

HISTORY MAKER

WILLIAM JOHNSON

Born: Aug. 31, 1732, in Wales

Died: Sept. 5, 1765, Rowan County (now Forsyth)

Known for: Being the first European landowner in the area now known as Clemmons, where he constructed a fort used by area residents during times of danger.

Each year, a holiday wonderland springs up along the winding roads of Tanglewood Park.

More than 70,000 vehicles wend their way through towering trees and over gently rolling pastures and fairways, many carrying children whose eyes sparkle with wonder at the elves and reindeer, penguins and toys crafted from more than a million colorful lights.

The line crawls slowly onward, the roadway turns up a hill where a huge Moravian star lights the way for wise men and their camels who seek the holy family.

At the top of the hill, bathed in the white light of herald angels, sits the Mount Pleasant Methodist Chapel and its small cemetery. Here rest some of the earliest settlers in the area, including William Johnson, the original owner of the land.

Just 25 years old and recently arrived from his native Wales, Johnson bought the land on May 24, 1757, for 80 pounds "Lawful Virginia money" from William Linville,

land agent for the Lord Proprietors of England. The 640-acre tract represents just shy of 49% of Tanglewood's 1314 acres today.

Situated on the eastern banks of the Yadkin, he and his wife, Elizabeth, and their neighbors were the first permanent colonists on the southwestern edge of what was then Rowan County, according to the Moravian Diaries from Bethabara.

The area had good bottom land for their farms, but the tensions between the Europeans and the Native tribes made the region dangerous as the French and Indian War ground to an end.

Johnson built a fort to shelter his family and neighbors using the virgin timber on the property. Some logs were said to have been more than two feet thick.

Johnson died at just 33 years of age, but his descendants owned the land for several generations. His grandson, James, bought his cousin's parcels and cobbled much of the original estate together again.

Family tradition holds that he built the oldest section of the Manor House



TEESHA MCCLAM

Kevin Pogue, a descendant of William Johnson, first settler of Clemmons, places flowers on Johnson's grave at Tanglewood Park in 2003.

in 1859. Johnson's tract left the family after 164 years when Will Reynolds bought it for his country estate in 1921. The fort and home

place are long gone, but the stream that burbles through the estate just south of the stables is still called Johnson Creek.