

Helped Build College

German Descendent Came Here In 1852

By: Betty Jo Byars

The construction of the old Randolph-Macon College near Boydton brought many things to Mecklenburg County. . . among them a young cabinet maker who was to make a great impact on the fledgling town of Clarksville and leave a firm imprint in the town's heritage of vigorous early settlers.

Franz Julius Liipfert left his

native Germany at the tender age of 18 to avoid conscription into the German army and to seek his fortune in the new land of America. The year arrived in New York was 1852, some 20 years after Randolph-Macon had first opened its doors to students.

The Gilliland brothers of the town of Halifax were evidently doing some interior finishing or

renovation on the college campus and were in dire need of a skilled cabinet maker when Lewis Gilliland traveled to New York to find such a qualified person.

The person he found was Franz Liipfert and together they trekked back to Halifax and Mecklenburg County to complete the job.

Liipfert may have entertained thoughts of returning to New York when the work was completed but his fate was sealed when he met Lewis' sister, Mary Eliza.

Mary Eliza Gilliland and Franz Julius Liipfert were married in 1857; they remained in Halifax for another year before moving to Clarksville.

In 1858, shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War, Liipfert moved his wife to Clarksville to establish a furniture manufacturing business.

Clarksville was a town of promise and offered a new market for Liipfert's handmade pieces; Lewis Gilliland, Mary Eliza's brother, also made the move to Clarksville about this time and opened a general store in the center of Clarksville near the Gilliland Hotel, another family enterprise.

Liipfert evidently had been very successful during his Halifax days because he bought considerable property in downtown Clarksville; he purchased about half a city block fronting Clarksville's main street where the old theatre building and fenced vacant lot are now. The property had a depth of about 250 feet.

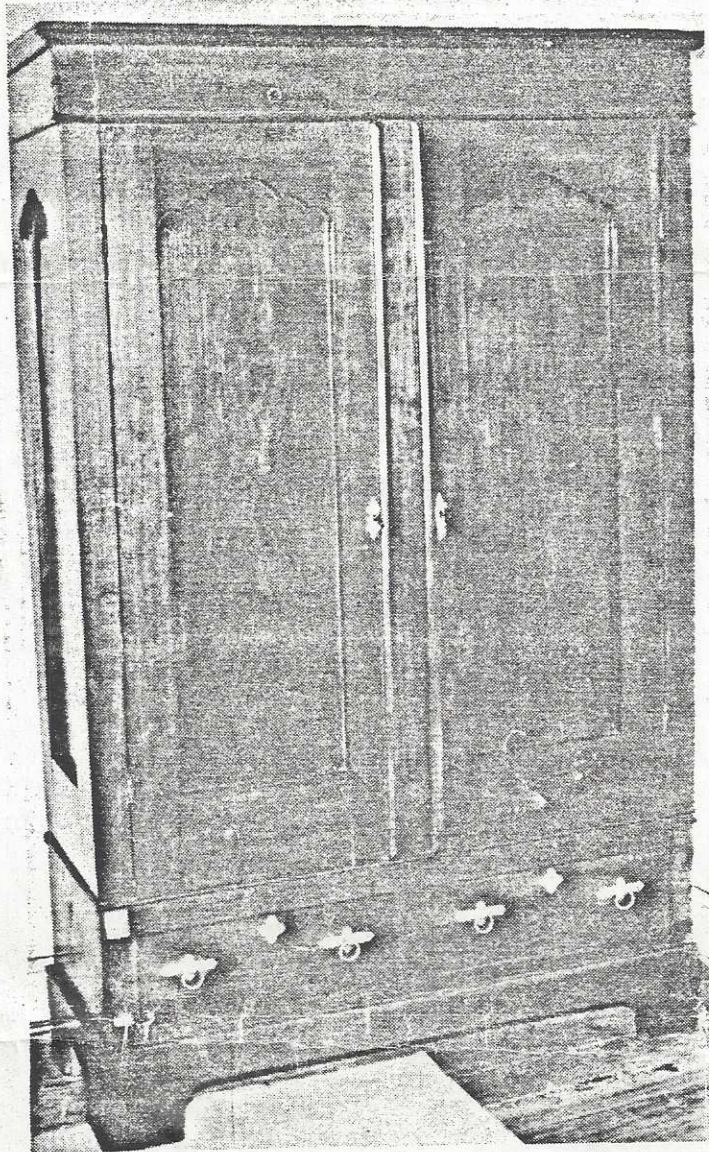
When the young Liipferts moved to Clarksville, their home was at the back of that property. And because Liipfert was German, the corner took the name "Dutch Gap".

Life in Clarksville centered around the Dutch Gap-any goods or services available in

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EARLY CARPENTER - Franz Julius Liipfert, a native of Germany, came to Mecklenburg County in 1852 and was one of the builders of old Randolph-Macon College in Boydton. Among his descendants are the many Sizemores in Clarksville.



FEW REMAINING PIECES-This solid walnut wardrobe is one of the few remaining pieces built by Franz Julius Liipfert and is now the property of one of his granddaughters, Mrs. Al W. Williams of Clarksville. (staff photo)

Decendent Came Here In 1852

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the town were available at Dutch Gap—Liipfert continued to make fine furniture, the horse drawn lathe he used was in

county, born and reared about five miles outside of Clarksville. He came to Clarksville as a very young lad

businesses from the present Russell's Furniture Store to the river, including Dutch Gap.

Franz Liipfert rebuilt his corner, this time with living quarters above the stores for the remaining family members and continued in the furniture manufacturing business until his untimely death in 1895.

An ever active man, Liipfert was supervising a construction job and had gone on the roof of the building when he fell off and punctured his stomach. He died shortly thereafter of that wound.

Very little of the furniture he made remains, quite a bit must have been destroyed in the 1893 fire and there were only two years between the fire and his death.

Fanny and Henry Sizemore, Liipfert's Clarksville descendants, had 11 children, four of whom are still alive and three of those 11 children, remain in Clarksville, Mrs. Al W. Williams returned from from Richmond several years ago to live with her brother, Mayor Otto Liipfert Sizemore. Just around the corner lives their sister, Mrs. M.M. Fitzgerald. A fourth sister, Mrs. Z.L. Edwards, lives in Washington, N.C.