

# **The Family of James Aiken (1733-1798) and Elizabeth Reid Aiken**

This sketch is transcribed from a typed copy of an old journal apparently written by a son of David and Nancy Kerr Aiken. The typed copy belonged to Wyatt Aiken, son of D. Wyatt Aiken and Virginia C. Smith Aiken.

## John

the second son, was an industrious man, his wife was known as old "Aunt Betsy", (but her maiden name not remembered.) They raised several sons and daughters. The sons were rather "rough fellows," particularly two of them, Hiram and Hugh, lazy and fond of "likker." Robert, another son, was more industrious and sober, and Joseph, the youngest, was a very good young man. Old Uncle John died about 1835. Aunt Betsy could not manage the wild boys, and they lived from hand to mouth in a log house near Little River until her death, about 1847, and then removed to Alabama and Mississippi.

## Hugh

This old uncle, lived and died in Fairfield District, very near to his brother John's place. Of his family very little is known, but, we think, they moved to the West, also, about the same time that Uncle John's folks did. One son, James Aiken, remained in Fairfield and settled near to Salem Church. He was known as "Squire Jim," a loud talker and important character at a horse race, an inquest, or an old field muster. He never missed attending salesday in Winnsboro, and after loafing, sundry drinks from friends on the street, would be certain to come in late to our house to get one of "Aunt Nancy's" good dinners, as he would say. We boys called him "Loud Jeems," and "Wild Jeems." His brother William was a much more quiet citizen, and a plain practical farmer. James Aiken married a Miss Mary Dixon, a refined Scotch-Irish lady of Charleston, and much too good for him.

## Two

of the sons of James Aiken, Sr., and of Elizabeth Aiken, are thought to have landed in Philadelphia, at what time we know not, and of whom nothing is known.

## David

The youngest child of James and Elizabeth Aiken was born in County Antrim, Ireland, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1788. We have said that he came to this country in 1799, landing at Charleston, then to the "Farm" in Fairfield, and again back to his brother William in Charleston as a store boy, where he became an expert in his peculiar line, that is, in rubbing rust off hardware, and salting green hides, afterward tacking the hides up on the outside of the store to dry in the sun, and when tired at night, he was allowed to occupy the counter for a bed, and cover with any stray blanket, or bolt of homespun not otherwise engaged, provided the bed was "madeup" and the room swept out, before sunrise the next morning.

When going from Fairfield to Charleston to enter this apprenticeship, he caught a young squirrel, and carried it to the city, which he sold for fifty cents. This gave him a start, and after serving his brother William for two years, he got permission to go back to Fairfield. Having a little cash saved up, and the promise of help from his brother, he concluded to settle in Winnsboro, and open a small store, for barter in coon skins, cowhides, indigo, leaf tobacco, and other products which would find a market in Charleston.

This shop was small frame building of two rooms and a shed on Main street, about 150 yards from the present "Aiken Homestead." One of the rooms was the store, the balance of the house was occupied by a "Sullivan" family. An annual trip was made to "The City." Leaf tobacco then was tightly packed into a hogshead, with a hickory pole run through the middle, extending through both heads as an axis, to this was hitched the old horse following the wagon loaded with its skins, indigo, etc., and the trip to Charleston was begun and ended in three weeks.

On one of these trips, David, from the proceeds of his produce, bought the first negro he ever owned. State Street was then the negro market for fresh importations from Africa. He went round, and with \$200 saved, purchased "Jack" and returned with his possession to Fairfield.

A few acres in cotton was cultivated the next year, and from its sale in the fall at sixty two and a half cents per pound, another darkey was bought, this time a female, "Betsy" returned with the wagon to Fairfield, and was shortly after the wife of Jack. Annually a few more acres in cotton were cultivated, a few more

When they moved into this dwelling, then the finest in the upper country, four children had been born---James Reid, Elizabeth Rachel, Joseph Daniel and Carolina Margaret....

but, to return to...

**Nancy Kerr** (Wife of David Aiken) born in County Antrim, Ireland, February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1784 she came to America at the early age, say four or five years, landing at Philadelphia. Who came with her is not known, but we think, her father (her mother having died in Ireland)., who did not live long here, and she was living with her uncle at the time she was married--- having removed to York when her father died in Philadelphia.

**Major Joseph Kerr** was Major of Cavalry in the War of 1812, and died in Winnsboro, January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1822, aged 68 years and four months, from the effects of wounds inflicted by sabre cuts about the head. His remains lie in the Presbyterian Churchyard there.

**Eliza Margaret Kerr**, her sister, after the marriage of Nancy, made a home with her, and while on a visit to Kentucky in 1833 she was taken sick and died at Flemingsbury, 18<sup>th</sup> August.

