

HISTORIC CAMDEN

PART ONE

COLONIAL AND REVOLUTIONARY



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now widely scattered over the Southern States. It is sad to relate that not a single representative of the Champion blood, or of this branch of the DeSaussure family—once so conspicuous an element in the society of Camden—is now left in the county.

CHESNUT.

This sketch has been composed from such authentic materials as the Registry in the family Bible and notes accompanying same, supposed to have been dictated by Col. James Chesnut, of Mulberry, to his daughter, Sarah; from old deeds and public records, together with such other gleanings as seemed reliable.

JOHN CHESNUT (I) was born on the Shenandoah River, Virginia, June 18, 1743. His parents came as children with their parents from Ireland, settling on the frontiers of Virginia, where they endured all the exposure and dangers of the pioneers, by no means conducive to longevity. His father died or was killed when quite a young man, and left his widow with three young children. His mother married again, Jasper Sutton, who was member of a company of frontier rangers. After Braddock's defeat in 1755 the Indians devastated Virginia. Mr. Sutton, with his wife and Chesnut stepchildren, retired, as did many other families, to the protection of the fort at the new town of Winchester. As soon as lines of regular troops had been posted so as to check the savages, most of these families, among them that of Jasper Sutton, moved South. John Chesnut was then about 13 years of age, making the date of their removal 1756.

This family halted a year or two on Fifers Creek, in North Carolina, between Salisbury and Charlotte, and then came on down and located on Grannys Quarter Creek, in Kershaw County, the Clermont or Rugeley neighborhood. A year or so after this John Chesnut entered upon an apprenticeship in Joseph Kershaw's store at the then Pine Tree Hill. The first record proof of his presence here is found in his signature as witness to an old land deed of Gover Black (son and heir of John Black) to Samuel Wyly, dated Jan. 8, 1763. In

the year 1767 is another deed of Ancrum, Loocock & Kershaw, conveying to Eli Kershaw and John Chesnut a considerable amount of land in and around the site of Camden, among others the 150 acres which was Pine Tree Hill, and Pine Tree Mill—now the Carrison Mill just below Camden. He had thus rapidly risen to an independent merchant and landholder.

In the year 1766 we find grants of land, in various parts of Kershaw County, to James Chesnut, a brother of John, and also of land (adjoining James), in the same year to one Samuel Chesnut, of whom there is no mention in the family record. In the year 1774 Joseph Kershaw conveys to Jasper Sutton lots 334 and 335 in the Town of Camden.

John Chesnut was a staunch Whig in the Revolution. He was paymaster in the third of the first three regiments, with the rank of Captain. After the battle of Purrysburg he resigned, being rendered unfit for service by rheumatism, which kept him abed for six months. On recovery he entered the militia and served in the Georgia campaign, commanded the Camden militia in Charleston when that city was besieged and captured in 1780, and was paroled to his plantation. When the British occupied Camden they took possession of his home, drove his family to Knights Hill and put him in the Camden prison. He was chained closely to the floor and bore the marks of iron on his ankles to his death, and likewise the resentment, for in his will he makes a bequest to his grandson, John Chesnut, of "two pair of old mahogany" (word missing) "much injured with the Royal stains of Lord Cornwallis and other inveterate enemies of that period."

He accumulated a great extent of land immediately north and south of Camden, by original grants and by purchase from estates of Kershaw, Cantey and others. He seems to have resided much of his life in Camden. His family being at Knights Hill during the Revolution, his wife's mother, Mrs. Cantey, also being with them, died and was buried there, at the spot where the family cemetery is located. Mrs. McGirtt, the mother of Mrs. Cantey, is buried at Mulberry.

He possessed the confidence of the people, as indicated by his frequent election to office. He was a delegate to the State Convention which ratified the Federal Constitution. He was elected to the State Senate in 1793 and 1796. His portrait, executed by Gilbert Stewart, manifests a decided likeness to that of George Washington, and is marked by strong features. An original of Washington by this noted artist used to hang on the walls at Mulberry until purchased some years ago for the Corcoran Gallery.

John Chesnut married Sarah Cantey, daughter of John Cantey of Town Creek, and granddaughter of James McGirtt. She was born Feb. 15, 1753. John Chesnut died April 1, 1818, age 61.

JAMES CHESNUT (I), brother of John (I). died while quite a young man, unmarried, and is buried in the old Presbyterian Church Cemetery at Camden. He owned the land on which Mulberry is built, and intended it for James, the son of his brother; but dying without a will, it was inherited by his brother, who, however, effectuated that intention by deeding it to his son, James.

MARGARET CHESNUT, full sister of John (I) and James (I), married Mr. Irwin. Her granddaughter married Thomas Salmond, ancestor of the Salmond family of Camden.

