

THE BELL COMMUNITY

As if always mindful of the Biblical injunction, "Be fruitful and multiply," William II and Ann Bell were the parents of twelve children born to them from 1775 to 1797. In addition to William III, James, Ann Nancy, Margaret, John, Charles and Thomas, already mentioned, there came Hugh in 1789, Elizabeth in 1790, Adam in 1791, Robert in 1795, and Isabella, their last child, in 1797.

It is understandable, then, that the neighborhood along the road to Ashford's Ferry, between Little River and the ridge, would become known and designated on county maps in the early 1820's as the "Bell Community." And as the last child was born there in 1797, some of the older children were preparing for marriage.

These are the families of the children of William II and Ann Montgomery Bell after they were married and established their homes in the Bell Community:

Family of William Bell III

William was married to Sarah Montgomery about the year 1800 or 1801. There were born to this union: James, 1802, who died 1809: [1] William M. (IV), April 10, 1803, who married Margaret Milling: [2] Nancy, whose date of birth is unknown, married James Smith: [3] Margaret, whose date of birth is unknown, married William Gray: [4] and Jane, 1806, who died 1829. [5]

Sarah Montgomery Bell died October 30, 1813, at the age of 36 years and was buried at the Old Brick Church. [6]

- [1] Grave marker, Old Brick Church, Fairfield County, South Carolina.
- [2] U. S. Census 1850, Oktobeha County, Mississippi. n. Information relating to wife of William Bell IV supplied by Mrs. Margaret Bell Gaston, granddaughter, of Starkville, Mississippi.
- [3] Estate of William Bell III, Department Archives & History, Columbia, S.C.
- [4] Ibid.

Eliza Brown, a cousin of William III, born in Ireland, October 9, [7] 1799, came to this country about 1820, possibly with the McCullough family, relatives of Ann Montgomery Bell, wife of William II. William III and Eliza Brown were married about 1821; and there were born as issue of this marriage: Charles, 1823; [8] Thomas R., 1824, [9] who is believed to have married; David M., 1827; [10] Hugh Cainin, 1828, and died 1833; [11] Elizabeth J., 1830; Mary C., 1833; and John C., 1834. [12]

Family of James Bell

James, second child of William II and Ann Bell, was married to Jane, whose family surname is unknown, about the year 1801. Born as issue of the marriage, were: William, date of birth unknown; Margaret, date of birth unknown, who married James Watt; Nancy, date of birth unknown, married P. (or) K. Taliaferro; and James M., 1807, married Martha, whose family surname is unknown; and Sarah, December 4, 1809, who married Samuel B. McCreight. [13]

James Bell, Sr. died October 11, 1809, shortly before the birth of his last child, Sarah, and is buried at the Old Brick Church. [14]

Family of John and Ann Nancy Bell Hawthorne

Ann Nancy Bell was married to John Hawthorne and they had four children, all daughters: Margaret, Isabella, Mary and Nancy; their dates of birth being unknown. Ann Nancy Bell Hawthorne died November 16, 1825 [15] and was buried at the Old Brick Church. After her death John Hawthorne and the children moved to Georgia. [16]

[5] Grave marker, Old Brick Church, Fairfield County, South Carolina.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] U. S. Census 1850, Fairfield County, South Carolina.

[9] Grave marker, Old Brick Church, Fairfield County, South Carolina.

[10] U.S. Census 1850, Fairfield County, South Carolina.

[11] Grave marker, Old Brick Church, Fairfield County, South Carolina.

[12] U.S. Census 1850, Fairfield County, South Carolina.

Family of Margaret Bell McGill:

Margaret Bell married a McGill, whose given name is unknown. Her dates of birth and death are unknown, however, she was living in 1825 when her father passed away. In his last will and testament he bequeathed to her a number of slaves, but this bequest was in trust for her lifetime, and then to her children. We can assume, perhaps, that she was in bad health at the time of her father's death, and also that she had children. The estate of her brother Adam refers to the children of Margaret as heirs, so we may assume that she predeceased him. Adam died in 1833. [17]

Family of John Bell

John Bell, at the age of 21 years, was married to Elizabeth Hawthorne, aged 20, on April 1, 1802. The Hawthorne family were charter members of the Old Brick Church congregation. Elizabeth passed away in the fifth month of the marriage, August 2, 1802.

About the year 1806, John was married to Elizabeth Montgomery, daughter of James and Margaret Montgomery of the Chester District. Born to John and Elizabeth were: Margaret Montgomery, September 14, 1807, who married Enoch Bolen; James Montgomery, May 5, 1810, who married Mary Bigham; John, Jr., February 18, 1814, who died October 2, 1835; and William Joseph, 1816, who died August 27, 1837. [18]

[13] Last will and testament of William Bell II, Department Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.

[14] Grave marker, Old Brick Church, Fairfield County, South Carolina.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Estate of William Bell II, Department Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.

[17] Estate of Adam Bell, Department Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.

[18] Family Bible of John Bell, as copied by Eula W. Bell and Dora Bell.

Family of Charles Bell

Charles Bell, aged 23, was married to Margaret Montgomery, aged 22, on November 27, 1807. She was a daughter of Hugh Montgomery II and his wife, Margaret.