**Daniel Kerr**, an industrious planter, in the "Means Settlement," Buckhead, Fairfield District, was a cousin of Mrs. Aiken. He was a Northern man, probably from Philadelphia also, and her only surviving relative at the time of her death.

I once met a Mr. Dubois, Jeweler, of Philadelphia, who claimed kin with the Kerr's, but his recollection of their early history was limited.

accumulation of wealth was slow, and by the most difficult means, hard licks and plodding ways.

David Aiken was remarkable healthy. He ate thin soups or cabbage and turnip greens, if well boiled, fat bacon and corn bread, for dinner. Cared little for vegetables, except soft boiled potatoes, raw tomatoes with vinegar--- indifferent to sweet-meats, except a pudding, and ate cold bread, fried strip bacon, cup of coffee at five o'clock a.m. for his breakfast, and then to his work.

After dinner he would take a nap in his chair before going out on a long summer's afternoon, but he never would lie down in the day time, and if the work was beyond five miles from home he carried a cold lunch in his pocket for dinner that day.

On one occasion he had the hands rolling logs on one of the plantations, and in his eagerness to finish the job he was helping roll when a log got beyond their control and rolled against another, catching the forefinger of his right hand between them and mashed it dreadfully. He tied it up in his red "bandanna" and rode home ten miles on horseback, had the finger dressed, and while sick and faint, lay down two hours. When this sick spell wore off, he ordered his horse and rode back to the work, against the protest of the family physician.

The broken finger ever after interfered with a free use of a pen, and his handwriting was materially changed for the worse.

He was never confined to bed a whole day in his life, and in his last illness only two days elapsed between the first attack and his death.

He was scrupulously cleanly for such a hard worker. Always wore a "biled shirt" and it must be made at home, and wholly of linen, with standing collar, and nicely starched. Always washed his hands before and after eating. Never used a tooth brush, but rinsed his mouth with cold water furiously after each meal.

He had erected on the corner of a lot near his dwelling a small shop, which he rented to a barber, with the understanding that he should be "clean shaved" every Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, and his hair must be trimmed once a month. He was never known to wear a beard, never smoked a cigar or pipe in his life, nor took a chew of tobacco, and would not converse with any one

He required all the hands to appear on Monday morning in clean clothes, and if washing had been neglected from laziness, he required the lazy ones to wash that (Monday) night, and appear in clean apparel Tuesday morning, or suffer the penalty.

If any negro was dissatisfied and preferred another Master, he would let him find one, or if any of his slaves ran away, to shun work, or for stealing, when caught, he would have to find another Master, or be sold to the highest bidder, but if all behaved themselves, and attended to their work, he would not part with them, nor would he separate families, however much might be offered in cash for a desirable hand, or a skilled mechanic.

This narrative of past events would not be complete if we omitted a short sketch of one, who acted a conspicuous part, in the rearing and training of the children of David and Nancy Aiken, and who contributed in no small degree to the success and welfare of that family circle. I refer to . . .

### **Mary Guy**

Her mother having died, she was left to the care of a worthless father, and Mrs. Aiken took her into her family in 1822, to raise her up in a proper manner. She was most efficient as a nurse, help, or housekeeper, and the younger children, viz. Hugh Kerr, William Edward, David Wyatt, Isaac Means, and Augustus Milton, became in after years as fond of and as attached to "Marrie" as to their mother. She was ever ready to lend a helping hand to any duty. She was a pious Christian woman, a consistent member of the Methodist Church, and attended services, even in her old age, when too blind to see her way to the church.

She died at the residence of Dr. W. E. Aiken in Winnsboro, of paralysis, on 9<sup>th</sup>, January, 1880, being about 86 years old, and was buried by the side of her mother in the Presbyterian church yard.

**Hugh Kerr Aiken**

**Mary Gayle**

born 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1822  
married 15<sup>th</sup> Dec., 1852 to  
of Mobile, Alabama, who  
still survives. He was killed  
in battle near "Mt. Elon"  
Church, Darlington Co., S.C.  
27<sup>th</sup> February, 1865 during  
Sherman's raid through S.C.

**William Edward Aiken**

**Patsie Eloise Woodward**

born 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1826  
married 14<sup>th</sup> Jan., 1852 to  
of Talladega, Alabama  
both now living in  
Winnsboro

**David Wyatt Aiken**

**Mattie Gaillard**

**Virginia Carolina Smith**

born 17<sup>th</sup> March, 1828  
married 27<sup>th</sup> April, 1852 to  
of Winnsboro, S.C., who  
died there 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1855  
married second to  
of Stoney Point,  
Abbeville County, S.C.  
on 27<sup>th</sup> January, 1857  
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he died in Cokesbury,  
6<sup>th</sup> April, 1887

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