Sally Sutton, a half-sister of John, James and Margaret Chesnut, married a Ross; and Richard Sutton, a half-brother, settled in Florida.

Children of John Chesnut (I).

MARY CHESNUT, born Jan 20, 1771, died Camden Jan., 1843. Married Duncan McRae. They had eight children. She is buried in Quaker Cemetery.

SARAH CHESNUT, born Dec. 12, 1774, died June, 1851. Married Gov. John Taylor, of Columbia. They had twelve children.

HARRIET CHESNUT, born Dec. 19, 1776, died Camden Sept., 1831, unmarried. She resided in the large house which still stands at corner King and Fair streets (lot 537). Tradition says she lived there as a recluse, be-

cause prevented by some barrier from requiting a true love.

MARGARET REBECCA CHESNUT, born Jan. 24, 1786, married Col. J. S. Deas, of Camden. Moved with him to Alabama in 1835. She died 1874. Their children were: (1) Alan (Mrs. Huger). (2) Sallie, married Dr. Knott, a distinguished physician of Mobile, later of New York. (3) Margaret (Mrs. Auzé).* (4) Mary (Mrs. Brown). (5) Serena (Mrs. Murphy). (6) Zach. Cantey Deas, the Confederate General. (7) John. (8) Henry.

JOHN CHESNUT (II), born Jan. 3, 1783. Died in Charleston of yellow fever, Aug. 16, 1799. Remains removed seven months later from St. Michael's Church to Knights Hill.

JAMES CHESNUT (II), born Feb. 19, 1773, died at Bloomsbury, 1866, age 93. As a boy of seven he rode horseback to Charleston with his father, who was sent there a prisoner by the British. He acquired Belmont, Town Creek and Mulberry lands through his father's will. To these he added acres until he became the owner of the entire territory, some five miles square, extending from the southern edge of Camden down to Daniels Branch, and bounding on the river all the way. His slaves numbered several hundred. His vast interests he managed ably and was also active in public matters. In 1802, 1804, and 1808 he was elected to Legislature. In 1806-07 he was Intendant of Camden, and in 1832, after a bitter contest, was elected to State Senate, by the Union party, over his brother-in-law, Jas. S. Deas, the candidate of Nullifiers.

His residence was in Camden till 1820, in which year he built Mulberry house, two miles south, a four-story brick and stone mansion, slate roof, of plain exterior, but handsome interior. Here he spent the winters, but the situation being near the low river swamps, in summer he would remove the family to his Sandy Hill place, three miles east on the uplands. The road between these two residences was a bee line, kept in perfect order.

*One of the victims in the burning of a great hotel in New York City of recent years. She was then an old lady.

When his coach traveled over this road or to Camden, outriders went ahead to see that the way was clear. The Sandy Hill home was burned some twenty years ago. Mulberry, though unoccupied, still stands intact, an old manorial hall, with its noble oaks, avenues and lawns, suggesting, as no words can, the state and style of the ante-bellum Southern landlord.

He married Mary Cox, of Philadelphia, Sept. 20, 1796. She was the daughter of Col. John Cox, of Revolutionary note, who, before coming to Philadelphia, had lived at a country seat near Trenton, N. J., on the Delaware, called "Bloomsbury." Here Count de Rochambeau was entertained, the house being given up to him by Col. Cox, as was the courteous custom of the time.

Mary Cox was one of the six girls who strewed flowers before Gen. Washington at Trenton Bridge, N. J., just before he was made President. She was highly educated and attended Washington's receptions. She was the first Vice-Regent, for South Carolina, of the Mt. Vernon Association, in April, 1860. She was then 85 years of age, and her daughter, Sallie Chesnut, attended to the clerical work. The gentleness and sweetness of her character has been the theme of a writer who had means of personal knowledge. At the Mulberry premises, in a long brick outbuilding, it is said she taught the slaves to spin, weave, and other useful arts. Though delicate and nurtured like a house plant she attained the age of 89, and was the mother of thirteen children. She died, March 13, 1864, at the Bloomsbury home, just beyond the northern boundary of Camden, which was built by Col. James Chesnut for their daughter, Sally, and named for the Cox place on the Delaware. Here, too, James Chesnut died two years later, in 1866.

Children of James Chesnut (II).

ESTHER SERENA CHESNUT, born in Camden 1797. Married 1820 to Nicholas Williams, of Society Hill, son of Gen. D. R. Williams. She died in 1822.

JOHN CHESNUT (III), born 1799. Married Ellen Whitaker. Died 1839. State Senator 1836. Descend-

ants in Florida. More fully mentioned in second volume.

MARY COX CHESNUT, born 1802. Married Dr. Geo. Reynolds 1834. Died 1899. Her handsome residence in Camden, on Laurens, Lyttleton and Fair streets, built by Dr. Reynolds.

