

Stephen C. Ertman
18 Campbell Avenue
Airmont, New York 10901

May 15, 2012

Robert L. Swanson
Commissioner, District 3
1669 White Level Road
Louisburg, North Carolina 27549

Dear Commissioner Swanson:

I am writing to you today on behalf of fourteen descendants of the Edwards family of northern Franklin County, North Carolina. Our names and lineages are included on page four of this letter. We are all direct lineal descendants of Zedekiah Gideon Edwards (1818–1873), Rial Theodore Pinnell Edwards (1841–1900), and Martha Pattie Julia [Hight] Edwards (1844–1920), whose gravesites are located in the remote Edwards Family Cemetery on farmland (36.205444° N, 78.271283° W) near Ingleside, NC, about 10 miles north of Louisburg, NC, just off U.S. Hwy 401. The Edwards Family Cemetery lies within District 3, which you represent. There are a total of ten known Edwards ancestors buried in this family cemetery. Unidentified gravesites within the cemetery perimeter are also likely.

The Edwards Family was one of the earliest families to settle in the Sandy Creek region of North Carolina, an area that now includes parts of present day Warren, Vance, and Franklin counties. The family owned large acreages in each of those counties, as well as in Granville County to the west. Zedekiah and Gideon were family names going back several generations in historical records of old Bute County, North Carolina. Rial Edwards served as a bugler for the North Carolina 1st Cavalry Regiment during the Civil War. He was wounded in battle at least once, but recovered and returned to his unit. Bugler was a very dangerous position with a high mortality rate, because the bugler was expected to sound and lead the cavalry charge against opposing troops. Union Army sharpshooters frequently targeted CSA buglers as a means of disrupting battlefield communications.

Also buried in the Edwards Family Cemetery is Matthew Dickinson (1780-1809), the first president of the Franklin Male Academy, which later became Louisburg College. I learned recently that Louisburg College intends to disinter Matthew Dickinson from the Edwards Family Cemetery and move his remains onto the college campus. I have been informed further that the college has already had the Edwards Family Cemetery inspected by a cemetery-relocation company, Ward & Ward Cemetery Relocation Services of Rocky Mount, NC.

As spokesman for 14 Edwards Family Descendants—across 3 family branches and over 4 generations—I wish to make it known that we are unanimously opposed to the intended

actions of Louisburg College to disturb the sanctity and integrity of the Edwards Family Cemetery. I have expressed our opposition to Dr. Mark La Branche, President of Louisburg College, but I fear that he intends to proceed with the disinterment despite our objections.

While we recognize that Louisburg College is well intentioned in their plans to relocate Matthew Dickinson's gravesite, we wish to present why this is such a terribly wrong action for the college to take:

Firstly, please understand that the location of Matthew Dickinson's gravesite is part of the historical record. There was an important reason why Matthew Dickinson was interred at his present gravesite location. We might not know that reason presently, but Matthew Dickinson was very well respected in the community, so an important decision had to have been made to bury him at this rural location rather than in the Louisburg cemetery.

Secondly, as family genealogists and historians, we believe that any action that leads to permanent disruption of the historical record should be undertaken only in extreme circumstances, when no other means is available to preserve an historical site. While we understand that the 225th-year anniversary celebrations might be important to Louisburg College, this is trivial reason—in the larger perspective—for disrupting the historical record by disinterring Matthew Dickinson and moving his remains to the campus.

Thirdly, we are very concerned about damage that might be caused to the Edwards Family Cemetery during relocation of Matthew Dickinson's gravesite. We expect that there are unidentified gravesites located within the cemetery perimeter. We base this expectation on past experience, as I discovered the small, primitive, hand-carved headstone of Zedekiah Edwards quite by chance just a few years ago, while clearing brush from the cemetery. The headstone was buried under several inches of soil with only a small corner exposed above the ground surface, and there was no obvious grave depression to mark the site. Prior to this important discovery, we had no information on the location of Zedekiah's gravesite, nor did we know his birth and death dates, which were carved onto the headstone. Zedekiah's first wife (my great-great-great-grandmother), Angelina Pinnell Edwards, and his sister Lucy Edwards Adcock might also be buried nearby. I should note that Zedekiah's gravesite was located toward the front of the cemetery, not far from the gravesite of Matthew Dickinson.

Fourthly, please recognize that most cemetery-relocation services are neither adequately trained nor experienced and often use disinterment techniques that are expeditious and cost efficient but are totally inappropriate for minimizing impact to the historical record. The use of a backhoe to open an historical gravesite—as is shown prominently on the website of Ward & Ward Cemetery Relocation Services (<http://cemeteryrelocation.com/>)—sends shudders up my spine. We would ask you

to please take a few minutes to review content on the website of the Chicora Foundation (<http://www.chicora.org/cemetery-relocation.html>) for a better perspective on cemetery relocation. When I contacted a senior staff member of the Chicora Foundation and presented to him the plans of Louisburg College to disinter Mr. Dickinson and relocate his gravesite, this was his response:

“I would argue in the strongest possible terms that a cemetery relocation company is not appropriate for the removal of a historic burial. Such firms have no forensic or archaeological expertise and will not do an appropriate job. More to the point, however, I question the appropriateness of a removal by anyone -- even us. I see no point in such a removal, at least based on your discussions.”

