

# Family Tales

North Carolina and Virginia

22 February-4 March 2024

HAMLET, NC

*The expansion franchise*

*Closest to home*

Julia (Julie) Meacham Jones

My sister at our hometown's landmark 124-year-old passenger train station

29 February

# *The expansion franchise*

**T**his newsletter is four years late and much longer than it would have been because of Covid.

I blame that virus because, in just its first year, **it caused more than 400,000 American deaths, exceeding U.S. battlefield deaths inflicted by all our foreign enemies since we began counting Fourths of July.** Beginning with that statistic but including many more, Covid disrupted our society as profoundly as war or depression.

My first story on Covid — then better known as “novel coronavirus” — was published January 31, 2020, in the **Silicon Valley Business Journal announcing the first known case in Santa Clara County, California,** where I live, and the eighth case overall in the United States. It wouldn't be confirmed for four months, but the **first two U.S. Covid deaths would occur in my county six days after that story.**

That was weeks after I had purchased plane tickets for a spring trip to the East Coast. That trip became one of uncounted millions of family events around the world that didn't survive the pandemic.

Family visits are the most important reason I go back to my home state of North Carolina and to Virginia, where my brother Lee lives. But the proximate cause for the scrapped 2020 visit was that a second nephew had been born that I needed to hold. By this year, after a four-year delay, the nephew-niece total had ballooned to eight — seven unheld — but only a couple of whom are still small enough to do so without jeopardizing my back.

So, the other side of the Covid story is that important aspects of family life were not disrupted and have proceeded at the normal, frantic, 21<sup>st</sup> Century pace. Among other things, they carried on carrying on. And although Covid turned the big church wedding Thomas and Bailey had planned for 2021 into an affair with a couple dozen people scattered around a huge sanctuary, that also meant it became **our family's first nationally televised wedding.**

“I'm not sure we'll have the big follow-up celebration we originally planned,” groom-turned-husband-and-father Thomas told me over the weekend. “We might do something else with the money we planned to spend.”

The tales these nephews and nieces tell their children will not be about walking uphill both ways in the snow to school during the Depression or how people waited for letters from their sons overseas in the war. They will be about going to school on Zoom and deciding whether to trust the doctors advising masks and vaccinations or the politicians saying get back to work.

# Notes on photos

**CLOSEST TO HOME** — You may have met Julie in my newsletters about [her January snow visit to the Sierra](#) and our [2021 road trip](#) following the Lewis & Clark Expedition's route from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean. Our hometown was incorporated just three years before [this passenger station was opened by the Seaboard Air Line Railroad](#) ("air line" in railroad speak meaning the most direct route between two places). The Seaboard's five main lines from North and South Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, Alabama and Florida converged on this spot. Today's third largest U.S. freight railroad, CSX Transportation, carries an initial from just two of its 10 corporate ancestors — the Chesapeake & Ohio and the Seaboard — in its unpronounceable name and covers most of the eastern United States and two Canadian provinces. Thirty daily passenger trains once stopped here. Amtrak's *Silver Star*, which began as a New York-Florida overnight train in 1947, eight years after the *Silver Meteor*, its older brother, still runs as an Amtrak passenger train along with the *Meteor*, but only the *Star's* route still takes it through Hamlet and stops at this station. The station, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was moved across the east-west main line in 2003 and restored as a working passenger station and railroad museum in a \$10 million project. You can see what happened in this 50-second [YouTube video](#). Julie now lives near Southern Pines, about 30 miles north, which is where I boarded the *Silver Star* to visit my brother in Richmond, Va.

**NAN WILLIAMSON & BETH THOMPSON** — These newsletters began in 2007 when Nan asked me to plan and accompany them on a [trip to Italy](#), where her late mother was to be honored at a U.S. Army base that her father had once commanded as a general. They've been together since 1996 but [married in 2013 while on a trip to visit Emily and me in San Jose](#). They live on a Great Smoky mountainside in Clyde, North Carolina, just west of Asheville, my landing place to begin this trip.

**BETTY JO RORIE MOAK** — My mother-in-law is retired from her job with Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, and was previously in newsletters [here](#) and [here](#) when her husband, Rod Moak, was still alive. She grew up on a Union County, North Carolina, farm with two brothers who fought and survived the 1944 D-Day invasion of Normandy. The brothers will be part of a series of newsletters I'll do in a couple of months.

