultural depression of 1866-1896,<sup>4</sup> he was also plagued by thirty years of low prices for his wheat and pork surplus. According to Hugh Lefler:

"North Carolina agriculture was definitely a part of the national picture of over production, falling prices, shrinking income, less rapidly shrinking ex-, expenses and burdens, and waning prestige. This situation which was acute in the late sixties and seventies became extremely serious in the eighties and early nineties."<sup>5</sup>

Farmers could get by, but the chances for making a profit were few. John W. could count on his farm to feed his family but he could not depend on the market to bring him a good price for his surplus production of wheat, pork, dairy, and other agricultural products.

There were other reasons, outside the farm, which might have caused John W. Couch to further value an education for his son. The post bellum years brought industry and business to the area. While on one hand hundreds of Orange County farmers toiled laborously to make ends meet, the tobacco factories, cotton mills and subsequent industries and businesses flourished in the newly incorporated county of Durham's city of Durham, just seven miles east of John W. Couch's Orange County farm. By 1890 Durham had become a place of opportunity, especially for the man with an education:

"Our hundreds of offices offer opportunity for those who like clerical work. Our various industries offer suitable employment for all classes of workers. These create opportunity for the merchant, the lawyer, the doctor, the teacher, the preacher and all the rest."<sup>6</sup>

In order to provide his son with an education and support his family, John W. Couch had to make some readjustments. Unlike living at home, studying at Guilford cost money. Tuition had to be paid along with room and board. Proper clothing had to be purchased along with the essential school supplies. Extracurricular activities also called on John W. for their financing. In a letter written from Guilford, J.W.T. tells his sisters Nettie and Hibernia:

"I have joined the Y.M.C.A. its cost 25 cents for five months (sic). They want me to join the other societies but I don't know yet. I thought I had beter (sic) join the best. It takes \$2.90 to join, ask Pa about it and send me word."<sup>7</sup>

Counting on a farm afflicted by low prices and a labor shortage to pay for such things would not have been wise. Teaching school, however, provided John W. with a salary and the funds necessary to cover his son's expenses.

John W. Couch's farm, like most Orange County farms,<sup>8</sup> experienced some changes in its grain production. Land and labor intensive crops, such as corn, oats and wheat, were partially replaced by orchard trees, potatoes and pasture. Although agricultural reformists encouraged farmers "to cultivate their orchards every year and to manure well,"<sup>9</sup> farmers such as John W. Couch were able to reap bushels of fruit from their orchards for a number of years without much work or expense. Furthermore,

orchards do not demand soil plowing or seed sowing. A farmer did not even have to invest much labor in harvesting the fruit. As long as fowl were not permitted to run through the orchards to pick at the fallen fruit, a farmer could simply collect the product as it fell from the trees.

Potatoes, unlike grain and corn, are fairly easy to harvest. Potatoes, unlike wheat, do not require threshing, nor do they, like an ear of corn, have to be separated from the fodder. In 1888 the Hillsborough Recorder gave some encouraging advice on potato culture: "With proper care potatoes can be grown upon almost any soil that is reasonably dry, and that is possessed of fair fertility."<sup>10</sup> It is not surprising then that John W. Couch insured his potato house for fifty dollars for at least three of the years in the nineties.<sup>11</sup>

John W. Couch's decision to use some of his land for pasture proved to be a profitable and wise one. It was the best alternative for the man with a soil-and-labor-deficient farm. The growth of Durham gave rise to increased demands for dairy products as the urban population expanded.<sup>12</sup> Putting land into pasture also helped to keep the soil from washing--a problem against which farmers fought an ongoing battle.<sup>13</sup> Farmers saw that raising cattle was a little bit easier on that land than working it row by row."<sup>14</sup> Furthermore,

When the land was in pasture you didn't have to rework it every four or five years. When the land was in pasture you didn't have to work it at all, yet you could reproduce and get more. That land could be grazed year after year but land where you planted crops you were suppose to have let it rest every other year.<sup>15</sup>

These reasons probably explain why John W. Couch began valuing his pasture land and few cattle more carefully.

Potato culture, fruit trees, dairy products, and other agricultural products the new local urban market demanded, helped John W. Couch replace the low returns grain and pork surplus (which had begun to have to compete with western production) created. John W. received higher returns from secondary rather than from staple surplus. The staples, such as cotton, pork, tobacco and wheat, which continued to be widely produced in the South or were becoming staple exports for the West, were those which brought in especially low prices. Because Durham provided farmers with a local market for

consumption of dairy products, because potatoes had not yet become a staple crop, and because fruit thrived only in the southeastern states and could not be transported long distances due to its perishability; these agricultural products provided John W. with intelligent substitutes during the late nineteenth century when agricultural prices, especially on the staples, were low.

The outsider, taking a quick look at John W. Couch's land at the turn of the century, might have perceived the farm as wasting away. He would have seen the majority of John W. Couch's property unimproved and he would have watched the farmer send his only source of labor, J.W.T. Couch, almost one hundred miles off to school. However, with a closer look, the outsider would have seen the limitations and obstacles John W. faced and how the farmer wrestled with his land and his situation as intelligently as he could.

## II

Although the close of the nineteenth century first appeared to mark the final episode for the Couch farm this would not be the case. The twentieth century would witness a final attempt by the Couchs to live off their land independently without tenant farmers to work the land or other sources to provide extra income. Nonetheless, this encore generation for farming, with damaged soils, low profits and sons who were eager to gain lucrative opportunities in Durham, would recapitulate John W.'s original prediction for the farm. J.W.T.'s property, in terms of soil quality, land resources, labor expenses, and low profits, was not a farm which a man and his family could depend upon for themselves or for their children.

The turn of the century did not find John W. Couch's farm especially busy, but it would not be long until the farm was active again. Although Hibernia, the younger sister at home, had married a widower and moved off the farm, and J.W.T., after graduating from Siler City Business School, lived and worked in Durham where he kept books at the Express Office,<sup>16</sup> the farm would soon see the return of J.W.T. and his new wife and children. Just after the turn of the century it was said that J.W.T. lost weight and because of that his father made him come home. Before long J.W.T. and his young bride, Mary

Ida, were living on the farm in their new three room house, just northwest and across the stream from the homeplace where John W. and Nettie lived.