Born to Charles and Margaret were: James, September 23, 1808; William, September 3, 1810; Charles, July 14, 1812, who died September 8, 1825; Mary Ann, May 13, 1815, married the Reverend James Boyce, January 24, 1833; David, January 4, 1818; Nancy, February 4, 1820, married the Reverend J. B. Watt, December 31, 1839.

Margaret Montgomery Bell died November 1, 1820 and was buried at the Old Brick Church. On September 5, 1822, Charles was married to Jane Martin and there were born to them: Edward Martin, July 29, 1823, who died August 31, 1825; Margaret Caroline, November 8, 1825, married John A. Brice, April 7, 1846; Charles E. March 27, 1828, married Isabella Witherspoon, March 18, 1853; John P., November 12, 1830, married Isabella Hemphill Caldwell, December 8, 1858; Celia M., June 9, 1833, married J. S. Brice, May 9, 1850; and Isabella E., March 5, 1836, who died May 26, of that same year. [19]

Family of Thomas Bell

Thomas, at the age of 30 years, was married to Martha McClure Martin on October 5, 1815. There were born to this union: James, August 23, 1816, who died December 9, 1845; Margaret McClure, May 10, 1818, married her cousin, William Bell, son of Hugh and Martha Watt Bell, on December 24, 1839; Sarah, September 25, 1820, who died September 23, 1828; Edward Martin, October 8, 1822, married Martha Simonton Douglass, May 19, 1846; Nancy Jane, April 13, 1825, married William Martin; and Martha Sarah, October 16, 1828. [20]

[19] Family Bible of Charles Bell, as copied by Eula W. Bell.

[20] Family Bible of Thomas Bell.

Family of Hugh Bell

Hugh married Martha Watt, daughter of William Watt. As issue of this marriage: William, January 4, 1814, married his cousin, Margaret McClure Bell, December 24, 1839; Jane, , married Frank Ware; James W., 1821, married Elizabeth Brown; Mary, 1822; John, 1827; Sarah, 1830; Henrietta Susannah, April 27, 1834, who died December, 1855,

unmarried. [21] also (Nancy Rebecca Bell who married (Wm. C. McDowell) (b. 24 May 1818 - 23 July 1856) (30 July 1814 - 13 Sept 1857) married 22 Dec 1840 moved to Hugh's family Oktibbeha Co. Miss. Family of William and Elizabeth Bell McKell

Elizabeth married William McKell in Fairfield District, South Carolina and moved to Starkville, Mississippi. It is not known if there was issue of this marriage.

Family of Robert Bell

Robert married Rebecca Martin in Fairfield District in South Carolina and migrated to Mississippi. Rebecca is believed to have died enroute. He married Nancy Y., whose surname is not known. Among his children buried in the A. R. P. Cemetery in Starkville, Mississippi are: Jane Y., 1831, died September 21, 1846; John M., April 23, 1835, died December 8, 1854; Nancy Elizabeth, 1839, died December 1, 1850; Mary Anna, June 7, 1845, died September 23, 1863. [22]

The U. S. Census of 1850, Oktibbeha County, Mississippi, reflects Bell daughters living with their aunt, Isabella Bell Montgomery, and these are likely children of Robert Bell who were orphaned at the time of his death in 1848. [23]

[21] U.S. Census 1850, Oktibbeha County, Mississippi and Cemetery Records of Oktibbeha County, Mississippi, Mississippi Genealogical Society, Starkville, Mississippi.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

Family of Hugh Montgomery II and Isabella Bell Montgomery

Hugh Montgomery II and Isabella Bell were married in Fairfield District, South Carolina. There were born to them: Nancy Elizabeth, 1824, married Dr. M. Brainard Barnwell; William B., August 21, 1829, married Sarah Glenn; Robert, 1834. [24]

On either side of the road to Ashford's Ferry (State Highway 34) from Little River to the ridge, in the 1820's, were farms or plantations of the children and grandchildren of William Bell II, for the most part, fields of cotton.

Near the Old Brick Church lived James Kincaid, a retired sea captain, who brought the first tomato to this country and developed it as a food. And "almost every resident of Fairfield will tell you without hesitation that the cotton gin was invented by James Kincaid, though Whitney received accolades as the inventor. In Fairfield it is stated that the inventor stole the idea after visiting Kincaid's home and watching the machine, which was originally to remove the burrs from sheep's wool. In Mr. Kincaid's absence, his wife allowed the northerner to see the machine, he promptly made off for Savannah, Georgia, sketched the intricacies, and applied for a patent." [25]

But to whomever belong the accolades for the invention of the cotton gin, its advent brought the development of the cotton culture, based on the slave system, and wealth and sumptuous living for many. For already in the early 1800's, fine colonial homes were rising to grace an already beautiful landscape. But the wealth of William Bell II was not to be measured by his place of abode, nor by sumptuous living, for that matter, but rather by the twelve farms or plantations staked off by him for his children.

The family social life seems to have been closely associated with

[24] n. This information obtained from the U.S. Census 1850, Oktibbeha County, Mississippi and Cemetery Records of Oktibbeha County, Mississippi, and may be incomplete.

