

## Lee Land at Paradise Before 1860

*Lee Brown, September 2014*

When I was researching ggg-grandfather William Southern<sup>1</sup>, I reviewed the land tax records of Gloucester County, which show the succession of owners of Paradise. The earliest records, in 1782, described 1440 acres as “Lee Land” which, in 1789, turned out to be the property of Philip Lee (spelled Leigh in 1790 and often during the next decade and a half).

After 1782, records are missing until 1789, when Philip Lee was taxed on 1400 acres, as he was the next year, too. What happened to 40 acres is a question. By the 1791 assessment, Philip Lee had acquired an adjacent 400 acre tract to be taxed on.

In 1795, it was the estate of Philip Leigh (or Lee) that was taxed on two tracts totalling 1800 acres. In 1807, the tax began to be assessed to “Philip Lee, dec’d” rather than the estate, and stayed that way until it reverted to “Philip Lee Estate” in 1827.

The land tax records got more descriptive in 1812. “Philip Lee, dec’d” was the owner of 1400 acres “called Paradise” and a 400-acre tract that “joins Paradise.” The 1400-acre tract was taxed at \$1.03 per acre and the smaller tract at \$0.625 per acre. The next year the description of the 1400-acre tract was amended to “Forest Land called Paradise” and the 400-acre tract was simply “near the above tract.” And the next year, 1814, both were listed as 15 miles northwest from the Court House. It was very adaptable property, for it was 14 miles northwest from the Court House in 1817, 13 miles in 1818, and 12 miles in 1819 when it stopped moving.

Paradise was divided into a third part when 500 acres from the 1400-acre Paradise tract were transferred to Thomas R. Corr through John S. Thornton just before the 1820 assessment. The land was taxed at a rate of \$7.4175 and described as 12 miles north (not northwest, so still moving) from the court house and “part of Lewis Paradise tract.”

In 1820, the land tax assessments looked like this:

owner	description	acres	rate	buildings	value
Philip Lee dec’d	mill seat incl.	400.0	\$5.3100	\$125.00	\$2,124.00
Philip Lee dec’d	“Paradise”	900.0	\$6.2500	\$0	\$5,625.00
Thomas R. Corr	forest land	500.0	\$7.4175	\$583.32	\$3,708.75

The values and taxes remained the same for a while, and, in 1827, all three tracts were again northwest of the court house.

The estate continued to be taxed on the 900 and 400-acre tracts for many years. In 1840, there stopped being any assessment for buildings. In 1841 the two tracts were valued the same per acre, and in 1842, the two properties were coalesced for tax purposes back into one 1300-acre tract, with no assessment for buildings. In 1845, the total taxable value was \$4,303.00 and the total tax was \$4.31.

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, Lee. “Finding William Southern,” *The Family Tree Searcher*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Gloucester Genealogical Society of Virginia, June 2013). pp. 21-26.

In 1846, the Paradise tract was reduced from 1300 acres to 972.5 acres after 327.5 acres were transferred to Mary S. Anthons, and Philip and Howard Thornton, Trustees for Susan Thornton, took on payment of the property tax for that tract. The estate of Philip Lee, 50 years after his death, was continuing to pay the property tax on 972.5 acres of the Paradise property. Neither tract included anything for buildings. The total taxable value for the Thornton part was \$1,084.03 and the Lee part, still called "Paradise," was valued 3,218.98.

John Booker purchased in 1839 the 500 acres 12 miles northwest of the court that Thomas Corr's heirs had held. In 1842, Booker sold 38.5 acres to John Mann and 94 acres to Dawson Cooke, Jr., leaving Booker 367.5 acres. In 1850, when Booker last owned his 367.5 acres, the total taxable value was \$2,119.45 with a building worth \$1,000.00. As the only parcel on which there were buildings in the tax records, perhaps Booker's parcel, which was earlier Corr's parcel, was the main part of "Paradise."

In 1850, the land tax assessments looked like this:

<b>owner</b>	<b>description</b>	<b>acres</b>	<b>rate</b>	<b>buildings</b>	<b>value</b>
Philip Lee dec'd	"Paradise"	972.5	\$3.3100	\$0	\$3,218.98
Thornton	Philip Lee estate	327.5	\$3.3100	\$0	\$1,084.03
John Booker		367.5	\$5.7400	\$1,000.00	\$2,119.45
John Mann		38.5	\$3.0000	\$0	\$115.50
Dawson Cooke Jr	forest	94.0	\$3.0000	\$0	\$282.00

The estate was still paying the property tax on the 972.5-acre property in 1851, when the total value was \$1,945.00 and the total tax was \$2.33. But that was the last year of tax assessments on the long deceased Philip Lee.

In 1851, John Booker's 367.5-acre tract was transferred from Booker's estate and sold by William Shackelford Commissioner by decree of the court to George W. Jeffries. Its assessed value was \$1,442.43 including \$800.00 for buildings. It was forested land 12 miles northwest of the courthouse and named "Paradise."