In addition to the ambivalence on both John W.'s and J.W.T.'s part to make the break--to conclude the family's farming legacy--and the emotional feelings which might have been responsible for J.W.T.'s return to the farm, 1900 was not a bad time for J.W.T. to return to the farm. By this time John W. was getting too old to do much farming. This enabled J.W.T. to take over some of his father's property and to be his own boss. Farm prices had also begun to improve, as they would until World War I. This gave the farm more promise for providing for a family.

Before much time passed J.W.T.'s house and the surrounding acreage were filled with change. By 1910 J.W.T. and Mary Ida already had six children with three more soon to follow. J.W.T. had to farm on a bigger scale than his father had in order to support his growing family. J.W.T. continued to practice many of the agricultural strategies which his father had followed. Like John W., J.W.T. would depend upon his farm to provide his family with food and would transport his potato, dairy, fruit, pea and other surplus to Durham. Nonetheless, these strategies would have to be intensified and new ones, such as different crops and maximum thrift, both of which his business education influenced, would have to be added in order to provide the family with a livelihood.

Catherine Melinius recalls her father "having right much acreage and a good garden."<sup>17</sup> She remembers her father bringing potatoes and molasses to market. There was only one year that the farm raised tobacco and cotton. J.W.T. did not continue to cultivate these crops because they did not bring in as good a price as did potatoes and molasses. Neighbors remember J.W.T. as "Potato Will." Catherine recalls a year when her father's farm produced one thousand bushels of potatoes. Potatoes provided the family with a staple for home and a surplus for market. J.W.T. also had apple and peach trees, corn, and snap beans. J.W.T. also harvested the fruit and beans in great enough quantities to create a surplus for market. Eggs, butter and timber were other products J.W.T. carried to Durham residents and retailers in his wagon.

J.W.T.'s education and his nine children were important for producing enough to feed the family and to provide a surplus for market. Like his father, J.W.T. worked his farm as best he could by taking advantage of what he had and by making substitutions

and compensations where it was necessary. In 1915, as a result of needing what J.W.T. called, "new ground" to cultivate,<sup>18</sup> J.W.T. cleared two sizeable tracts of land in the northwest corner of his father's property. The cut timber, originally planned to be at least partially used to enlarge the small house, was sold at market. However, more important than J.W.T.'s crowded house was at this time, were the diminishing yields his fields were bringing him. This new ground gave J.W.T. fresh soil for his row crops such as potatoes and corn plants requiring fertile land. The old fields offered J.W.T. land for experimenting with new crops such as soybeans and melons--crops which agricultural reformers had begun encouraging farmers to cultivate.

In addition to intensifying some of the strategies he inherited from his father, J.W.T. employed some of his own new methods of maximizing the farm's potential in the least expensive way. Outstanding is that sometime around 1910 J.W.T. began planting soybeans. At this time soybeans were new and few farmers in Orange had begun to cultivate them. Cultivating a new crop meant that J.W.T. was somewhat of a progressive farmer--possibly an effect of his higher education. Indeed the fields which had begun producing diminishing yields were less valuable and thus offered J.W.T. an inexpensive resource with which to experiment and possibly a way to turn low yield acreage into productive acreage. J.W.T.'s nine children also provided him with plenty of hands for sowing and harvesting his experimental crops. J.W.T.'s education, not to mention his literacy, must have been at least partially responsible for his love for reading.<sup>19</sup> J.W.T. had a subscription to the local paper and the Atlantic Constitution. Reading the agriculture columns in these publications would have persuaded J.W.T. to experiment with new agricultural crops and techniques which were affordable to him. Soybeans were an intelligent investment for many reasons. The soybean is a legume, a plant which produces its own nitrogen. It is a crop which restores soil rather than exhausting it. Although there was not yet a market for soybeans, the crop would enrich J.W.T.'s soil and provide nutritious feed for his livestock. Finally, soybeans would be no more labor intensive to harvest than corn or snap beans.

Watermelons and cantaloupes were good investments for the educated farmer also. Melons brought in a good price at market if they were of good quality. J.W.T. knew that in order to raise good cantaloupes he had to get fresh seed every year. Unlike

watermelons, he could not save the seeds from the previous year's harvest to use for planting. J.W.T. was also able to take advantage of his handful of children for agricultural production. Catherine Melinius describes how, as a little girl, she and her younger brother helped their father and what sort of things her father did to produce a good crop with the least expense and the most profit:

My younger brother, the youngest boy, he and I grew up like twins. We worked together on the farm. It was our job to pick up the fruit when it fell, if we didn't get it, the chickens would come and peck at every piece. They wouldn't eat it. They'd just peck it. That was one of the ways my father made money. We had pear trees and lots of different kinds of apple trees. We had lots of peaches, different kinds. We canned them for ourselves and sold them. We also picked peas together. When the peas would get dry we would pick them. We saved them and we had them in the winter time to eat and sell some also. My daddy treated them so he could plant them the next year. He kept up with things like that so he wouldn't have to buy seed. He had his own seed and his corn the same thing.<sup>20</sup>