HARRIET SERENA CHESNUT, born 1809. Married Wm. J. Grant. Died Dec. 2, 1835. Buried at Knights Hill.

EMMA CHESNUT, born 1812. Died, unmarried, 1847.

SARAH CHESNUT, born 1813. Died, unmarried, 1889, at "Bloomsbury."

JAMES CHESNUT (III), born in Camden Jan. 18, 1815, died Feb. 4, 1885. Married Mary Miller, daughter of S. D. Miller. No children. His distinguished career will be fully treated in Volume II.

Six other children of James Chesnut (II) died in infancy.

The Chesnut family has been marked by distinct political abilities, and during three generations appears perhaps oftener than any other Camden name in the list of public representatives. It is sad to reflect that, like so many another distinguished surname, it no longer survives in our community.

CUNNINGHAM.

Will be treated in Volume II under head of Liberty Hill.

DUBOSE.

Capt. Isaac Dubose removed to Camden, from Chesterfield County, soon after the Revolution. He had served, with distinction, in the war as Lieutenant in the 2d Regiment of Foot, organized in 1775. He was one of the officers stationed in Fort Moultrie at the time of the British attack on Sullivans Island.

His father, John Dubose, of the old Huguenot family, had settled, about the middle of the 18th century, on Lynches River, in the Old Cheraws.

Isaac Dubose was highly honored by our people. He was sent to the Constitutional Convention (1790), was Intendant of Camden (1792), and was elected to the Legislature in 1796, 1800 and 1806. His first wife, who

one hogshead of rum, a quantity of bacon and hams, butter, brimstone, axes and wedges, sent to the Engineer department. Rhubarb in root, damaged, sent to the general hospital. A number of hats and some green cloth, distributed to the troops.

“In a barn near the river 90 hogsheads of tobacco—part of which was destroyed by the troops; the rest was ordered by Lord Cornwallis to be sent to Charlestown. Near 100 head of cattle were found in and near the town, together with some sheep.

“Lord Cornwallis ordered the commissaries to give no receipt to Colonel Kershaw for the property taken from him, as he was deemed a very violent man, and who was said to have persecuted the loyalists.”

Large quantities of silver plate, tobacco, indigo, and other stores, that had been sent from the low country to Camden for safe keeping, also fell into the hands of the enemy.*

The British proceeded to establish a well-fortified post at Camden, which was left in charge of Lord Rawdon, Cornwallis returning at once to Charleston, where he superseded Sir Henry Clinton in command on June 5th. We shall hear more of the works and garrison at Camden in a subsequent chapter.

Early in June,† Rawdon went up into the Waxhaws, carrying with him the Volunteers of Ireland and a detachment of his legion. He expected to find that section a prosperous Tory stronghold, but, disappointed in this, he hastened back to his post here.

Learning that Gates with a strong force was on the march towards Camden, in the early part of August, he called upon all the male inhabitants, in and around the

*McCrary.

†McCrary.

town, to take up arms in the British ranks. More than 160 nobly refused and, as a consequence, were cast into the small common jail, in the intense heat of the dog days. About twenty of them, gentlemen of the highest character and standing, were manacled. How unfortunate that the names of all these martyrs have not been preserved! Ramsay gives us an incomplete list, to wit: Mr. Strother,* Mr. James Bradley, Colonel Few, Mr. Kershaw,† Captain Boykin,‡ Colonel Alexander, Mr. Irvin, Colonel Winn, Colonel Hunter, Captain John Chesnut. Judge James adds the name of Mr. James Brown.

A lot of indigo, valued at \$5,000, was taken from Colonel Chesnut, and, on the evidence of one of his own slaves that he had violated his parole by corresponding with the Americans, he was bound to the floor with chains. No wonder that this much injured man annotated the account of these indignities in his copy of Ramsay: "British cruelties in Camden, never to be forgot by their descendants!"

Mr. James Bradley, who had figured as a legislator and had considerable influence, was taken prisoner by treachery at his home near Salem,§ thirty miles from Kingstree. Tarleton, passing himself off as Col. William Washington, was unsuspectingly taken into his house by Mr. Bradley, and hospitably entertained. From his host, Tarleton drew the plans of the patriots to rid the country of the redcoats. He then asked Bradley to conduct him over two difficult fords of Black

*Mills ("Statistics") tells us that Mr. Strother, who was a decided and independent patriot, died in jail.

†This was certainly Joseph, as there is no evidence that Eli was taken in Camden, and the third brother, William, returned to his allegiance after the fall of Charleston.

‡Dr. E. M. Boykin thinks this was his grandfather, John Boykin.

§James's Life of Marion.