[25] A. Fairfield Sketch Book, Dolich, page _____.

the activities of the church and its congregation. It was at their church that the Synod of the Carolinas, which is now the Associate Reformed Synod of the South, was organized on May 9, 1803, with the Reverend James Rogers acting as moderator. [26]

Sunday was a very special day in the lives of the Bell family, a day set aside for worship at the Old Brick Church and for fellowship and visitation. For it was on this day each week, that William II and Ann, their eleven living children and more than forty grandchildren, would assemble together to worship, and, after services, have dinner on the grounds of the church, shaded by the large and towering white oak trees. But then on occasion, they would be invited to the homes of members living nearest the church, such as the Kincaids.

In the early 1800's Charles, fourth son of William II and Ann, had won election to the office of Justice of Peace in the Justice District embracing the Monticello area. He also had established a grain mill on Little River, or one of its tributaries, and was engaged in the milling business. [27]

Among other events of the era was that of John's departure for North Carolina. John, third son of William II and Ann, " * * * settled early in life on the middle fork of Crowder's Creek, in Lincoln County, the part that is now Gaston County, N.C., in a neighborhood where he had relatives. Having lost his bride of five months, Elizabeth Hawthorne, he married Elizabeth, daughter of James and Margaret Montgomery, who were his mother's kin, and who had moved to Crowder's Creek from Chester County, S.C. in 1301. John Bell received from James Montgomery a plantation of 116 acres, and he owned other land, besides." [28]

[26] The Centennial History of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.

[27] See affidavit of William Bell III, Estate of William Bell II, Department Archives & History, Columbia, South Carolina.

[28] Notes of Eula W. Bell.

For more than a quarter century there had been but a single death in the William Bell II household, that of the second son, James, in the year 1809.

But death visited the family for the second time, when on November 16, 1823, Ann Montgomery Bell, wife of William II, passed away, in the 69th year of her life. [29] In something less than a year from her death, they would have celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary. We can be almost certain that those of the Bell Community, including the collateral kin, would have filled the sanctuary of the Old Brick Church as the celebrated Reverend James Rogers delivered the eulogy. And so, also, we may presume that among the mourners that day, and seated in the servants' gallery [30] of the church, were a Negro girl, named Winney, a mulatto girl, named Sukey, and a Negro man, named Jack, all faithful household servants. [31]

Ann Montgomery Bell was laid to rest at the Old Brick Church, where, beside her resting place, was a space reserved by William II for his own interment. When "the old gentlemen," as he was affectionately referred to, was assisted onto his wagon or buckboard for the ride back to his home, he likely sensed the events of that day marked the beginning of the end of the immigrant era.

Living at the plantation with the father was Adam, the seventh son, who never married. The youngest son, Robert, who married Rebecca Martin, may also have been living there with his family. And there were the faithful household servants. It is likely "the old gentlemen," at the age of seventy, left the planting of money crops to his sons. But he still held title to his plantation, or so much as was left of it, after staking off lands

[29] Grave marker, Old Brick Church, Fairfield County, South Carolina.

[30] The term "servant" rather than "slave" was used to denote the gallery used by the family slaves, who attended religious services with their masters. See plaque in Old Brick Church.

[31] In last will and testament of William Bell II, these servants were bequeathed to some of his children. Department Archives & History, Columbia, South Carolina.

to his children. And he owned another tract of two hundred fifty acres that he had leased. Occasionally one of the children would be in need of financial assistance; and to the end that none of them should be dealt with unfairly, a cash advance was treated as a loan. For it was about this period of time that his son, Hugh, borrowed fifty dollars. [32]

Perhaps the waning years or a lingering illness, prompted William Bell II to call for his neighbors, Robert Milling, L. T. Rabb, and William Hawthorne, to witness his last will and testament, a document to which he would be unable to affix his signature - only his mark,, that May 14, 1824. [33]

To his son, William Bell III, he would leave the sum of three hundred dollars (\$300.00), and the family Bible, or a new one at his choice; to his grandchildren, William Bell, Margaret Watt, Nancy Bell, James Bell, and Sarah Bell, children of his son, James, deceased; and Margaret Hawthorne, Isabella Hawthorne, Mary Hawthorne, and Nancy Hawthorne, children of his daughter, Ann Nancy Bell Hawthorne, each the sum of fifty dollars (\$50.00). And, for the payment of these bequests, he directed that his parcel of two hundred fifty acres of land be sold. To his youngest sons, Adam and Robert, he would leave his plantation. Of his faithful household servants, the Negro girl, named Winney, together with a bed and furniture, would go to son, Adam; to son, Robert, the mullato girl, named Sukey, together with a bed and furniture, and to son, John, the Negro man, named Jack, together with his (William II's) saddle.

All the rest of his Negro slaves, he would give and bequeath to his children, Margaret McGill, Charles Bell, Thomas Bell, Hugh Bell, Betsey McKell, and Isabella Montgomery, each to share and share alike. The share of daughter, Margaret McGill, was left in trust for the use and benefit of her children after her death.

[32] See Footnote [27].

[33] Last will and testament of William Bell II, Department Archives & History, Columbia, South Carolina.