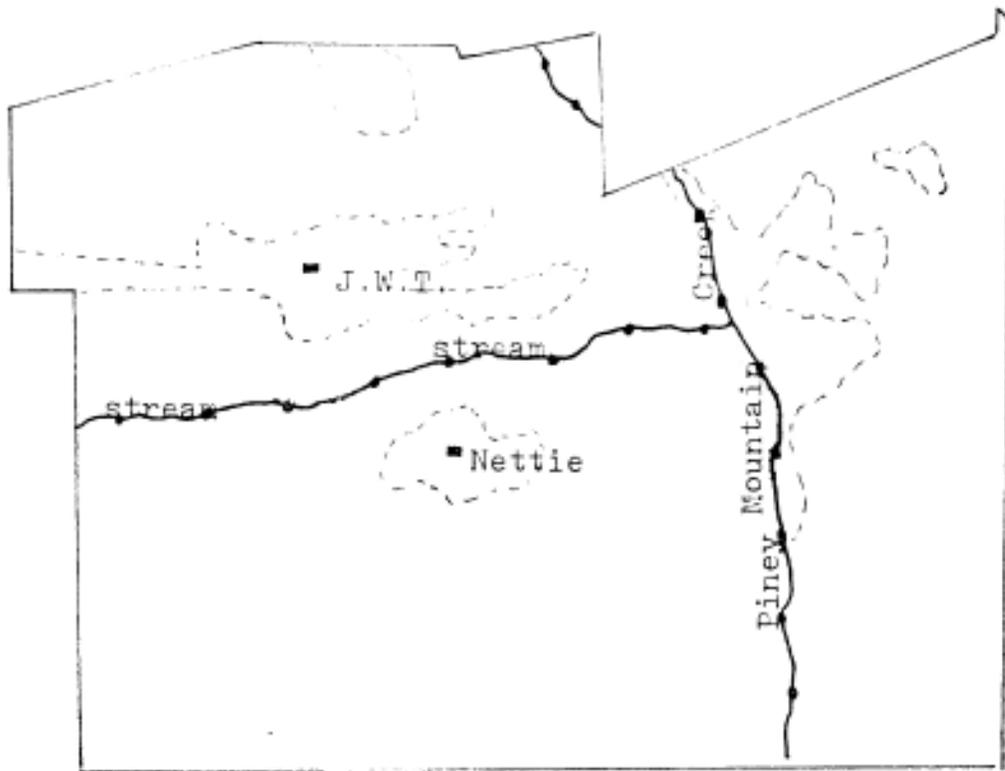
Spring was the most difficult time of year for the farmer. It was the season when J.W.T. needed to buy the fertilizer he used and the few seeds he required. These purchases could only be afforded with the cash created by surplus (J.W.T. did not like to buy on credit, not that he paid for all his fertilizer at once however.<sup>21</sup>) J.W.T.'s two cows, his hens and the wood lots provided him with butter, eggs, and timber surplus which he could sell in the spring when he had no other surplus to bring to market.

While farming intensified in the northwest part of the Couch Tract, it dwindled in the central region where John W. and Nettie lived due to the fact that by 1915 John W. was too old and much too feeble to farm. In addition, Nettie was unable to do much farming herself. However, living on the farm minimized expenses for both Nettie and John W. and for J.W.T. and his family. Their land provided them with what they ate. They had neither rent nor fuel bills to pay. They were able to purchase what they needed (that which the farm could not produce like sugar and coffee) with the money their surplus created for them. It seems as if Nettie and her father depended upon Nettie's quilt making<sup>22</sup> and J.W.T.'s assistance to get by. Letters from Jennie Cate, Nettie's youngest sister, disclose much information. One letter, dated 1913 reveals that Nettie had a man cut some trees for her and that J.W.T. would take the worth of the trees in slabs"<sup>23</sup> for

Nettie. This provided Nettie with some income. Nettie further provided for her father and self with a cow and vegetable garden. She also relied upon her brother to bring her surplus to market.

Nonetheless, John W. realized that idle farmland was unprofitable, if not expensive. Land which he could not supply with the labor or capital necessary for farming it, yet which was a tax burden, became very expensive land to maintain. Renting out his land to tenant farmers would relieve John W. of much of this burden. Tenancy would also mark the beginning of a sort of holding action whereby the Couchs would no longer farm the land themselves to provide their basic livelihood but would hold onto the land, and thus balance the expense of landholding by renting to tenants whose rent would pay the taxes and whose occupancy would provide some care for the land. Thus it is not surprising that John W. had tenant farmers as early as 1915. In a letter dated 1915, Jennie Cate wrote, "I was glad to hear that Mr. Stone was making a good crop."<sup>24</sup> Mr. Stone was the first tenant to farm on the Couch Tract. At this time, around 1915, J.W.T. and his family lived off the land surrounding their house (see map). Nettie and her father lived southeast and across the stream from J.W.T., toward the center of the property. The few areas Nettie had in garden and pasture surrounded her house. The rest of the property west of Piney Mountain Creek laid in woodlot or unimproved acreage. East of the creek the forest cover indicates that land, at least a dozen acres, was under cultivation. Apparently this property east of the creek was the acreage cultivated by Mr. Stone, the tenant farmer. However, at the same time, around 1915, J.W.T was clearing the two tracts of new ground and thereby continuing the traditional strategy of land clearing. This indicates that as late as 1915 J.W.T. thought that his farm might still be profitable and able to sustain his family.