**LEE & DEB FUNDERBURK NEULICHT** — Deb and I were classmates at Chapel Hill, although we didn't know each other then. She's a retired rural mail carrier. Lee, who also went to UNC, is a former chef and retired school psychologist. They live on what was the Rorie family farm at Wolf Pond and, after raising goats, now tend bees and sell honey. They visit Mrs. Moak every week to take her to lunch and to be sure everything's OK with her and her house.

**HANK & MARY WOOD MEACHAM STALLINGS** — Hank was a jazz drummer before he became an accountant in banking, money management and finally the publishing industry. He and Mary Wood are retired, she from her career as an oncology nurse. Her father, my Uncle Dan, was a Seaboard official in Raleigh and used to deduct 90 cents from my paychecks when I worked for the railroad during college if he thought the conductor on my crew had over-billed on our pay sheet for connecting an air brake hose between freight cars. The union contract said we got extra pay for that. You will read a lot more about Hank and Mary Wood in the spring when we meet in Edinburgh, Scotland.

**MAC & JULIE MEACHAM JONES** — Mac grew up in Scotland County, North Carolina, one county east of where Julie and I grew up. He's now out of the pig farming business and putters around with Scotland's gift to sports at the Country Club of North Carolina (CCNC), practicing for the day he finally plays a round on the Old Course at St. Andrews, Scotland. Julie is a retired elementary school physical education teacher in addition to being my occasional travel companion. The town of West End, where they live, is part of a contiguous cluster of towns including the golf resorts of Pinehurst and Southern Pines, one county north

of where I grew up. Moore County has 100,000 residents, 40 golf courses and will host the U.S. Open golf tournament in June.

**JK & VIRGINIA JONES KENNINGTON** — JK works in sales for a San Jose-headquartered technology company and knows more about sports than I do. Virginia, who is named for my mother, is the personnel department for CCNC but likely deducts nothing extra from her dad's paycheck.

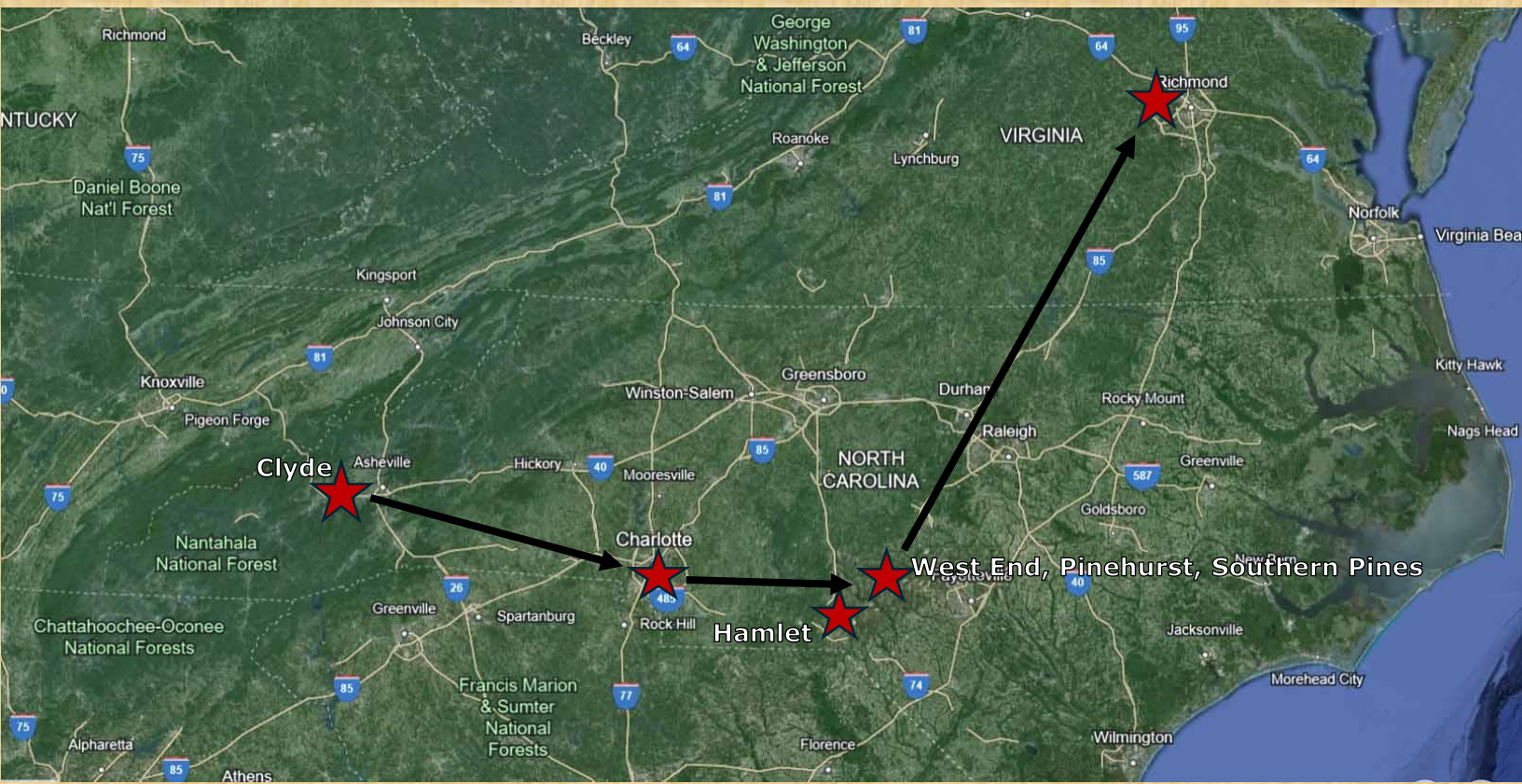
**JOHN LEROY (LEE) & ANN SIEWERS MEACHAM SR.** — Lee recently retired from his father-in-law Daddy Freddie's lumber company in Richmond, Virginia, but would have preferred being a Major League Baseball player. He was a catcher on the only Hamlet High School sports team ever to win a state championship. However, he is most famous for streaking naked across the diamond at a UNC baseball game, documented by a picture on Page 1 of the *Daily Tar Heel*. Ann was a school teacher and now serves as the primary on-call child care provider for a still-growing tribe of six grandchildren.