And, finally, William Bell II bequeathed his Brown's Dictionary to his son, Charles, who, with son-in-law, Hugh Montgomery III, were named co-executors of his last will and testament.

CHAPTER XI
THE THIRD MIGRATION

It was late summer, 1825, and more than a year since William Bell II had touched a pen as his mark to his last will and testament. Whether or not he suffered a terminal or lingering illness, is left to conjecture, but on September 3, 1825, the patriarch of the Bell Community passed away, in the 72nd year of his life. [1]

Probably no person outside the immediate family knew him better than did the Reverend James Rogers, his pastor for more than a quarter century. The Reverend Rogers had baptized his children, performed their marriage ceremonies, and they had received their education in his school. If we could but recapture the words of the Reverend Rogers in his eulogy of William Bell II, we would know much more of his life than the fragmentary records tell us today. But just as we know that his name is implanted for posterity on the Deed to the Old Brick Church, and his labor embodied in the brick that line its sturdy walls, the Reverend Rogers might also have noted that William Bell II had drawn inspiration from the old books in his home - the Holy Bible, The Confession of Faith and Catechism, The Scot's Worthies, Cloud of Witnesses, and the Crookshank's History of the Church of Scotland. And, as the Reverend Rogers closed his Bible and stepped from the small pulpit of the sanctuary to speak personally with the family, he might well have said to them, and for us today - therein is your family heritage.

The estate of William Bell II was administered by the co-executors, Charles Bell and Hugh Montgomery III. In order to pay the cash bequests for the grandchildren named in the will, as well as to William Bell III, the executors, on November 2, 1825, sold eight Negro slaves for a total of \$2,852.00, or \$356.50 each. At this same sale, they disposed of many

[1] Grave marker, Old Brick Church, Fairfield County, South Carolina.

items of personal property, including: a "Side Board" for \$15.00; a "Lot of Books" for \$6.00; "20 Old Fat Hogs" for \$100.00; "14 Stock Hogs & Pigs" for \$21.00.

On the 10th day of January, 1829, the executors sold 255 acres of land for \$2.00 per acre, or a total of \$510.00. This property was sold on credit, payable in twelve months.

Hugh, son of William Bell II, had borrowed fifty dollars from his father. William III, now William Bell, Senior, made oath before his brother, Charles, Justice of Peace, to the following:

"Wm. Bell Senr. swears before me that sometime in the year 1824 previous to the death of his father Wm. Bell he heard the old gentleman saying that a certain note which he held on his son Hugh Bell for Fifty Dollars was all paid but thirteen or fourteen dollars - and has reason to believe that the ballance was paid by said Hugh Bell as means was procured for that purpose."

In settlement of the legacies to William Bell, Senior, and the grandchildren, Charles, one of the executors, on March 9, 1829, paid to P. (or) R. M. Tallaferrro \$50.00, amount of legacy to his wife, formerly Nancy Bell, and the same amount to James Watt, legacy of his wife, formerly Margaret Bell. On January 1, 1831, John Hawthorne received \$228.00, amount of legacies due his daughters, Margaret, Isabella, Mary and Nancy. February 3, 1831, William M. Bell received \$56.30, the amount of legacy and interest. August 19, 1831, Samuel G. McCreight received \$57.00, legacy due his wife, formerly Sarah Bell, and the interest. On February 17, 1829, James Bell received \$54.48; and March 30, 1830, William Bell received \$327.00.

And, finally, among the papers in the file of the estate, is the notation of the executors of a receipt for the Negro slave, Jack:

"Received of John Bell of the State of North Carolina, Lincoln County, his receipt for a Negro man by name Jack about twenty-six years of age which Negro Man was willed to him by William Bell Senr. decd of South Carolina Fairfield District." [2]

By the early 1830's, the cotton fields in the Piedmont were badly eroded and leached, the humus gone from the onetime fertile soil. Crop production had declined steadily, requiring greater acreage. And, with all of this, a steadily increasing population to share the arable land. So it was little wonder that the Bells, at least most of them, turned their eyes westward for land on which to plant cotton.

In the State of Mississippi, and particularly Oktibbeha County, the Choctaw Indians had been removed, the county surveyed, and the land offered at public sale:

"In 1832, or 1833, the report of the surveyors became public. This described the county; giving not only section and quarter-section lines, but adding comments on topography and fertility; noting timber and streams and lay of the land. This valuable report is still in existence. Upon its publication, the Government threw open the lands to settlement, and on November 27, 1833, the Land Office began to sell and to record claims at a dollar and a quarter an acre." [3]

But just as many of the family were in the process of liquidating their holdings, as also were their neighbors, in preparation for the migration to the State of Mississippi, Adam, seventh son of William II and Ann Bell, died in 1833, and was laid to rest with others of his family at the Old Brick Church. [4]

From all that is known, it would appear the four eldest sons of William II - William III, John, Charles and Thomas, never intended to

[2] Estate of William Bell II, Department Archives & History, Columbia, South Carolina.

[3] Historical Sketches, Oktibbeha County, page _____.