Couch Tract of the Duke Forest  
Land Under Cultivation in 1915



-  ....watercourse
-  ... land under cultivation
-  .... house

### III

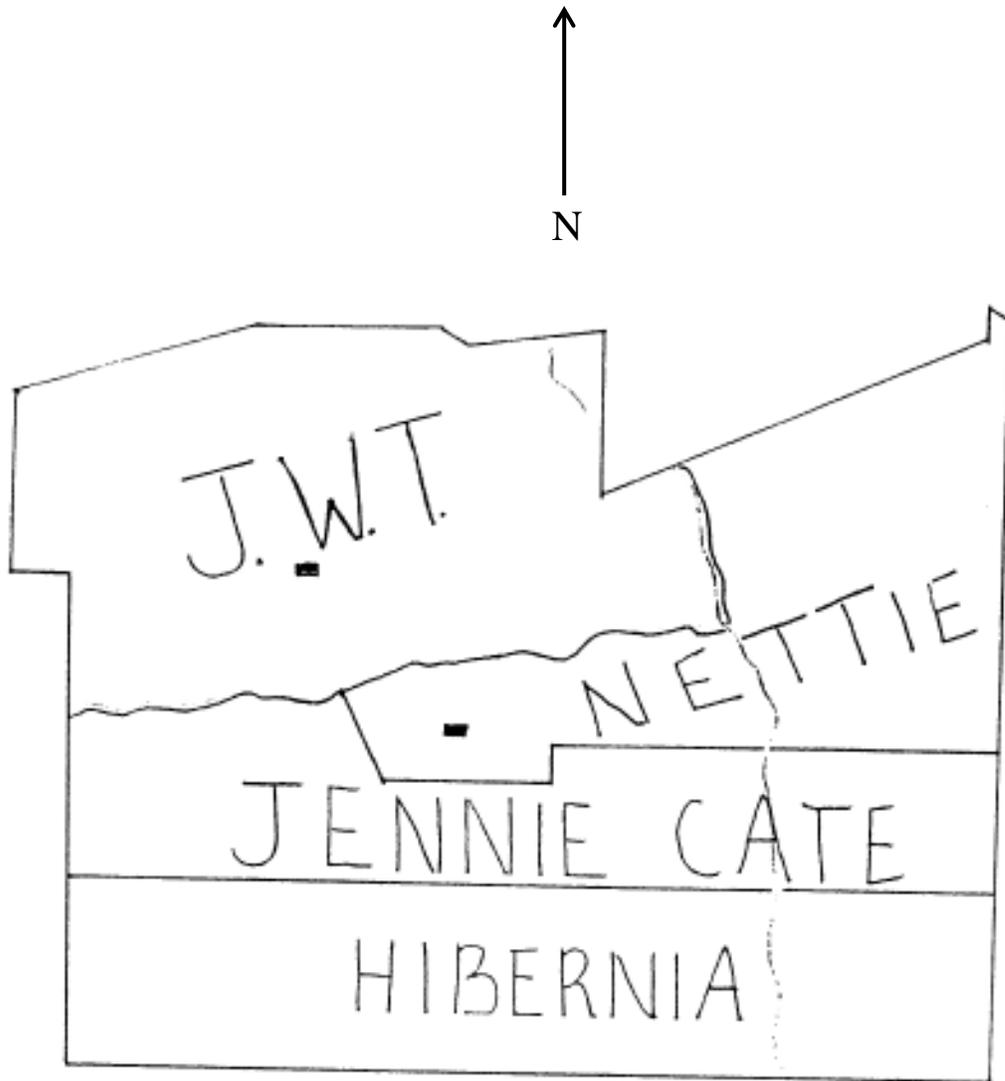
Not only did 1917 mark the year of John W. Couch's death but also the end of the encore generation of the Couch family farm. Two factors are largely responsible for this significant change. Firstly, John W.'s death and the subsequent division of his property broke off some of the emotional ties the last generation held towards the land. Also, the decline of agricultural prices and the simultaneous boom of Durham at the end of World War I created a combination of renewed uncertainty of life on the farm and a renewed certainty of life in Durham. These changes thus tipped the scales and persuaded J.W.T. to leave the farm in Orange, which just two years ago appeared to hold some real future promise, and move himself and his family into Durham.

Upon John W. Couch's death in 1917 his property consisted of close to three hundred acres. It was divided amongst his four children. (See map.) J.W.T. got the northwestern part above the stream. Nettie got the homeplace and its surrounding acreage and some of the property east of Piney Mountain Creek. Jennie Cate inherited the southern tract above the southern tract Hibernia inherited.

By 1920 not a single Couch was farming the Couch Tract land and Nettie was the only one living on it. Three years after John W. Couch's death, J.W.T. and his eleven member family moved to Durham. Catherine Melinius remembers one outstanding reason why her family left the farm. J.W.T. relied upon the old Hillsborough-Fayetteville Road (see map) which, despite its name went both to Chapel Hill and to Durham. The road ran right in front of the homeplace and gave J.W.T. a way to get his produce to market in Durham. It was an old and unpaved road yet one which was counted on by many. The State kept the road up to a certain degree, as it was subject to washing and wear. When the State wanted to improve the road and convert it into a much needed highway, most people, including J.W.T. were willing to give up a fraction of their land necessary for its construction. Unfortunately, one neighbor, Page Couch, who lived on the southside of the road, did not want the road improved and was not willing to give up a piece of his land. Because this one neighbor would not cooperate the State put their highway in elsewhere.

Couch Tract of the Duke Forest

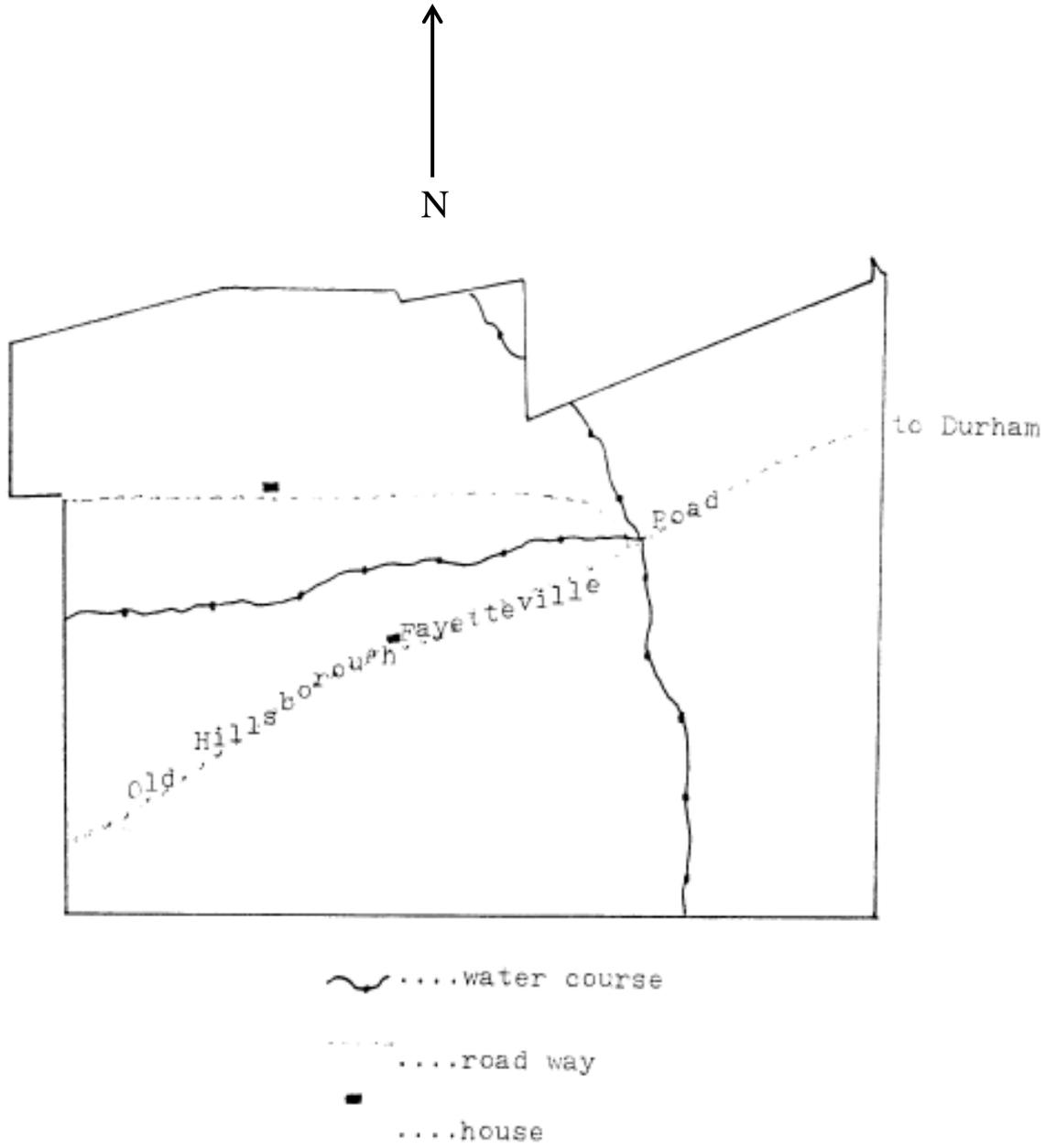
1917 Division of John W. Couch (deceased) Property



