

Dr. Walter Brice

My Grandfather was born Sept. 5, 1804. As he came into the world his mother passed out of the world, and he was nurtured by a negro wet nurse. He attended Mt. Zion Institute in Winnsboro, Jefferson College in Pennsylvania and later graduated in medicine at the College of Charleston. Transportation facilities were so lacking in those early days that my grandfather had to ride on horseback to the point of connection with the stage coach. There he would sell his horse and on the return journey would buy another horse on which to ride home. Naturally there were very few return trips. In the case of my grandfather there was only one trip, as he would spend summer vacations working in the mountainous regions of Pennsylvania and went to Jefferson College two years without visiting home. Returning home after two years, he decided to study medicine and took a preliminary course of reading with Dr. John Douglas, who married Mary Lunsford, the half sister of Martha Emeline Moore, who was to become his wife. It was while boarding in the Douglas home that he met her. Just why the young student took this preliminary course with a practicing physician isn't apparent now, for he took the full course at the Medical College in Charleston and later attended lectures in New York City. The education of Dr. Walter Brice must have been far superior to that of the physicians of that period, and he met in every respect the qualifications of a Southern gentleman, being fastidious in his dress and abrupt in his manners. He was twice nominated for the Legislature but always declined public office. He built an office in the side yard of his home in Fairfield County. This came to be known as the "Doctor Shop" and I can remember as a small child being told tales about the old skeleton which was still in the house at that time. This building is still in very good shape, although there is no longer a floor and it has been converted into a garage. I still have a memorandum book showing the fees charged different people. The standard charge for an office visit seems to have been fifty cents and if the doctor had to go to see the patient the charge was one dollar. Contrasting these fees with those charged by doctors of the present day, one can see why modern doctors are so concerned over socialized medicine. A number of Dr. Brice's medical books are also still in existence. One reason he could charge such low fees is that medicine was not his chief source of income, as he owned several thousand acres of land, almost a hundred slaves, and was a large planter. Having heard people speak of their forebears as owning "hundreds of slaves", although the records show very few slave owners of that magnitude, I asked my father and mother on one occasion how many slaves their parents owned just before the Civil War. My father estimated it as about eighty, but my mother still claimed her father had owned "more than a hundred". My Grandfather kept a level head when most of the hot headed people of South Carolina were talking secession. I have often heard my father tell of a visit from ex-Governor Means, who was a good friend of my Grandfather's and the families quite frequently exchanged visits. My Grandfather accompanied Governor Means to the front step still im-

ploring the Governor to use his influence to avert the terrible bloodshed. Governor Means took from his pocket a small silk handkerchief and said "Doctor, I can take this handkerchief and wipe up all of the blood that will be shed." "Oh, No, Governor" replied my Grandfather "You're very wrong about that". It must be said of Governor Means that what he lacked in judgment was made up in his valor, for he organized a regiment and although he was old enough to have flowing white hair, he was in the thick of every battle and exhorted his men to follow wherever they saw his white hair. He was killed leading a charge at Cold Harbor. I have in my home a sideboard Governor Means had made in Columbia and presented to my grandfather in 1859. I have also copies of the letters exchanged at that time, and they are beautifully expressed. My Grandfather was destined to lose three sons in the terrible war, and did not live very long after the close of the war, dying December 7, 1871. Such incidents as this I feel should be preserved for posterity and for that reason I write this history. My grandfather Brice gave to New Hope A. R. P. Church the land for the church and the cemetery, so these are in sight of his old home place. The present house had been built partially while he was a young man and he added later the rear wing of the house, which consists of two large rooms, upstairs, two corresponding rooms downstairs, a pantry and two long side porches. As was the custom in the South at that time, the kitchen was separated from the "big house". I remember that on the metal guttering of the house, the figures 1837 and still visible, but my father had been told as a boy that the guttering was added some years after the house was built, so the house, which stands out picturesquely in its setting of beautiful trees, is much more than one hundred years old. In all of the annals of history, ancient or modern, there is nothing to equal the manner in which these emigrants came to America with little worldly goods and with much less cultural background in Europe than is generally supposed, and yet built up in one or two generations a race of proud and colorful people who came to be known as Southern aristocrats.

This composition of Dr. Walter Brice (1804-1877) my great grandfather, was copied from a History of the Brice Family, compiled in 1944 by George Wilson Brice Charlotte, N.C.

These parts have been preserved through the 4th generation by my mother, Rebecca Brice Macfie (Mrs. R. Rice Macfie) her half sister Emeline Rosborough Macfie (Mrs. Wade Macfie)

*Presented to the Fairfield County Museum June 1997 by
Kate Macfie Sturgis of Wrensboro, S.C.*