[4] Grave marker, Old Brick Church, Fairfield County, South Carolina.

move to Mississippi. Thomas, however, had acquired property there. [5]

It was Robert, youngest son of William II, who led the way westward about the year 1834. It may have been that Robert, then 39 years of age, had been chosen by the group to go first and purchase land claims in their names.

Eula W. Bell, in her notes, refers to Miss Janie Hutchinson of Monticello, who remembered her mother saying that Robert was the first of the Bell family to leave home. It is believed that a daughter, Isabella, was born to Robert and his wife, Rebecca, in the State of Tennessee in 1834. [6]

We know that his route of travel would have taken him first to the State of North Carolina and then to Tennessee. Likely with two covered wagons, laden with two months' supply of grain and rations and all of their personal effects, Robert and wife Rebecca, then heavy with child, and Negro slaves, including the household servant, Sukey, first headed northward, possibly to his brother John's home on the middle fork of Crowder's Creek in Lincoln County, North Carolina. From thence, his route of travel would have taken him to a road leading from Lumberton, North Carolina to the Smokies and into Tennessee.

Those of the Bell family who joined the wagon trains to Mississippi were:

Hugh, son of William II, his wife, Martha, and likely all of their children except William, who remained behind in Fairfield District.

Robert, youngest son of William II, his wife, Rebecca, and their children.

Elizabeth, daughter of William II, and her husband, William McKell.

Isabella, youngest daughter of William II, her husband, Hugh Montgomery III, and their children.

[5] Last Will and Testament of Thomas Bell, Department Archives & History, Columbia, South Carolina.

[6] Notes of Eula W. Bell.
n. See U.S. Census 1850, Oktibbeha County, Mississippi, Household of Isabella Montgomery.

James, the son of James, grandson of William II, and his wife, whose name is unknown; and his sister, Sarah, with her husband, Samuel G. McCreight. [7]

William IV, grandson of William II, his wife, Margaret, and children; his sister, Nancy, and her husband, James Smith; and his sister, Margaret, and her husband, William Gray. [8]

And finally, three sons of Charles - James, William and David, grandsons of William II. [9]

The wagon trains probably took a route that carried them to the Savannah River at Augusta, Georgia, and across that State to LaGrange. In a cemetery at LaGrange, Georgia is the grave marker of a Nancy Bell, as yet unidentified. Some of the Bell wives are believed to have died enroute, and probably some of the children. James, son of James, lingered in Georgia for two years, where two of his children were born. His wife probably died there, inasmuch as his wife, Martha, as reflected by the U.S. Census of 1850 for Oktibbeha County, Mississippi, was too young to have been the mother of his older children.

Just as their ancestors had migrated from Scotland to Ireland as yeomen farmers, taking with them their flinty Presbyterianism, so, too, had some of the Bells of Fairfield District come to Mississippi with equal skills and religious zeal. For it was only shortly after they had arrived that the Bells and their neighbors organized for religious services. Included in this first group were Robert Bell and Elizabeth Bell McKell, children of William II, Hugh Montgomery III, husband of Isabella, daughter of William I, William Bell, Sr., believed to be a son of Charles Bell, and William Bell, Jr. (IV), son of William III, who was at that time the Senior William Bell, still residing in Fairfield District.

[7] U.S. Census 1850, Oktibbeha County, Mississippi.

[8] Estate of William Bell III, Department Archives & History, Columbia, South Carolina.

[9] Estate of Charles Bell, Department Archives & History, Columbia, South Carolina.

Carroll, we are told:

"The Reform Church Presbyterians had preaching in 1839, organized formally in 1840, and built a church-house in 1841. The building, a wooden structure, stood at the juncture of east Main St. and West Point Rd., people called it the Reform, the Seceder, or the United Presbyterian Church. The charter members were Margaret Fleming, Jane Wiseman, Elizabeth McKell, Hugh Montgomery, Robert Bell, William Bell, Sr., William Bell, Jr., and John and James Wiseman. The membership was 25 in 1842; and David Pressley was pastor."

It was their dedication and their skill as planners that would enable the Bells and other early settlers of Starkville to see that community become the capital of the farming aristocracy of Mississippi. As a landmark today of that aristocracy is "The Cedars," the home built by David Montgomery on a high knoll overlooking his cotton fields. At his death, the property was purchased by W. B. Montgomery, son of Hugh Montgomery II and his wife, Isabella Bell Montgomery, youngest daughter of William Bell II. In "Mississippi, a Guide to the Magnolia State" is found this reference to "The Cedars":

"Left from Starkville on State Road 23 1.3 miles to the Montgomery home (open by appointment.) Built in 1839 by David Montgomery and modeled after a 2-story 18th Century English dwelling. It is marked by restraint of treatment, no unnecessary details detracting from its good proportion. Long green blinds hang at the small-paned windows, and walls and columns are white. Brick chimneys, mellowed to a faint rose, flank the ends. The house sits on a knoll in a grove of ancient cedars."