...water course

■ ...house

Couch Tract of the Duke Forest  
Road system Prior to 1920



Soon, after the new highway was put in, the Old Hillsborough-Fayetteville Road was neglected by the State. This left J.W.T. without a reliable source of transportation. The new highway was not close enough to accommodate J.W.T. In addition, he had difficulties keeping the road in front of his house in repair (see map). Because this road sat on a hill and was so often used by J.W.T. and his neighbors, it was prone to wash. J.W.T. could not keep this road up himself.

Family reasons also accounted for the family's departure. As J.W.T.'s sons got older, they realized that their father's inheritance would not be enough to provide for each of them. They also knew that staying on the farm meant filial subordination. J.W.T. was in charge of the farm and as long as he lived there his sons had to obey him: "My daddy was boss. It was his farm and he was boss."<sup>25</sup> In addition, Catherine Melinius doubted how happy her mother had been living on the farm. When Mary Ida married J.W.T. he was living and working in Durham. She probably never expected to live and raise her family out in the country on a farm. Most would agree that during the first half of the present century small farmers noticed but did not specifically label the ecological conditions of their lands.<sup>26</sup> Decisions to stay on the farm or to go to town were more directly related to family size and economic conditions. Ultimately, however, the ability of a farm to produce enough to feed a family and to provide economic stability depended a great deal upon soil fertility and sound agricultural practices: "We saw lots of erosion. Farmers just learned to live with it as best they could."<sup>27</sup>

After her father's death Nettie had only herself to support. Thus she did not have to produce as much as she had when her father was alive and living with her. However, after her brother, J.W.T., moved off the farm, Nettie did not have him to provide the favors she came to rely upon such as carting her butter to market. Nettie attempted to solve her problem by renting the upstairs of her two-story house to an elderly woman and caring for her in exchange for monetary compensation. Nettie also rented some of her property to tenant farmers.

The unique institution of tenancy gave Nettie a way to hold onto her land. It paid the land taxes and provided some property care. In addition, tenancy gave labor and subsistence to landless, unskilled, moneyless people. It also supported agriculture without

much additional cost. Nonetheless, tenancy tends to decrease farm size and efficiency, favor money crops, and deplete the soil.<sup>28</sup> Since the tenant is but a renter and usually transient, he has little interest in soil preservation. Basically tenant farmers are people who scratch out a living and who are not going to take heroic action to refurbish the land. Furthermore, it was difficult to collect cash rents from one's tenants. Generally tenants paid their owner three-fourths of what they produced. The owner usually furnished his tenant with everything including a house and farm equipment.

Certainly tenant farming was not an easy solution for landowners. Letters from the John W. Couch Papers reveal how difficult it was to have to depend on tenants to work the land and to pay the rent. A letter dated June 25, 1919, from Jennie Cate's son and son-in-law (who had been given the property Jennie had inherited from her father), reminding Frank Carroll, their tenant farmer, that he owes them five dollars rent money for the months of June and May, reveals such difficulties.<sup>29</sup> Another letter, dated July, 1919, from Jennie to Nettie, indicates that collecting the rent from Frank Carroll was an ongoing problem.<sup>30</sup>

Difficulties with tenants would soon plague J.W.T. also. After moving to Durham, J.W.T. rented his land to tenants. The first tenant, John Bland, lived in the three room house with his family. Catherine Melinius remembers that John Bland was an exceptional tenant. He was a hardworker and a steady tenant. Bland rented from J.W.T. until his death shortly after the beginning of the Depression. This meant that J.W.T. had to come back to the farm. According to Catherine, John Bland, "had a good crop and my daddy wanted to come back and see that it was harvested. If he didn't, you see it was his money and he had to get his rent."<sup>31</sup> After John Bland's death a score of tenants and problems followed.

According to the 1935 Farm Census all of J.W.T. Couch's and Nettie Couch's cultivated land was being worked by a family of tenant farmers. Only twenty out of J.W.T.'s eighty-eight acres were under cultivation. In 1935 these twenty acres grew six acres of corn, one of cotton, one of rye, one of soybeans, and one of sweet potatoes. There were also two acres devoted to garden vegetables and eight to fruit trees. Aerial photographs taken in 1938 confirm these reports by showing which lands were under cultivation, and in some cases exactly what was planted where. The only livestock was

one horse. Nettie's tenants (probably the same family who worked J.W.T.'s property) cultivated seven and a half of her forty-one acres (apparently Nettie either had sold the eastern portion of her property to one of her siblings or did not report the correct total for her land holdings because the 1938 aerial photograph documents land on the east banks of Piney Mountain Creek being under cultivation). They had corn, cow peas and fruit trees. They also had one milk cow and a single sow.

