

CALEB STORY

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Over the past 120 years, many stories been written about the origins of the town of Kernersville. They all have in common two things. First, they claim a man named Caleb Story was the first settler to own land in what eventually became Kernersville. The second is that all these stories are in error as regards Story being the original settler.

In a companion piece called *Getting History Off on the Wrong Foot*, the authors traced the root of the Caleb Story legend to a piece that originally appeared in the *Durham Recorder*, but which was republished in the January 13, 1888 edition of the *News and Farm*, an early Kernersville newspaper. Its author was Thomas Early Whitaker. In his sketch of how Kernersville came to be, Whitaker wrote that Kernersville “was first settled about the year 1760 by Caleb Story, an Irishman. Tradition says that he bought the original tract of 400 acres, in which the town was built, for four gallons of rum.”

One hundred and twenty years ago, when Whitaker fingered Story as the original pioneer who settled Kernersville, little did he know he was launching a myth with remarkable staying power. Even now, many websites connected with the town still attribute Caleb Story with the founding of Kernersville.*

But with history, as with many other things, facts are a stubborn thing, and they reveal that, while Story was an original owner of one of the six parcels of land that were later acquired by Joseph Kerner in 1817, he was not the first or earliest settler there. In fact, little can be said about the history of this Caleb Story, either where he came from, or where he went after divesting himself of his lands in the Kernersville area. This sketch is an attempt to add some additional information about him.

It seems that Story first appears in the land records of Guilford County where, on August 22, 1786, he entered 50 acres of land on Millstone Branch bordering Martin Pegg and Thomas Henderson. He must have moved soon after to that part of Surry County that is now Forsyth because the Surry land records show that he entered 250 acres of land on July 28, 1787, and received a warrant to have it surveyed. It was described as on lying on the north branch of Muddy Creek bordering Amos Lundy, Richard Lundy and David Morrow. Morrow, by the way, was the earliest settler of Kernersville, and should rightfully be recognized as its founder. In any case, this 250 acres of land was subsequently granted by the State of North Carolina to Story on November 29, 1797. In the grant, it was described as 250 acres on the north branch of Muddy Creek adjoining Richard Beason, Moses Pedon’s corner, Amos Lundy’s corner, Dobson’s corner and Whicker’s corner.

Story sold half of this tract (125 acres) for £50 to William Dobson by deed dated February 8, 1801, and it was this tract of land that was ultimately conveyed to Joseph Kerner as one of the original six tracts comprising what was known then as Dobson’s Cross Roads after William Dobson.

Story sold the remaining 125 acres of his 1797 land grant to Jemima Mills of Stokes County in two transactions. The first was a deed to Mills dated February 11, 1801 for 85 acres on Muddy Creek adjacent to Beason’s line, Pedon’s corner, Hester’s corner and Dobson’s corner. The second was a deed to Mills dated same date for 50 acres adjacent to Richard Beason’s corner, Whicker’s line and Dobson’s corner.

In addition to this 250 acre grant from the State of North Carolina, Story also acquired a 95 acre parcel in Stokes (later Forsyth) County from Mordecai Mendenhall. The deed, dated March 4, 1791, was witnessed by Mordecai Mendenhall Jr. and Archibald Campbell. It seems Story sold this piece of land for £80 to Valentine Arnet on February 1, 1795. The deed to Arnet described it as 95 acres on Muddy Creek adjacent to David Walker, Archibald Campbell and David Bittick. Witnesses were Samuel Bittick and Campbell. In one of the volumes of the *Records of Moravians in North Carolina*, there is a map showing various lots of land lying within the Wachovia tract along with a list of those who owned them. Caleb Story’s name is show in association with lots 155 and 156 while Samuel Bittick’s name is shown in association with lot 154.

* See these for current examples: http://www.downtownkernersville.com/town_history.html and <http://kernersvillenews.com/insights/Intro.htm>.

On June 4, 1799, Frederick William Marshall, agent of the Unitas Fratrum on the Wachovia Tract, conveyed 52 acres to Story described as lying on the south side of the branch of the middle fork of Muddy Creek. Story held this piece of land for a couple of years before conveying it to William White on December 31, 1801 for \$315. In this deed, it was described as on the south side of one head of a branch of the middle fork of Muddy Creek called the neck.

Story is mentioned in another Stokes County deed of August 19, 1796 in which Elizabeth Pike, the administratrix of Nathan Pike, conveyed 42 ½ acres to Anne Phillips. The language in the deed recites that this conveyance was carried out by Pike in compliance with a bond for £150 given by Nathan Pike to Caleb Story. It appears that Pike was originally to have conveyed the land to Story, but Story requested it be conveyed to Anne Phillips instead, but why he did this is unknown. This land was on the middle fork of Muddy Creek, formerly in the possession of William Ramey.

His name appears on the 1790 federal census where it is written as “Calup Story.” This census record shows his household consisting of 1 male 16 or over, 2 males 0-15 years of age, and 2 females. During this time, he also appears as a land owner in Captain William Dobson’s District of Stokes County for the years 1791 to 1796. This was the district that contained most if not all of the Cross Roads. Story was still resident in Stokes in 1800 according to the federal census for that year which shows him with 2 males age 0-9 years old, 2 males age 10-15 years, 1 male 45 and over (himself), 5 females 0-9 years old, 1 female 16-25 years old and 1 female 26-44 years old. It is certain he was married some time before 1800 given the size of his family.

It seems Story moved back to Guilford County some time after 1801, as he is seen acquiring 290 acres there in 1805. The deed from James Rumbley of Guilford made in consideration of \$475 describes the tract as lying on the waters of Alamance Creek. On May 1, 1806 Story witnessed a Guilford deed from Stafford Landingham to Levi Tucker for 168 acres on the waters of Alamance Creek and on February 12, 1808 he witnessed a deed from Joseph Hanner to Robert Hanner for 142 acres on Alamance Creek. Not long after witnessing this deed, Story sold his 290 acres on Alamance Creek to Elias Cowen, the deed being dated August 9, 1808.

There is no mention of the name Story in the 1810 census of Guilford County, suggesting he and his family had probably moved elsewhere by this date, but where is not known. It does seem probable he had some connection to another Caleb Story who settled first in Fayette County, Indiana and then moved to Noble Township in Wabash County. An account entitled *History of Wabash County, Indiana*, written in 1884, states says he “was born May 14, 1828, in Fayette County, Indiana, and after receiving such education as the time afforded, he was married, April 9, 1854, to Miss Icyphena Calvert, who was born November 10, 1839.” Further details about him are given in a book written in 1901 called *Biographical Memoirs of Wabash County, Indiana*. It recites that he was “the third of fourteen children born to Caleb and Rebecca [Sain] Story” who, according to the text, was born in Guilford County, North Carolina.

Both Caleb Story Sr. and Caleb Jr. are shown in the 1860 census for Noble Township, Wabash County, Indiana. This census shows the elder man as age 63, born in North Carolina, indicating he was born about 1797. If this age is accurate, it would preclude his being the same man who owned land in Stokes County, North Carolina, including one of the tracts that comprised the Cross Roads. In fact, some researchers of the Story family say the Caleb who married Rebecca Sain was in fact the son of a James Story. It is possible further research could add to this meager store of information about one of the original owners of a Cross Roads tract but that task must be left for another time.