CHAPTER XII

YEARS OF PESTILENCE

Hardly a household in Fairfield District had escaped the impact of the migration westward. Almost overnight, the Community of Starkville in Mississippi was like a transplant of life from old Fairfield. It seems that most of the older children of the families, whose ties were not so firmly rooted as to deter them, moved westward, almost en masse. About thirty in number were those of the Bell family community who had joined the migration, for they, like their forefathers, were filled with an indomitable pioneering spirit, lured on by the prospect of purchasing land for one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre and the promise of a cotton culture that mirrored wealth and gracious living.

But as the striping community of Starkville had gained most of the young talent of Fairfield District, it marked the beginning of a long period of regression in the community life back in South Carolina, and eventually to the day when it would be said of the Bell Community, though once there were many, now there are none.

A culture that had evolved among these Scotch-Irish immigrant descendants over a period of some three-score and ten years - industry, frugality and God-fearing - it was all still there, but surely noticeable were the empty pews each Sabbath at the Old Brick Church. The very old were in attendance, as also the youth, but the many young married couples and their children, who had contributed so much to the spiritual and material vitality of the church, were no longer there. Moreover, death had taken their pastor-teacher, the celebrated Reverend James Rogers.

The Reverend Rogers was succeeded in the pulpit at the Old Brick Church by the Reverend James Boyce. Reverend Boyce was married to Mary Ann Bell, daughter of Charles Bell, son of William Bell II.

Few, if any, of the children or grandchildren of William Bell II, prior to 1840, had the benefit of a higher education. South Carolina had established a State University at Columbia, but among the Associate Reformed Presbyterians, it was considered a corrupt institution and they refused to permit their children to enroll. This led to the establishment by them of the State's first four-year sectarian college: " * * * Due West was the holy city of the Associate Reformed Presbyterians. The last named sect, by the way, were anything but newfangled, or liberal Presbyterians. They claimed, to the contrary, a purer devotion to John Knox; reformation, polity, zealous to keep their sons from corruption in Columbia, they opened at Due West the state's first four year denominational college - Erskin - in 1839." [1]

About 1835, John Bell, son of William II, sold his lands on Crowder's Creek in North Carolina, the last tract being a piece of meadow land bequeathed him by James Montgomery. John and Elizabeth, by joint deed for \$222.00 conveyed "1 acre and 70 square perches" to Robert Barber on January 14, 1835. On January 25 of that year, he held a sale to dispose of part of his personal property and immediately thereafter removed to his native Fairfield District.

An acute, infectious, often fatal, febrile disease, characterized by jaundice, hemorrhages and vomiting, its virus transmitted by the yellow-fever mosquito, found its way into parts of the South in the 1830's, though not epidemic until the mid-40's. We can only assume that the many deaths among the young and middle aged of that era were attributable to it.

At this period of time, John and wife Elizabeth, together with their only surviving son, James Montgomery Bell, and his family, were living at the old Bell Place, then owned by his brother, Charles.

From the notes of Eula W. Bell we are told that:

[1]

"In 1843 John Bell and his son James Montgomery Bell bought a plantation in partnership in Chester County on Rocky Creek. Deed Book DD, page 372, shows this purchase of 154 acres for \$432.57 from David Willson. The land was bounded by lands of Alexander Barber, John Nesbit, and Mr. Kilgore. Witnesses were W. Flenniken and John F. Bigham.)A note should be made about this John F. Bigham, who was the brother of Mary Bigham Bell, wife of James Montgomery Bell. Mr. Bigham never had any children and was especially considerate of all his relatives. He married Miss Jane Johnson who was the beloved 'Aunt Jenny' to all her husband's kin, as well as her own. They are buried at Hopewell.)

"On this farm on Rocky Creek John Bell and his wife Elizabeth Montgomery lived in one house, alone, being cared for through the years by the faithful Negro Jack. A very short distance away, probably not more than a hundred yards, lived James Montgomery Bell and his family. In fact they were so near that James Montgomery Bell's wife every morning took the children to their grandfather John's for morning prayers, (her husband at that period of his life not being much given to prayer) and on the way home carried up a bucket of water from the spring. The children who were taken to grandfather John's for morning prayers received there impressions for good that they never forgot. Charles James Bell spoke often to his sons of that period. John and his wife were dependent upon the daughter-in-law Mary for much attention and care, and after her death April 24, 1848, they moved back to the old home place in Fairfield County * * * John Bell at the time of his marriage 'was provided for' by his father William Bell of Fairfield Co., S. C., and James Montgomery, his father-in-law, gave him land in Lincoln Co., N. C., but he was never very successful in a financial way, and also he suffered from much bitterness of heart because of the way Charles Bell executed the will of William Bell (II)."

John Bell lost three children in the 1830's: Margaret Montgomery

Bolen, on January 12, 1832; John, Jr., October 2, 1835; and William Joseph, August 27, 1837.

The yellow fever had reached epidemic proportions throughout the South. In Starkville, Mississippi, Elizabeth Bell McKell, daughter of William Bell II, died on June 2, 1842; on May 7, 1844, Nancy Elizabeth, daughter of Hugh Montgomery III and wife Isabella Bell. Back in Fairfield District, on November 27, 1844, Charles Bell, Sr. passed away and was buried beside his first wife, Margaret Montgomery, at the Old Brick Church. On June 9, 1845, his son, William, died at Starkville, Mississippi; as did his son, James, on December 26 of the same year; and a daughter, Mary Ann Boyce, of Fairfield District, on December 5, 1847.