During the 1930's, before the economy recovered from the Depression, tenant farming was not a bad occupation for a poor man. At least it insured that he would be able to feed his family with his agricultural produce. By the 1940's finding tenant farmers was no longer as easy as it had been during the Depression. War production in the 1940's gave the poor tenant farmer opportunities to work in factories and in other places and to get off the farm. Thus it left the land owner with less of a choice of whom to rent his land. Subsequently, there were less tenant farmers in the 1940's to choose from and those remaining were often less hardworking and ambitious and had less incentive to take good care of the land. Thus rented land suffered and attracted fewer and not as good tenants: poor lands attract poor farmers. A poor road also made J.W.T.'s and Nettie's property less attractive. J.W.T. was afflicted by this downward spiral. According to Catherine Melinius her father was troubled by a rapid turnover of tenants after John Bland's death. Eventually the cumulative limits of the land would defeat this land holding strategy.

Comparing the 1946 Farm Census figures to those of 1935 reveals that what the Couch's might have seen as the best solution to their problems of idle farmland, proved in the end, to be a poor investment and an inefficient strategy. By 1946 the acreage under cultivation on J.W.T.'s farm had dropped by almost fifty per cent to twelve acres. The decrease in cultivated acreage does not reflect a decrease in people living on the farm. In 1946 eight people plus Nettie depended on fourteen acres to feed them and to provide J.W.T. with his rent.

The 1946 Census further indicates soil exhaustion. In 1946 only four acres of corn were planted on J.W.T.'s property yet there were three acres of hay. Acreage taken out of cultivation and left to grow hay meant that the soil could no longer support the demands of cultivation. Instead it would serve as pasture and where crop production decreased livestock numbers increased. The tenant farmer in 1946 was not growing hay to restore

the soil: he was not planting nitrogen rich grasses which would, over a few years, replenish some of the soil's lost nutrients. He could not afford such foresight. He was simply leaving the exhausted land empty and allowing it to grow wild grasses on its own for grazing. Not only do the 1946 figures document a decrease in corn cultivation but they also no longer report acreage under cotton, rye, or soybean cultivation. While cotton, a row crop, many have seemed like a sure source of income to the tenant farmer, it would not provide him with a renewable crop nor one upon which he could depend. Like corn and tobacco, cotton demands fertile soil. The soil (that which lay on cleared land and was available for cultivation had been cleared at least thirty years ago and was continuously tilled) simply was too poor to support cotton planting. The tenant farmer, who does not make long range plans, chose to plant this short-lived cash crop in return for soil depletion. It is not surprising that the tenant choose to discontinue soybean culture. Soybeans only became popular for animal feed in the 1970's. They would not have provided the tenant with a cash crop nor with something for his family's dinner table. These two factors would have been much more important to the tenant farmer than any of the crop's soil enriching qualities.

Fruit trees are another item which are drastically reduced by 1946. The 1935 figures report eight acres of fruit trees on J.W.T.'s property. The 1946 Census reports only two acres. Likewise, where an unspecified amount of fruit trees are reported for Nettie's acreage in 1935, none are listed in 1946. It is no wonder. First of all fruit trees do not produce forever. A tree is at its peak when it is twenty-five years old. In order to keep an orchard producing, care must be given and new trees must be planted to replace the old. It is doubtful that any tenant would take great care of orchard trees just as it would be extraordinary to discover that the man renting a house had replaced the foundation at his own expense. Tenancy, because of its tenuous nature, does not allow a renter to spend effort and expense on implements that will never bring him profit.

The fact that the increase in the 1946 Census reports were only in livestock production is significant because it indicates the tendencies of tenant farmers. Where J.W.T.'s tenants had but one horse in 1935, they have two cows and seventeen chickens in 1946. These figures clearly show that crop production was being replaced by dairy and poultry. The change supports tenancy's tendencies. The tenant has to produce enough to

feed his family and to pay J.W.T. the rent. He could not afford to invest in anything which did not create immediate returns. Thus he could not spare fertile ground for rest and replenishment nor could he afford declining yields. Raising dairy cows and egg laying chickens was his best solution. Neither demand much more than pasture grasses (fields left to grow wild hay) and some corn silage, yet they both promise continuous output and a marketable good. The Census figures further indicate that this strategy of livestock production was in practice: twenty-one chickens are reported for Nettie in 1946 where there were none in 1935. The absence of documentation for agricultural production in the Farm Census and lack of evidence of cultivation on Jennie Cate's and Hibernia's properties further indicate that tenancy had not been a successful strategy. However, the property under cultivation, east of Piney Mountain Creek, is a mystery. There are no Census figures for the land yet the aerial photographs show that there was some acreage under cultivation. It seems that someone did rent this property. In addition, sometime before the Couchs sold their property to Duke University in 1947, Hibernia gave or sold her property to her brother, J.W.T., or to one of Jennie Cate's family members.

Apparently, Nettie too gave or sold her property to either J.W.T. or Jennie Cate's family.

Tenancy was never a completely satisfactory solution for the Couchs. They could never completely rely upon their tenants to pay the rent nor could they trust them to take good care of their property. The difficulties of land ownership were further aggravated by the burden of taxes and other expenses. Throughout the twenties and thirties letters from the John W. Couch Papers document Nettie's inability to pay her land taxes and to keep out of debt. A letter to Nettie from the Orange County sheriff, dated 1924, reveals her situation:

The time has come when I must close the tax accounts for the past year. This means that I shall be forced to levy and sell, without further notice, all property on which the tax is not paid.

I feel that my leniency and patience with delinquents justifies me in expecting a prompt response to this notice.