The Edwards Family Descendants have proposed to Louisburg College an alternative to disinterring Matthew Dickinson and relocating his gravesite. We believe the college could best honor their first president by applying to have his existing gravesite included in the National Register of Historical Places. We believe that Matthew Dickinson’s gravesite might be eligible for this honor under Criterion B, “Graves of persons significant to a particular State, region of the country, or cultural group.” What better way to celebrate the 225th anniversary of Louisburg College than by initiating action that would ensure the preservation of Matthew Dickinson’s gravesite for future generations to come.

According to North Carolina General Statutes, Louisburg College must present their plans to the Franklin County Board of Commissioners for approval. On behalf of the Edwards Family Descendants, I am hoping, sir, to enlist your support and the support of the entire Franklin County Board of Commissioners in opposition to Louisburg College. Well-intentioned or not, their plans to disinter Matthew Dickinson from the Edwards Family Cemetery are misguided. From a legal standpoint, the General Statute that Louisburg College wishes to invoke is inappropriate, since it applies only to “abandoned” cemeteries. GS_65-85(1) provides this definition:

“Abandoned. – Ceased from maintenance or use by the person with legal right to the real property with the intent of not again maintaining the real property in the foreseeable future.”

We would contend that the Edwards Family Cemetery is not abandoned, because family descendants—including myself—do visit the site and perform maintenance when we can. Within the definition of the General Statutes, the cemetery might be considered “neglected” because the family descendants do not live locally and cannot provide maintenance on a regular basis. Nevertheless, this cemetery remains a part of our rich family heritage, and we have not and will not abandon it. Please note that the general statutes for removal of a grave by Louisburg College (GS_65-106) do not apply to neglected cemeteries.

If you wish to speak with me on this matter, please feel free to call me during the workday at my business phone (201-529-5151, ext. 7196). I would happy to answer any

questions you might have about the plans of Louisburg College or about the Edwards family history. You may also contact me by email at sertman@optonline.net.

Sincerely,

Stephen C. Ertman
Spokesman, Edwards Family Descendants

Copies to:
Shane Mitchell, Chair, Franklin County Board of Commissioners
Angela L. Harris, Franklin County Manager

Descendant	Relation to Ancestor(s) Buried in the Edwards Family Cemetery
Stephen Curtis Ertman	ggg-grandson of Zedekiah Gideon & Angelina [Pinnell] Edwards gg-grandson of Rial Theodore Pinnell & Martha Pattie Julia [Hight] Edwards
Joseph Oliver Ertman	gggg-grandson of Zedekiah Gideon & Angelina [Pinnell] Edwards ggg-grandson of Rial Theodore Pinnell & Martha Pattie Julia [Hight] Edwards
Abigail Caryn Ertman	gggg-granddaughter of Zedekiah Gideon & Angelina [Pinnell] Edwards ggg-granddaughter of Rial Theodore Pinnell & Martha Pattie Julia [Hight] Edwards
Patricia Louise Edwards Bowen	gg-granddaughter of Zedekiah Gideon & Angelina [Pinnell] Edwards g-granddaughter of Rial Theodore Pinnell & Martha Pattie Julia [Hight] Edwards
Brian Nestor Bankard	gg-grandson of Zedekiah Gideon & Angelina [Pinnell] Edwards g-grandson of Rial Theodore Pinnell & Martha Pattie Julia [Hight] Edwards
Benet Edwards Bankard	gg-grandson of Zedekiah Gideon & Angelina [Pinnell] Edwards g-grandson of Rial Theodore Pinnell & Martha Pattie Julia [Hight] Edwards
Susan Lynn Wiens	ggg-granddaughter of Zedekiah Gideon & Angelina [Pinnell] Edwards gg-granddaughter of Rial Theodore Pinnell & Martha Pattie Julia [Hight] Edwards
Wyatt James Wiens	gggg-grandson of Zedekiah Gideon & Angelina [Pinnell] Edwards ggg-grandson of Rial Theodore Pinnell & Martha Pattie Julia [Hight] Edwards
Nancy Susan Edwards Gundy	gg-granddaughter of Zedekiah Gideon & Angelina [Pinnell] Edwards g-granddaughter of Rial Theodore Pinnell & Martha Pattie Julia [Hight] Edwards
Barbara Sue Edwards Brown	gg-granddaughter of Zedekiah Gideon & Angelina [Pinnell] Edwards g-granddaughter of Rial Theodore Pinnell & Martha Pattie Julia [Hight] Edwards
Laurie Donaldson	ggg-granddaughter of Zedekiah Gideon & Angelina [Pinnell] Edwards gg-granddaughter of Rial Theodore Pinnell & Martha Pattie Julia [Hight] Edwards
Tamara Brantley Freeman	gggg-granddaughter of Zedekiah Gideon Edwards
Benjamin Webster Freeman	ggggg-grandson of Zedekiah Gideon Edwards
Jordan Emily Freeman	ggggg-granddaughter of Zedekiah Gideon Edwards