

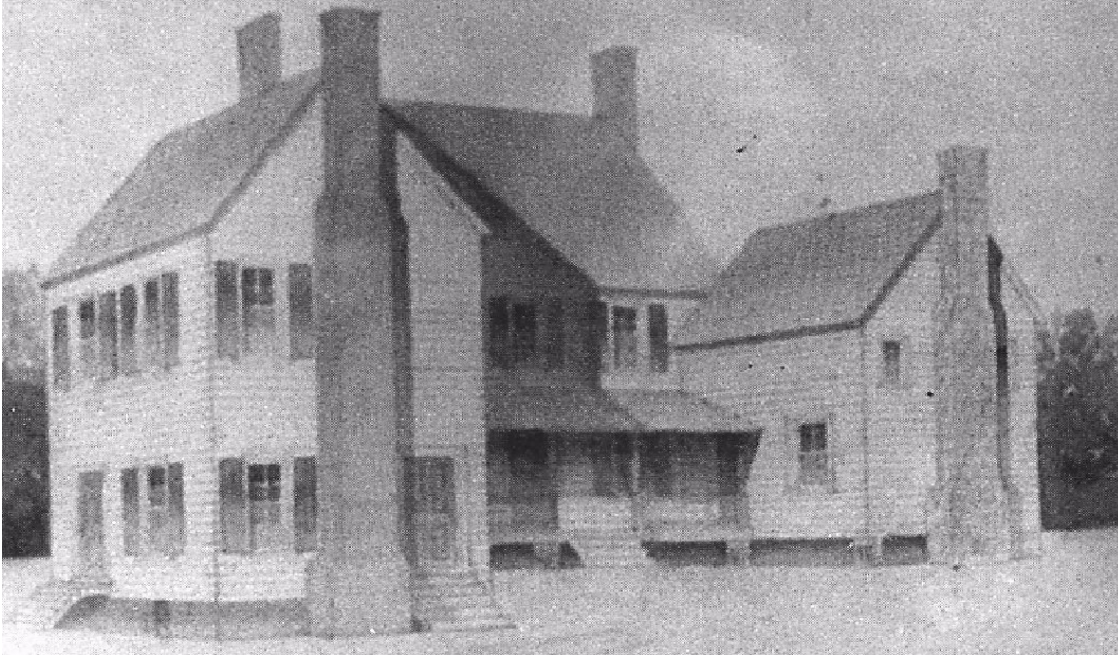


Described as the "Land of Eden," by the state surveyor, William Byrd, II, Ridgeway, North Carolina is a mixture of high, flat plains and softly rolling ridges that fall into gentle brooks and creeks. From this paradise rose several large plantations including the Collins ancestral home known as "Pleasant Hill." Although the Collins descendants have either passed away or moved from the area, the name Collins still strikes a familiar chord among the local residents.

"[Pleasant Hill](#)"* is still standing and It is located just off of I-85, exit 226 at the corner of Ridgeway-Drewry Road and Seamen Road (SR 1234). The 1850 census states that his property laid between William and Lucy Paschall and Caswell Drake (see Drake genealogy).

"*Pleasant Hill*" was built in 1790 by [Col. Benjamin Hawkins](#) (1754-1818), who served with Washington in the American Revolution, Benjamin Hawkins was in the Continental Congress, one of the first two senators elected the United States Senate from North Carolina and negotiated treaties with the Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaws, and Natchez Indians. Col. Hawkins brother, Philemon Hawkins, Sr., received the property when Benjamin Hawkins accepted an appointment and lived among the Creek Indians in Northern Georgia as the Superintendent of Indian Affairs. During his service, he moved his Negroes to work his model farms in Georgia and Alabama. This may have been the connection to the Alabama Negroes that were disposed of in the Michael⁷ Collins estate. Michael⁷ Collins, II purchased the property I n 1801 from the estate of Philemon Hawkins, Sr. Michael⁷ Collins, II's, father served as a Captain under Lt. Col. Philemon Hawkins during the Revolutionary War.

The house was constructed entirely of hand-hewn beams pinned and mortised. Each beam has a Roman numeral cut into it in order to match it to the proper succeeding beam. The 1790 date is inscribed in the chimney. The ceilings are 11 feet tall and the



The earliest known picture of *Pleasant Hill*. This pastel watercolor was painted by Leon Banzet as the house appeared in the late 1800's.

Courtesy of Robert J. Bender

rooms are 18 X 18 feet. Joists in the floors are all maple, white oak and poplar. There was formerly a separate kitchen which has been torn down. There have been several renovations and additions to the structure. Much of the original structure built by the Hawkins family, however, remains today.

The property was divided according to the provisions of Michael⁷ Collins will in 1857 which was administered by William F. Collins, Michael⁷ Collins' oldest son by his first marriage and Thomas Cottrell Collins, Michael⁷'s oldest living son from his second marriage. The home and 447 acres was bought by his 3 daughters, Amanda, Apphia and Mary. The slaves were largely bought by family members.

A stream ran through the Collins property called Fortuna Creek. The creek was rumored to have gold traces in it. Nicholas' Barzet's wife, Leone found a gold nugget on her brother's tract of the old Bloomsbury plantation during a visit. She convinced her husband and son's to move to Ridgeway from New York. Nicholas and his sons, Julius and Leon bought Pleasant Hill from Captain Benjamin M. Collins in 1886 but the stream did not produce enough gold to make the prospecting profitable so the Banzets turned to farming for a while. The changed hands again in 1901 when the house and 277 acres were sold to Richard Jacob Bender for \$1,200.00. Albert Seaman recalled that his father-in-law, Adam Seaman, said that Captain Benjamin Collins wanted him to marry one of his four daughters but Richard Bender had other ideas. Bender married Anna Babetta Thomas (1880-1952) and raised seven children at *Pleasant Hill*. Only one of Captain Collins' daughters married and that was when she was 41 years old. The house and remaining property is currently owned by Jane Bender, the widow of

Richard Bender's grandson Robert. The 217 year-old home has continued I perpetual operation for more than two centuries.



The original Collins family cemetery containing twelve graves is located near the old Collins home. The only standing stone at the time of this writing is that of George Washington Lafayette Collins' grave. Before her death, Rebecca Wharton Collins, the daughter of Benjamin Mosley Collins and Mary Plummer Collins, had this cemetery enclosed and a stone engraved naming the people who are buried there. This marker however has fallen. Michael⁷ Collins 1856 will had requested the cemetery be enclosed with a brick wall three feet thick and five high. One quarter mile from the cemetery is a slave cemetery containing 50 to 70 graves.