The amount due by you is \$15.84<sup>32</sup>

A chattle mortgage holding Nettie in debt to her neighbor, J. F. Rigsbee, further documents her troubles:

I, Miss Nettie Couch of the County of Orange, in the state of North Carolina, am indebted to J. F. Rigsbee of Orange County in said State, in the sum of thirty dollars and sixty cents...<sup>33</sup>

It is no wonder that in 1947, when Duke University offered to buy the Couch's property they readily agreed. Not only did Duke offer the Couchs relief from the burdens of taxes and tenants, but Duke allowed the Couchs to continue to live on their property as long as they choose: "This conveyance is made subject to the life estate of Mary Annette Couch."<sup>34</sup> The University promised too that they would put a power line in for Nettie, who had never had electricity. The decision to sell the property had something more to do with J.W.T.'s personal wishes than just with the difficulties renting created and the inefficiency of idle land for tax payers. As he got older, J.W.T. continued to miss living on the farm. Selling the property to Duke meant the end of tenants which would allow J.W.T. to move back into his house and to once live on the land where he had grown up. In addition, J.W.T. did not seem to think any of his children were interested in keeping the farm. "He did get in touch with my brother in Richmond," Catherine Melinius recalls:

I don't think any of my other brothers would have cared about the farm. My daddy thought that no one in the family was interested in the farm and that he ought to get rid of it. He knew that Duke was buying property and that people live on it their lifetime. He thought, I guess, that that was the thing to do; sell it and live on it because he thought that none of the children were interested. I guess he just thought it was a good time to sell the property, since he felt none of his family was interested. I guess he thought it was more profitable to sell the land than to rent it out; he could get interest on his money, not much interest, but some and he wouldn't have to pay tax on it anymore.

I was sorry that the property got away, but it just happened that way.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps.

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Lefler and Paul Wager (editors), Orange County 1752-1952 (Chapel Hill: The Orange Printshop, 1953), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Charles Kenzer, "Portrait of a Southern Community 1849-1881: Family, Kinship, and Neighborhood in Orange County, North Carolina," Diss. Harvard University, 1982, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Christopher Crittenden, The Commerce of North Carolina 1763-1789 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), p. 86.

<sup>4</sup> Hugh Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, The History of a Southern State: North Carolina (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1954), p. 83.

<sup>5</sup> Lefler and Wager, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> It seems as if Thomas Couch spent some time in Mecklenburg County, Virginia, and possibly elsewhere after he left Brunswick County, Virginia, in 1739 before he arrived in Orange County, North Carolina.

<sup>7</sup> Markham, Land Grants to Early Settlers in Old Orange County North Carolina (map). 1973.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas J. Wertenbaker, The Planters of Colonial Virginia (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1922), pp. 101-102.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas left Virginia in 1739 because his farm in Brunswick County and his later intermediate (before Orange County) occupations were not profitable ones. Therefore Thomas would have had little capital, especially after travel expenses, upon his arrival in Orange County.

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Couch left Brunswick County in 1739 only a generation or two after slave labor was introduced to the colony of Virginia. It is safe to conclude that neither the means of a small farmer nor time would have allowed Thomas to accumulate any substantial slave holdings. Furthermore, it would have been both expensive and burdensome to keep anymore than a few slaves while transient for the fifteen approximate years before Thomas received his Orange County, North Carolina land grant.

<sup>15</sup> Crittenden, p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> In the William Couch Papers (Manuscript Department, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina) there is mention of corn cribs on Thomas Couch, Jr.'s farm. It is assumed that corn cribs rather than kernal separation was the practice on Thomas Couch's (the settler) farm.

<sup>17</sup> In the Thomas Couch, Jr. Estate Papers (State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina), there are 132 hogs listed and only 33 head of cattle. It is assumed that these amounts grew out of Thomas' livestock.

<sup>18</sup> Lewis Cecil Gray, History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860 (Washington: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1933), p. 441-442 and letters and receipts in the William Couch Papers.

<sup>19</sup> Lewis Cecil Gray, p. 442.

<sup>20</sup> Crittenden, p. 86.

<sup>21</sup> Harry Roy Merrens, Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Historical Geography (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1964), p. 108.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>24</sup> Merrens (pp. 109-111) only suggests that corn was a Piedmont export.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111-116.

<sup>26</sup> From Pollard to Thomas Couch, 6 June 1826. William Couch Papers.

<sup>27</sup> Merrens, p. 163 and Crittenden, p. 88.

<sup>28</sup> Gray, p. 443. (??)

<sup>29</sup> John Solomon Otto, "Slaveholding General Farmers in a 'Cotton County'" (Agricultural History, 1980), p. 171.

<sup>30</sup> In his first will in 1822 (Thomas Couch, Jr. Estate Papers) Thomas Couch, Jr. leaves twenty-five slaves to his children.

<sup>31</sup> William Couch to Stephen Moore. 31 December 1834.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Couch, Jr. Estate Papers.

<sup>33</sup> In his article, Edward W. Phifer ["Slavery in Microcosm: Burke County, North Carolina (Journal of Southern History May 1962) p. 144] writes, "After 1800 the price of slaves generally rose steadily except during the depression of 1837-1845."

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Couch, Jr. Estate Papers.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Kenzer, p. 46.

<sup>47</sup> This information was gathered from the 1850 slave census and the 1850 Agricultural Census.

<sup>48</sup> William Couch Inventories Sales List, November Term 1857, State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Couch, Jr. Estate Papers

<sup>51</sup> Gray, p. 793.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 789.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 794.

<sup>54</sup> Lefler and Wager, p. 344 and p.24.

## CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup> State of North Carolina, Orange County Superior Court. September Term 1856, William Couch Papers.

<sup>2</sup> Population Schedule II (Slave), 1850.

<sup>3</sup> This area is presently densely populated by a variety of botanical species thus indicating the richness of the soil.

<sup>4</sup> Gray, p. 788.

<sup>5</sup> Gray, p. 789.

<sup>6</sup> Lefler and Wager, Orange County 1752-1952 p. 229.

<sup>7</sup> William C. Bagley, Soil Exhaustion and the Civil War (Washington, D. C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1942), p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> Rosser H. Taylor, "Fertilizers and Farming in the Southeast 1840-1950" (The North Carolina Historical Review, July 1953), p. 306.

<sup>9</sup> Albert E. Cowdrey, This Land, This South (Lexington, Kentucky, University of Kentucky Press, 1983), p. 78.

<sup>10</sup> William Couch Estate Papers.

<sup>11</sup> In Soil Exhaustion the Civil War (pp. 47, 69, 70), Bagley convincingly reports that this was the universal situation for Southern farmers prior to the Civil War.

<sup>12</sup> William Couch Estate Papers.

<sup>13</sup>

<sup>14</sup> William Couch Estate Papers.

<sup>15</sup> Gray, p. 795.

<sup>16</sup> Gray, p. 795.

<sup>17</sup> Gray, p. 795.

