

COLONEL JAMES HENRY RION OF WINNSBORO, S. C.  
Introduction by Alice America Beaufort Walker, Winnsboro, S.C.

Colonel James Henry Rion of Winnsboro, South Carolina, with his wife and children were intimate friends of my parents, David deVere deVerille Walker and wife, Alice Buchanan Walker.

After a most outstanding Confederate War Service in which Colonel Rion fought a goodly number of battles and was wounded and, through his brilliant mind, invented and used successfully his personally-contrived breastworks that were adopted by the entire Southern Army, Colonel Rion came to Winnsboro with his wife, bought a fine home on the corner of South Congress and Calhoun Streets, and procured a legal degree at a North Carolina College. He was considered one of the most brilliant legal minds of this part of the South.

He married Mary Catharine Weir, born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. As a small child Mary was brought to Columbia, South Carolina, by her father, Samuel Weir, when he denounced his wealthy heritage, was disinherited by his father and divorced by his wife because of his open and enthusiastic sympathy with the "Southern Cause." He came to Columbia to enter newspaper work. Easily recognized as a gentleman of facile mind, Samuel Weir became the friend of prominent men of the State Capitol, while living with his young daughter of attractive appearance and quick mentality in a boarding house. William C. Preston and Wade Hampton were attracted to Weir's gentlemanly out-look on life and Preston told him his lovely daughter should never be allowed to grow up in a common boarding house environment and that he, Preston, wished to have Mary live with his family. Samuel died and so Mary Weir spent her formative years in the elegant Preston-Hampton mansion on Elanding Street in Columbia.

James Henry Rion, an outstanding student of the South Carolina College married Mary Weir, the fine pianist and scholarly young lady who was a gracious and beautiful personality.

Colonel Rion and his wife joined Sion Presbyterian Church in Winnsboro, Rion's wish being baptism in Baptist immersion style. They were devoted and happy members of this congregation. A fine sterling baptismal bowl donated to the church in memory of a short-lived child has been in use to to-day's record. The engraved words on it, "In Memoriam" and date of birth and death of the baby are easily seen on the base of the bowl.

Colonel Rion was legal counsel for several railroad companies in the South, the Southern Railroad among this group ran through Winnsboro. The locomotives were powered by steam. A large wooden tank, adjacent to the tracks, was filled with water through iron pipes bringing water from a lake pumping-station a mile south of the town. Here the engines were furnished with water, the pipes continuing to the Rion dwelling which thus had plumbing conveniences, while the mansion was heated and lighted by a private gas plant erected on the property. Over the beautifully landscaped front and westerly gardens stood 15-foot decorated black iron pedestal gas lamps. Inside the sumptuous house gas chandeliers gave dignity to the handsomely furnished rooms. On the outside door entrances to living quarters and kitchen were speaking tubes, along with tubes in the master bed-rooms. Individual call-bells on springs hung high on the line top of wall and ceiling. These were operated by a falling-down velvet cross-stitch embroidered pull to summon the servants.

On his almost annual trips abroad Colonel Rion brought to his

youngest daughter, Hanna, dolls from many countries visited by him. Also, he added practical doll furniture, even a tiny stove that cooked in the little kitchen of the 6-foot high doll house. This writer, then a small quiet child, had the privilege of a favored grandchild of the Rions, being the only young girl given the privilege of hours alone in the attractive doll-house

Colonel Rion offered David deVere deVerille Walker and his wife the great luxury of tapping his water-pipe line to this home, thereby making the Rion and Walker residences the only two dwellings in the village with plumbing conveniences, until later years when a water system was installed for the town.

After a remarkable and deeply dedicated Christian life Colonel Rion died, December 1886, and as is Mrs. Rion's, his remains are interred in Zion Presbyteriañ Church Cemetery.

Mrs. Rion lived until I was a sizable girl. I recall her beauty, dignity and graciousness. I well re-call her daily visits to my mother. The youngest daughter, Hanna, was blessed with her mother's talent for music. Hanna composed piano and vocal master-pieces, writing excellent articles for national magazines. She was in England during World War I and there lent great aid to men who took part on the battle fronts.

The fine musical intuition of cultured Mary Weir Rion is passed down in inheritance to her grand-children, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren in their astute knowledge of piano, voice, science and literary talents.

The descendents of Kitty Rion, the favorite young daughter of Colonel Rion who early in life married Flemming McMaster, died leaving

one child, Kitt Rion McMaster, descendants conspicuously brilliant mentally in the musical and literary fields. Also, Preston Rion, who was the eldest child of Colonel Rion, has a descendant of idealistic type of mind and heart, who made a sizable worldly fortune, gave it up, and in his Christian devotion took Bible study and is a missionary to South America. The world is richer for the gift of fine men and women children of James Henry Rion and Mary Rion.

There are only three surviving grand-children of this union. They are Wallace and Holbrook Rion and Mrs. Kitty Rion DuBose (Mrs. John DuBose) of Columbia, South Carolina.

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Appendix to Rion History:

In the beginning of the War Between the States, Mrs. Margaret Hunter Rion, mother of Colonel Rion, was in charge of a small veterans' hospital in Winnsboro which was organized by the women of the town. It was located in the colonial home of the Cathcarts which stood on the corner of Zion and East Washington Streets. Mrs. Rion's excellent business ability and kindness was spoken of by the chairman of the Womens' Hospital Society, Mrs. Osmond Woodward.

Later, Mrs. Rion became manager of the large Midway Hospital of Charlottesville, Virginia, going there July 12, 1863. She died in Charlottesville and is buried in the Presbyterian Church Cemetery there.

Colonel Rion bought a handsome home in Winnsboro from Mansell Hall in 1857.