

## HAMBURG—JACOB W. BROWER (1812-1868)

The industrial growth of Mount Airy began when Jacob W. Brower came from Randolph County to buy land in Surry and begin the operation of several enterprises.

His land purchases included a large farm on the Haystack Road, and much acreage along the Ararat River. He was later to acquire a large tract that lay between Cross Roads and the Virginia line, including Slate Mountain.

Before coming to Surry County he had married Miss Mary Martha Albright of a prominent family in Greensboro. They built their first home on what is now South Main Street, and a large frame house with the traditional porches upstairs and down, known in the twentieth century as the "Bobby Gilmer House."

On the Haystack farm Brower constructed a gristmill, but it was along the Ararat River that his operations grew to include a sawmill, a tannery, a shoe factory, a cotton mill and a general store. The little settlement had a name—Hamburg.

At this time Mount Airy was still a post office beyond Bannertown. Hamburg Street is the original road leading down from the main road to the river and the location of Mr. Brower's enterprises.

The North Carolina census of 1840 listed 25 cotton mills in the state, one of them being in Surry County, which places the Brower mill as beginning operations in the 1830s.

Farther down the river Brower constructed a dam and built a large brick building to house a cloth mill. Many years later the town of Mount Airy was to use this dam as a site for an electrical power plant, naming it Buck Shoals.

The great drought of 1845, which affected all of the Piedmont section of the state, caused many farmers and merchants to bring their grain to the mills near the mountains where the water still ran swift enough to turn the wheels.

In Guilford County there had been no rain from March until August, the crops failing and the stock dying for want of food, there being little even for the families.

Those who were lucky enough to have grain in their barns brought it to the mountains, among them a planter and merchant named Robert S. Gilmer. Having his grain ground by the Brower Mill he became acquainted with Brower, the acquaintance growing into a business association whereby Gilmer became manager of the cloth mill. He moved his family up to the village, buying Brower's house which was vacated when the owner built another home down near his store, across the river.

The Browsers had two sons, Thomas and John M., who became associated with their father in his many industries. John became Congressman from the district after the War Between the States. At this time he published a newspaper in Mount Airy named the Surry Visitor—1877-1878.

Brower built a handsome home on Hamburg Road, overlooking the Ararat River and the Brower Mills. This home was destroyed by fire in 1929, a complete file of his newspaper being lost with other family papers.

An interesting story is told of a piano being brought to Mount Airy by the bride of Jacob Brower. This piano, said to be the first of its kind to be purchased in Greensboro, was the property of the Hon. John M. Morehead (Governor of the State).

The families of the Albrights and Moreheads were friends and neighbors, their children being playmates, so when a newer model of piano was purchased for the Morehead home, Albright bought the first instrument for his daughter. The piano has been a cherished possession of Mrs. Brower's descendants, now being in the home of a great-great-granddaughter.

(This article was found in the files of the Carlos P. Surratt Genealogy and Local History Room at Surry Community College, source unknown. Typed by Wilma Hiatt)

Submitted by Fletcher Edwards