**THOMAS WILLIAM & BAILEY PRICE MEACHAM** — Thomas is an insurance underwriter for a national company and was a star high school soccer player. Bailey is a marketing executive for an information technology company. Theirs was the only wedding of my siblings' children that I could not attend. But John attended my son Gordon's wedding here in California and two days later was at the hospital for daughter Hadley's birth on his birthday.

**JOHN LEROY (JOHN) & CHELSIE DOLAN MEACHAM JR.** — John was born on the day in 1984 when Emily's and my cross-country move to California reached the Pacific Ocean. It was a signal things back East were moving along fine without us. He works for Daddy Freddie's mill. Chelsie heads a neonatal nursing unit at the same hospital where her sister-in-law Mary once worked.

**THOMAS & MARY MEACHAM BAHEN** — Mary is due to deliver Lee and Ann's seventh grandchild this summer. Her son Teddy is the only nephew or niece I had seen before this trip. Thomas is CEO of his father's franchised cleaning and restoration business.

## Trip map



*Nan Williamson &  
Beth Thompson*

My cousins

Haywood County, North Carolina

22-25 February



# Nan & Beth's driveway





*Betty Jo Rorie Moak*

Emily's mother  
Charlotte, North Carolina  
25-28 February



*Betty Moak's driveway*



# *Lee & Deb Funderburk Neulicht*

Emily's cousins

Wolf Pond, North Carolina

27 February



# *Hank & Mary Wood Meacham Stallings*

My cousins  
Charlotte, North Carolina  
26 & 28 February





*Hank & Mary Wood's driveway*



*Mac & Julie Meacham Jones*

My sister  
West End, North Carolina  
28 February-1 March



*Mac & Julie's driveway*



  
LONGLEAF

*JK & Virginia Jones Kennington*

My niece  
Southern Pines, North Carolina  
28-29 February

*Porter Mae Kennington*

22 months





*Eli James Kennington*

4 years



*John Leroy (Lee) &  
Ann Siewers Meacham Sr.*

My brother  
Henrico County, Virginia





*Lee & Ann's driveway*



*Thomas William & Bailey Price Meacham*

My nephew  
Henrico County, Virginia  
2-3 March



*Thomas & Bailey's driveway*

*Price Breslin Meacham*

2 Weeks





*Hadley Stark Meacham*

21 months



*John Leroy (John) &  
Chelsie Dolan Meacham Jr.*

My nephew  
Goochland County, Virginia  
2-3 March



*John & Chelsie's driveway*





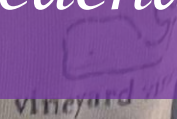
*Charlotte Scott Meacham*

2½ years



*John Leroy (Jack) Meacham III*

4.999 years





*Thomas & Mary Meacham Bahen*

My niece  
Chesterfield County, Virginia  
3 March



*Thomas & Mary's driveway*



*Hayes Michael Bahen*

3½ years



*Thomas Edward (Teddy) Bahen Jr.*

5½ years