<sup>18</sup> Bagley, p. 66.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur R. Hall "Soil Erosion and Agriculture in the Southern Piedmont: A History." Diss. Duke University, 1948, p. 125.

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<sup>20</sup> That William Couch practiced shallow plowing is determined by the implements listed in his Inventory Papers. Deep plowing requires at least four to five horses. William had only one multi-horse plow and this one was only a two horse plow.

<sup>21</sup> Cowdrey, p. 77.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid p. 76.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid p. 79.

<sup>24</sup> Julius Rubin, "The Limits of Agricultural Progress in the Nineteenth Century South," Agriculture History April 1975, p. 376.

<sup>25</sup> Bagley, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Bagley, p. 41.

<sup>27</sup> Bagley, p. 41.

<sup>28</sup> William Couch in account with Laurner and Troy, 25 November 1852 in the William Couch Papers.

<sup>29</sup> "Flour Inspection and Sack Salt," Hillsborough Recorder, 1949.

<sup>30</sup> Latimer and Brown Co. receipt for William Couch, 1855. William Couch Papers.

<sup>31</sup> "Wood! Wood!," Hillsborough Recorder, 1849.

<sup>32</sup> Ruth Blackwelder, The Age of Orange (Charlotte: William Loftin, Publisher, 1961), p. 83.

<sup>33</sup> Taylor, p. 306.

<sup>34</sup> Bagley, p. 28.

<sup>35</sup> In one of Thomas Couch, Jr.'s wills (1822) he "lends" his land to his sons in order that his grandchildren would one day be endowed by it.

<sup>36</sup> Samuel Couch and others, Orange County Superior Court, February Term, 1857.

William Couch Papers.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Letters from John W. Couch to Julia A. Shields, 1862-1865 in the John Couch Papers, Manuscript Department, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>39</sup> Kenzer, p. 117.

<sup>40</sup> During the Civil War John W.'s and William Jr.'s slaves were only four in number. In addition, it was not until 1865 that John W. married and it was not until midway into the war that William Jr.'s new bride gave birth.

<sup>41</sup> Dolores Elizabeth Janiewski, "From Fields to Factories," Diss. Duke University, 1979, p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> Agricultural Census Schedules, 1870.

<sup>43</sup> Hall, p. 142.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>45</sup> The 1880 Agricultural Census Schedules do not list livestock enough to provide adequate manure.

### CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup> Personal Interview with Catherine Melinius, 24 February 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Personal Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Carl Walker, Orange County residents who grew up on farms in the southeastern part of the county, 23 February 1984.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>4</sup> Crandall A. Shifflett, Patronage and Poverty in the Tobacco South, Louisa County Virginia 1860-1900. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982.
- <sup>5</sup> Hugh T. Lefler, History of Southern State: North Carolina (Chapel Hill: UNC Press 1954). p. 492.
- <sup>6</sup> Upchurch and Fowler, Durham County Economic and Social (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1916), p. 34.
- <sup>7</sup> J.W.T. Couch to Nettie and Hibernia Couch, 19 January 1893, in John W. Couch Papers, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.
- <sup>8</sup> In Orange County 1752-1952 (Chapel Hill: Orange Print Shop, 1953) p. 237, Hugh T. Lefler and Paul Wager state that the county had “witnessed a progressive decline in the average devoted to small grain.” The authors show by tables that in 1889, 15,538 acres of wheat were produced and by 1929 there were only 7,750 acres produced. Likewise there were 9,736 acres of oats which fell to 210 acres.
- <sup>9</sup> "Why Fruit Crops Fail," Hillsborough Recorder, 12 July 1888, p. 4, col. 1.
- <sup>10</sup> "Planting Potatoes," Hillsborough Recorder, 12 July 1888, p. 4, col. 1.
- <sup>11</sup> N.C. Home Insurance Co. Policy statement in John W. Couch Papers.
- <sup>12</sup> Shifflett, p. 61.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Walker, 22 February 1984.
- <sup>14</sup> Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Walker, 22 February 1984
- <sup>15</sup> Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Walker, 22 February 1984
- <sup>16</sup> Interview with Catherine Melinius, 24 February 1984.
- <sup>17</sup> Interview with Catherine Melinius, 24 February 1984.
- <sup>18</sup> Interview with Catherine Melinius, 24 February 1984.
- <sup>19</sup> Interview with Catherine Melinius, 24 February 1984.
- <sup>20</sup> Interview with Catherine Melinius, 24 February 1984.
- <sup>21</sup> Interview with Catherine Melinius, 24 February 1984.
- <sup>22</sup> Jennie Shields to Nettie Couch, 2 October 1901, in the John W. Couch Papers.
- <sup>23</sup> Jennie Cate to Nettie Couch, 27 March 1913, in the John W. Couch Papers.
- <sup>24</sup> Jennie Cate to Nettie Couch, 9 September 1915, in the John W. Couch Papers.
- <sup>25</sup> Interview with Catherine Melinius.
- <sup>26</sup> In the interview with Mr. and Mrs. Walker, Mrs. Walker states, "They probably didn't notice other things, like soil and ecology back then when they made decisions of farm. Mostly they based their decisions on the size of the family or the economy."
- <sup>27</sup> Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Walker, 23 February 1984
- <sup>28</sup> Lefler, The History of a Southern State : North Carolina p. 491.
- <sup>29</sup> Fred Arrowood to Frank Carroll, 25 June 1929, in the John W. Couch Papers.
- <sup>30</sup> In this letter (Jennie Cate to Nettie Couch, July 1929, in the John W. Couch Papers), Jennie writes, "I sure do hate to bother you again about seeing Frank but please give him this paper. Send me his address and they can send it to him next time."
- <sup>31</sup> Interview with Catherine Melinius, 24 February 1984
- <sup>32</sup> L. Bunri Lloyd, Sheriff, Orange County to Nettie Couch. 11 August 1924, in John W. Couch Papers
- <sup>33</sup> Nettie Couch to J. F. Rigsbee, 29 May 1931, Chattel Mortgage, in John W. Couch Papers.

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<sup>34</sup> Deed, 17 January 1947 by J.W.T. Couch, John H. Cate and his wife, Martha A. Cate, and Jane C. Cate (Jennie) to Duke University, in the Orange County Tax and Records Building.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Catherine Melinius, 24 February 1984.