

This Heritage Is Ours...

The Pioneer Stock Of Mrs. Janie Brice Hemphill

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Who are we and from whence did we come? The question is interesting, indeed, but native Chesterites by and large have a fascinating and notable heritage. In a series of articles to be published under the title "This Heritage Is Ours" The News & Reporter will attempt to give some insight into the pioneer stock of citizenry that went before us in the Chester area. We welcome contributions of information and pictures from the 1800's from any interested citizen. This heritage is our's. May we never become too preoccupied, negligent, or uncaring to fail in preserving it for future generations.)

A recent storm knocked over an old tombstone in the Gage plot in Evergreen Cemetery here. It was a stone erected to the memory of Mrs. David (Jane Brice) Hemphill who died on October 4, 1886.

The attention of Mr. Robert Gage of Chester, now in his 88th year, was called to the broken stone. He intends having it repaired in that Mrs. Jane Brice Hemphill was Mr. Gage's great-grandmother.

When asked if he remembered her, Mr. Gage said no, that he did not but he remembered a story about her. The Gages were living in the old Gaston brick house on York Street, now the residence of the Quinton family, when Robert Gage was born. The house belonged to his grandmother, Margaret Hemphill Gaston, whose husband had been killed in the Confederate Army at the Battle of Seven Pines. Mrs. Gaston's mother, Mrs. Jane Brice Hemphill, came from Fairfield after the War to live with her. And Mrs. Gaston's daughter, Janie, the wife of Judge George W. Gage, and their family also lived there.

Chester suffered some alarming shocks from the famous earthquake of 1886 which did great damage to Charleston and the low-country. Mr. Robert Gage was born in 1885 and was, therefore, a year old at the time of the quake. He does not remember the catastrophe, but he was always told that when the brick house began to shake, his great-grandmother Hemphill picked him up and ran out into the yard. The picture of Mr.

reason to be. She was born in Fairfield on the "Woodland" plantation of her father Robert Brice, a prosperous planter and a good provider for his family. At the age of eighteen, she was married to David Hemphill, a son of the noted Reverend John Hemphill, D.D., of Hopewell A.R.P. Church. A friend of the Hemphills, writing about the wedding, said that Jane was "a handsome, prudent looking girl."

Three children were born to the Hemphills and then David died at the age of 28. Jane moved back to "Woodland" to help her father with his large family, her mother having died two months after her husband, and Jane was the oldest of the Brice children.

Life at "Woodland" must have been a happy one. The New Hope A.R.P. neighborhood was known as "Brice Country" and Jane's uncles and cousins owned many thriving plantations. The

"Woodland" house was set on a high hill; it was a very large house with many rambling rooms. There were plenty of servants and the cotton sold well. Governesses were employed for the girls and tutors for the boys. All the children were given as advanced educations as they would take. Jane's son, Nixon Hemphill graduated at Erskine. Robert attended the University of Virginia. Margaret, the daughter, was educated at boarding schools in Yorkville and Charleston. She married her third cousin (once removed) J. Lucius Gaston of Cedar Shoals, a graduate of the College (now University) of South Carolina. He bought the brick house on York Street for her from one of her Hemphill uncles.

Then the War came! In rapid succession, Mrs. David Hemphill lost both of her sons and her son-in-law. Reconstruction made the Fairfield property practically worthless.

Land and slaves had "gone with the wind." She and her widowed daughter-in-law, Sally Hemphill, moved in with her widowed daughter, Margaret Gaston, in Chester. Their last days were a far cry from their ante-bellum affluence. They were kept in provisions during the darkest days of Reconstruction by the generosity of Mrs. Hemphill's bachelor brother-in-law, Robert Hemphill who managed to make a surplus of the family plantation near Hopewell.

Who wouldn't be a bit grim of visage, after that?

At the base of Mrs. Hemphill's stone is inscribed:

"A Rest Remaineth for the People of God."



The Pioneer Stock

Mrs. Jane Brice Hemphill of "Woodland" plantation, Fairfield District and Chesterville, is one of the "pioneer stock" that helped form a heritage that Chester natives call their own. The former Jane Wilson Brice (1818-1886) married David Hemphill. Her husband and mother died at almost the same time and she returned as a widow with three small children to "Woodland" and helped her

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A House With A Story To Tell

The home place of the late Captain J. Lucius and Margaret Hemphill Gaston of Chesterville is shown as it once looked. Situated on York Street, it is now the Quinton Home. This picture shows the historic house as

it appeared before renovation was accomplished to change the porch, and the red bricks were painted white. See story. (Photo by Nichols Studio, Chester)