In 1852, the 1300-acre "Paradise" tract, reassembled from Philip Lee's estate and from Philip & Howard Thornton, trustees for Susan Thornton, was in the hands of Mrs. Lucy Barber (Executrix for James Barber dec'd). The total value, \$2,600.00 did not include any assessment for buildings.

Also, George W. Jeffries continued to own 367.5 acres still named "Paradise". The house there was valued at \$800. John Mann and the Dawson Cooke Jr. estate still held the remainder of the old property.

The Barber (or Barbour) property was reduced from 1300 to 410.38 acres and described as "part of Paradise" in 1854. The reduction was due to the transfer of 655 acres to Absolom Bland ("Paradise"), 203 acres to Thomas P. Fary, and 21.625 acres to Thomas Cooke. That leaves 10 acres unaccounted for. The next year, Absolom split his property with Archie Bland, and William Southern obtained the Jeffries property. Only Southern's property retained the name "Paradise".

In 1855, this was the situation:

owner	from	acres	buildings	value
Lucy Barbour, executor for J. Barbour, of Paradise	Lee, Thornton	410.38		\$820.75
Absolom Bland, of Paradise	Barbour's 1300 ac	327.50		\$655.00
Archie Bland, of Paradise	Absolom's 655 ac	327.50		\$655.00
Thomas Cooke, of Paradise	Barbour's 1300 ac	21.62		\$43.25
Thomas P. Fary, of Paradise	Barbour's 1300 ac	203.00		\$406.00
William Southern - Paradise	Jeffries	367.50	\$800.00	\$1442.43
John Mann	Booker	38.50		\$77.00
Dawson Cooke, Jr. Estate	Booker	94.00		\$188.00
TOTAL		1790.00	\$800.00	\$4287.43

In 1857, Southern transferred 50 acres to William P. Baker, and in 1858 the Barbour holdings were reduced by 11 acres to William P. Baker, 54.66 acres to Elizabeth Bayse, 38.75 acres to William Rowland Fletcher, and 43.75 acres to Thomas P. Fary. In 1859, William Southern transferred his 317.5 acres named "Paradise" to Albert D. Mitchell after owning it only between 1855 and 1859.

Also in 1857, Thomas S. Cooke started being taxed on 31.63 acres instead of 21.63 acres. Does this mean the 10 acres lost in 1854 was found? The extra acreage seems to have had a building on it.

In 1859, the land of Paradise was recorded in this way:

owner	from	acres	buildings	value
Lucy Barbour, executor for J. Barbour	Lee, Thornton	262.21		\$655.53
Absolom Bland	Barbour's 1300 ac	327.50		\$900.62
Archie Bland	Absolom's 655 ac	327.50		\$900.62
Thomas S. Cooke	Barbour's 1300 ac	31.63	\$600.00	\$2003.55
Thomas P. Fary	Barbour's 1300 ac	203.00		\$1737.50
Thomas P. Fary	Barbour's 410 ac	43.75		\$109.38
William R. Fletcher	Barbour's 410 ac	38.75		\$96.87
Elizabeth Bayse	Barbour's 410 ac	54.66	\$300.00	\$457.30
William P. Baker	Barbour's 410 ac	11.00		\$27.50
William P. Baker	Southern 1857	50.00		\$166.16
Albert D. Mitchell - Paradise	Southern 1859	317.50	\$800.00	\$1855.09
Dawson Cooke, Jr. Estate	Booker	94.00		\$470.00
John Mann	Booker	38.50		\$192.50
TOTAL		1800.50	\$1,700	\$9,572.62

Both Thomas Fary and William Fletcher owned other parcels located 12 miles northwest of the court house, perhaps adjacent to the Paradise property.

William Southern purchased part of "Paradise" from George W. Jefferies in 1855. He received 367.5 acres valued at \$3.93 per acre plus \$800 for buildings - a total value of \$1,442.43. The tax record describes the property as 12 miles northwest of the Court House. Because this property was named "Paradise" (several other properties in the land tax list are described as "part of Paradise", while William's parcel was simply described as "Paradise") and usually was the only property taxed for buildings, this was probably the operational center of the original property.

The 1855 land tax list reported 1,098 parcels in the county with a total value of \$1,327,991.37. The average value of a parcel was \$1,209.46, the median was \$348.75. Such a large difference suggests that a few large, high-value parcels inflated the average value. William's parcel was worth a bit over the average and well above the median.

549 parcels in the 1855 land tax list included buildings, some of which would be residences for the families, others residences for slaves, or barns, workshops, stores, and so on. The average value of buildings on a parcel was \$708.84, the median \$300. Again, the buildings on William's parcel were worth slightly over the average and safely above the median.

Whether the Southerns lived in the old Lee home, 200 years old by that time, we do not know.