

AN EARLY RICHLAND PLANTER: William Howell

Submitted by Frances Osburn

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Robert Mills, in his Statistics of South Carolina, says that Benjamin Singleton was the first settler within the bounds of Richland county, having a cowpen above Columbia on Broad river in the year 1740. This may be correct, but the cowpen was the forerunner of the settlement. Col. Benjamin Singleton owned many tracts of land in different parts of the province and secured a grant for a tract in the bounds of the later county of Richland, but he did so a quarter of a century after 1740. There is no indication that he ever lived in this territory.

However, at the early date settlers were beginning to arrive in the fork of the Congaree and Wateree. The Raifords would seem to be in 1741 on Mill Creek, long known as Raiford's Creek, below Adams pond. Shortly after this, John Pearson located nearby and in 1742 married Mary Raiford. James Denby and his wife, Mary, came to live a little further down the creek in the neighborhood of Rawls pond. Whenever they needed the services of a preacher, they had to go to the Rev. Mr. Giessendanner at Orangeburg, who recorded their coming in the service he performed for them, marriage and baptism of children. Under the year 1757 he related that he crossed the Congaree and buried William Howell, who had been planting there for many years. "On Friday morning, Feby 4th," he wrote, "died & on Saturday evening, Feby 6th (did he mean Sunday, which would be the 6th?) Was entered at the plantation of William Howell the body of said William Howell, a settler for many years over Santee or Congaree river in Craven county, aged -(1757)."

William, Thomas and Arthur Howell seem to have been brothers, who came from Maryland, inasmuch as Thomas Howell, serving in Col. Thompson's regiment, is registered as born in Maryland. The Howells had been living in Maryland for nearly a century.

The plat of Thomas Howell's grant of 200 acres, which was certified by George Haig, October 23, 1746, shows William Howell on one side and next to him Arthur Howell. A house is marked on the plat with an "avenue" running to William Howell's house. These three had their lands on Raiford Creek (Mill Creek) where it made a large bend that seems to correspond to the bend just below Adams mill pond. Beside the Bluff road a short distance this side of the pond was till a few years ago an old family burying ground in which was the grave of Malachi Howell, if the memory of an old Negro was correct. There was a Howell's mill at the time of the Revolution, when meal was ground here for General Sumter. This may have been at or near the site of Adams mill. John Pearson owned next to Thomas Howell.

Arthur Howell died at the beginning of 1753, his will being proven March 9 of that year. His wife's name was Sarah; he mentions three sons, John, Matthew and William. The Rev. Mr. Giessendanner baptized February 33, 1756, Malachy, son of Thomas and Race Howell, born May 20, 1755. Thomas Howell did not live long after the Revolution.

The houses built by the new arrivals must have been of logs, such as have been built by the pioneers everywhere in this country, nothing very substantial, as Robert Mills observed. When Jesse Goodwyn died in 1767, he left a request that a house, comfortable and well made, should be erected for his wife. It was to be 20 feet long and 12 feet wide. Philip Raiford built a house on Mill Creek at the edge of the bluff near Rawls mill pond in 1753, the date he cut in one of the timbers, which was torn down in 1902. It is very difficult to locate the homes of the early settlers.

Soon mills were erected on the creeks for grinding meal and flour and for sawing timber, so that frame houses began to appear.

Ferries across the Congaree were operated, no doubt, from an early day after settlers began to arrive. Friday's Ferry at the Congaree (near Columbia) and McCord's Ferry at the lower end of the county were the first public ferries, established some two decades before the Revolution. There may have been private ferries as that of "Myrick," indicated on a plat. Joseph Joyner operated a ferry over the Wateree near the junction of the two rivers about 1754.

Trails, or paths, were soon made up and down the river, to the trading post at the Congaree, to McCord's Ferry, across the county to Camden. The first public road ran up the west bank of the Wateree, crossing the Congaree at McCord's Ferry to meet the road to Charleston.

If the settler wished to attend church he had to go to Orangeburg, where the Rev. Mr. Giessendanner had charge, who was supposed to serve a large territory. The Rev. Christian Theus conducted the Reformed church (Swiss Presbyterian) a few miles below the Congaree, appearing on maps as St. John's. William Howell's nephew of the first of the name, gave the land on which to erect a Baptist church in 1766 somewhere near Mill Creek, three miles from the home of its pastor, Joseph Reese.

William Howell owned a cowpen, which Logan says in his history of Upper South Carolina was located in Fairfield County. At his death he had among his possessions seven bells for horses. Such bells, as described by Logan, were used in the pack trains of Indian trades. William Howell owned at his death seven mares and colts and 45 other horses, and he may have packed goods up from Charlestown, for he probably owned a trading store. He left "shop goods," notes, due him, and book accounts. A large quantity of hogs and a flock of sheep were part of his possessions; but nothing was said of his cattle. He owned 12 slaves.

He no doubt raised corn and wheat, as did his neighbors, for home use. For a "money crop" he raised indigo on the swamp lands that he had cleared. This was raised in large quantities in the Congaree swamps, and for many years traces of the fields and the vats were clearly visible. Joshua English cultivated it near Camden. In 1799 William Goodwyn's property, which was managed for him by his cousin, Jesse Goodwyn, produced 12 hogsheads of indigo, valued at 300 pounds in English money. Green Hill, now owned by Mr. Seegers, was a part of this estate. Gale Hampton's estate, which was managed by Conrad Murph, who had married the widow Hampton, reported some indigo raised as late as 1815.

Not far from William Howell lived James Denley, who died near the same time. He had a large number of "meat cattle," hogs, and horses and also must have traded, as he left a "remnant of store goods," book of accounts, and notes. He had a good set of smith's tools and some old iron. In the inventory of the estate of Jesse Goodwyn, who died in 1767, is a list of persons owing money to him, for which they have given their notes. This list is especially interesting because it contains nearly a hundred names of persons in this section of the state.

John Taylor's inventory, made in 1767, contains an item of "67 head of Black Cattle," which is explained as meaning that he had black Angus cattle, once used in the upcountry.

One of the witnesses who signed the will of William Howell in 1757 was Benjamin Farrar. He was most probably present as a physician, since he was described elsewhere as a doctor, possibly the earliest in the county. Dr. Ebenezer Richmon was another doctor, who lived below Columbia and died at the end of the year 1788. The earliest comers built on the banks of the creek in the low grounds, often near a fine spring of water. The practice of having summer houses in the sandhills developed from experience. Malaria was very prevalent and filled many family graveyards.

William Howell was buried at his plantation in a spot set aside for the family burial plot. It may have been inclosed, or merely marked off by a ditch, and planted with cedars. No stones were set up to record the birth and death of the sleeper. All traces of the earliest graves have been for the most part lost, no memory even of them existing. There were many persons of the Howell name below Columbia, but only a few of their graves are known.

It is impossible to find out how the children were schooled. Some of the wills make provisions for schooling. Probably the earliest settlers taught their children at home. Thomas Taylor is said to have had some instruction in a school near Granby. The earliest school in the lower part of the county seems to have been Minervaville academy, near Hopkins, in operation before 1805. The only books listed in the inventory of William Howell's property were three volumes of sermons. Jesse Malachi Howell, who owned Woodville, had a very considerable library.

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