William Bell III, first born of William II, at Fairfield District on July 2, 1845, and was buried at the Old Brick Church beside his first wife, Sarah Montgomery. Also at Fairfield District, James, son of Thomas Bell, died December 9, 1845; Martha Jane, daughter of William, the son of Hugh Bell, on January 18, 1845; and her brothers, Thomas Jefferson, September 3, 1847, and James Erskin, April 24, 1848; Margaret Caroline Brice, daughter of Charles Bell, died March 1, 1848.

And back in Starkville, in the family of Robert Bell, son of William II, Robert's second wife, Nancy Y., died February 3, 1846; his daughter, Jane Y., on September 2, 1846; his third wife, Catherine A., on August 30, 1847; Robert died on July 19, 1848; his daughter, Nancy Elizabeth, on December 1, 1850; and his son, John M., December 8, 1854. Also in Starkville, Hugh Montgomery II, husband of Isabella Bell Montgomery, died September 2, 1849.

From the notes of Eula W. Bell is an account of:

"A 'store bill' made at the time of the death of Mary Bigham Bell, aged 40 (wife of James Montgomery Bell) six weeks after the birth of her baby, William Thomas, throws light upon the customs of the times when

when shrouds were used for burial garments, while the handmade coffins were covered and lined with cloth. The footing was fine net trimming for caps, collars and ruffles. Under date of April 24, 1848, the following items were entered:

1	Bottle port wine	.75
9 yards	White cambric at .25	2.25
2 1/4 yards	Footing	.20
1/4 yard	Book muslin	.10
1 pair	White cotton gloves	.12 1/2
1 pair	White hose	.25
4 1/2 yards	Black covering at .37 1/2	1.68 1/4
6 1/2 "	Lining at .14	.91
4 1/2 "	Black ribbon at .15	.67 1/2

"Her baby was taken to be reared by the Misses Peden of the Peden's Bridge Road, but he survived his mother only two weeks, dying on May 7th. On May 8th the store account received a charge for 1 1/2 yards of white ribbon which must have been used on the tiny burial robe, a spool of white thread and 1 1/2 yards of blue covering cloth for the coffin."

John Bell, son of William II, passed away January 4, 1849, at the age of 68 years; and his brother, Thomas, on March 15, 1850, at the age of 65 years. Both are buried at the Old Brick Church, John in an unmarked grave.

Thomas Bell died testate, having made his will on January 14, 1847. He devised and bequeathed to his wife, Martha, a child's share, and more should she desire it, during her lifetime; the remainder to his four children. Other provisions of the will are:

"3rd My daughter Margaret M. Bell (who has intermarried with William Bell) I have already given a Negro Woman Charlott, a horse saddle and bridle, bedsted bed & furniture, one cow & calf, &c-- at the time given. I valued the Negro Woman at Eight hundred dollars (800.00) the horse bridle & saddle at one hundred (100.00). The other property I have placed no valuation on - and I wish my Wife & other three children to receive each as much property as I have already given my daughter Margaret M. when she shall come in and share equal with the rest of my heirs.

"4th The balance of my property real & personal (after my Wife takes what she chooses and my three children namely Edward M. Bell, Nancy J. Bell and Martha S. Bell - shall receive each as much in valuation as I have already given my said daughter Margaret M. Bell - including a Negro boy Alexander & a girl Phily which I lent to my daughter Margaret to wait on her as I chose) I wish equally, divided in valuation among my four children Margaret M. Bell, Edward M. Bell, Nancy I. Bell and Martha S. Bell, share and share alike.

"5th The property real or personal that my three daughters Margaret M., Nancy I. & Martha S. may or do receive by this my Will I hereby settle it on them and the lawful issue of their bodies forever and I do declare that it shall in no wise be subject (to) the debts of their husbands in no case whatever.

"6th I do hereby appoint my son Edward M. Bell sole Guardian of the person and property of my daughter Martha S. Bell during her minority.

"I hereby empower my Executors to sell any or all my real property either here or that in the State of Mississippi and to give warrantie titles to the same.

"8th I do hereby nominate constitute and appoint my Wife Martha M. Bell executrix and my son Edward M. Bell Executor of this my last will and testament." [2]

Thomas, at the time of his death, owned perhaps as much as 1000 acres of land. The survey of his brother Charles' land [3] reflects adjoining tracts belonging to him (Thomas) of more than half that number of acres, and did not include his home plantation. He also had holding in the State of Mississippi, and owned an undetermined number of slaves.

Death struck again on April 7, 1850, when Elizabeth Montgomery Bell, widow of John, passed away, and was buried beside her husband at the Old Brick Church.

Although this was an era of great sadness at the Bell Community -

[2] Estate of Thomas Bell, Department Archives & History, Columbia, South Carolina.

[3] Estate of Charles Bell, Department Archives & History, Columbia, South Carolina.

death of fever still hovering over the remaining families, and ominous war clouds everywhere as the Secessionist Movement gained momentum, there was still occasion for some levity and celebration. Perhaps it was to be a wedding, for on March 3, 1851, Martha, wife of Edward M. Bell, rode to Winstboro in her carriage to make some purchases at the mercantile establishment of Woodward & Randolph. These included: "2 gallons malaga wine, 2 gallon demijohns, 17 pounds loaf sugar, 1 box raisens, 2 pounds candy, 2 pounds kisses, 1 pound pop kisses, 4 bottles cordial, and 1 quart rye whiskey." Martha returned to Woodward & Randolph on March 12, and made some additional purchases: "12 sperm candles, 1/2 bushel of rice, 2 gallons Bourbon whiskey, 2 pounds of candy, 1 bottle lemon syrup and 14 1/2 pounds of bacon."

Death among the Bell families continued, unabated, as on July 29, 1852, Jane Martin Bell, widow of Charles, passed away, at the age of 67 years; and on June 9, 1852, Cella M. Brice, daughter of Charles, died.

On March 19, 1853, Charles E., eldest of three surviving sons of Charles Bell, was married to Isabella Witherspoon. This couple moved to Mecklenburg County, North Carolina to make their home, leaving only John P. Bell, aged 23, as the last of Charles' children to reside in the Bell Community of Fairfield District. [4]

On May 16, 1854, Martha Sarah, daughter of Thomas Bell, passed away; and on December 21 of the same year, Eliza Brown Bell, widow of William II, died. On August 10, 1854, Edward M. Bell, Jr., infant son of Edward M., a grandson of Thomas, died. And death took the widow of Thomas, Martha McClure Bell, on September 9, 1855. All of the foregoing are buried at the Old Brick Church. And at Starkville, Mississippi, ^{HARRIETT SULLIVAN PH.} a daughter of Hugh Bell, son of William II, died on December 22, 1855.

[4] Charles Edward Bell and Isabella Witherspoon were the parents of 10 sons and 7 daughters. Of these were Edward Martin Bell, Laura Bell Thompson and Jessie Bell McDonald, whose address, in 1948, was R.F.D. 3, Box 59, Charlotte, North Carolina. n. This family has not been traced.

Having lost his father, mother, a sister, and his child, Edward, Jr., all within a period of two years, Edward M. Bell left Fairfield District, perhaps in early January, 1856, for a journey to Starkville, Mississippi. He was executor of his late father's estate, the administration of which had been complicated by the death of his mother and sister, both beneficiaries under the will of Thomas Bell. His father had acquired land in Mississippi and it was this item of business that required him to make the trip. Edward probably visited in the home of his Uncle Hugh at Starkville, the last surviving son of William Bell II. On his return journey, he travelled southeast of Starkville to a cotton port on the Tombigbee River, where he boarded the steamer "Frank Lyon." The affidavit of three passengers aboard the vessel tell of the death of Edward M. Bell and his nuncupative will: [5]

"On the 16th day of February, 1856, Thomas E. Cannon, Alonzo R. Cushman and Angi E. Sove, residents of the State of Mississippi, made oath that 'Being on board the steamer Frank Lyon and being with Edward M. Bell of Fairfield District of State of South Carolina during his last illness were then and there called upon by him to take notice and bear witness to his Will hereinafter set forth: that one of us, to-wit, Angi E. Sove retired to the Clerk's office on said boat to write the will at length. That after the Will was reduced to writing it was brought to him for his approval and signature. He was so far gone that he was unable to listen it or to sign the same; that he was taken very suddenly, only sick about forty eight hours; that he spoke plain and distinctly without any person suggesting or dictating his Will, being of sound mind & disposing memory and understanding. viz: I desire that my wife shall have all my property free from the interference

[5] n. An oral will declared or dictated by the testator in his last sickness before a sufficient number of witnesses, and afterwards reduced to writing.

Estate of Edward M. Bell, Department of Archives & History,
Columbia, South Carolina.

of any legatees or any other person and at her death wish my property to go to my children and that my wife be my executrix. ."

Edward M. Bell was buried at the Old Brick Church. His nuncupative will was offered for probate in Fairfield District; and he was survived by his widow, Martha S., a daughter Martha M., and a son Alexander Douglass Bell.

As the end of the era of the 1850's came to a close, the Bell households in Fairfield District, as far as we now know, where both the husband and the wife were living, were reduced to two in number. There was the household of William Bell, son of Hugh, and wife Margaret, daughter of Thomas Bell, and their children: Sarah Elizabeth, Hugh, Thomas E., and Margaret Jane. And the household of John P. Bell, son of Charles, who married Isabella Hemphill Caldwell on December 8, 1858.

In the household of William Bell III, deceased, were: Charles, Thomas R., who may have been married at that time; David M.; Elizabeth J; Mary C.; and John C.

And finally, there was the household of Edward M. Bell, deceased, with his widow, Martha S., and two children, Martha M. and Alexander Douglass.

So it was that of the nine known male descendants of William Bell I residing in the Bell Community of Fairfield District, six were eligible for military service and awaited the call to arms in the coming era.

In Chester District was the family of James Montgomery Bell, son of John, and his children: John Leroy; Robert Brown Bell; Charles James; Joseph Bigham; Margaret Nancy; Elizabeth Montgomery and Mary Jane.