

History of the Mount Zion Society

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History of the Mount Zion Society, and the College Established under its Auspices in Winnsboro, S. C., by D. B. M'Creight.

No. 12

1783. While the Society was engaged in Charleston in reviving its effort to promote the cause of education in the State, its subordinate branches were not idle. Of these there were at least three, but where they were exactly located, there is no report to show. Besides the one in Winnsboro, there were two others, one of which was styled "The Committee of the Congarees," and the other "The Turkey Creek Committee." The reference is, since the XXIII Rule required these Committees "to be titled from their location situation," that the one was in the upper part of the District of Camden, and the other in the lower part. This would place the Turkey Creek Committee about the line between York and Chester Districts, and the Committee of the Congarees in the lower part of Richland. These sections were called counties, and were embraced in Camden District.

The earliest record at hand of the proceedings of the Winnsboro Committee after the war, is that of a meeting held in Winnsboro, at the house of Capt. Baker, on the 23d of May, 1783.

It is well to state at this point that whenever the Winnsboro Committee is alluded to in these papers, it will be denominated simply "The Committee", as no record of the other two Committees can be found. Nor must the reader confound the Mount Zion Society, which held its sessions in Charleston, with the Committee of the Mount Zion Society which held its meetings in Winnsboro.

The Society now meets in Winnsboro, but as will appear in the sequel, it was not transferred from Charleston to this place until many years after its original formation.

At the meeting of the Committee at Capt. Baker's house, alluded to already, an election was held for officers. It would appear from this that the Committee had not been as prompt as the Society in reorganizing. Though there is good reason to believe that the very unsettled condition of the country, and especially of the interior of the State, retarded the progress of the Committee's work. We can well imagine what bickerings, what crimination and recrimination must have succeeded the long and angry strife in which the State had been involved, developing as it did the conflicting principles and acts of Whig and Tory. Nor had hostilities even yet been proclaimed. It was not until the 19th of April, 1783, that this was done. It is but just to state, however, that so far as the record goes, there must have been more unanimity of feelings in this immediate section than in many other parts of the State.

At this election the following was the result: Gen. Winn, President; Col. John Winn, Senior, Senior Warden; Hugh Milling, Junior Warden; Capt. John Woodward, Treasurer; Francis Pringle, Secretary; and Capt. Thomas Baker and Kemp Strother, Sewards.

Of these officers, three joined on the day of the election, viz: Kemp Strother, Thos. Baker and Francis Pringle. As the Pringles were citizens of Charleston, the only reason that appears plausible why Francis Pringle was elected Secretary, which evidently implies that he was residing in Winnsboro at the time, is that he was a refugee from Charleston.

Col. John Winn, elected Senior Warden, availed himself of the privilege allowed in Rule IX, and declined to serve. It will be remembered that he was the first President of the Society. How many offices he filled up to this election does not appear. Mr. James Hart was elected Senior Warden in his stead.

At this meeting the extract from the proceedings of the Society, dated May 2nd, and calling for a statement of the condition of the Mount Zion buildings etc., was taken up for consideration. That extract has been given in the previous number of this series of papers. Capt. J. Milling, Capt. Farrar and Col. Henry Hampton were appointed a Committee "to draw up an answer to a letter received from Mount Zion Society;" which answer "was approved of, ordered to be engrossed and signed by the Secretary," and is as follows:

Winnsboro, 6th June 1783

Gentlemen:

We received yours of the 2d May, in which you requested a particular account of the temporary buildings of the Mount Zion Society at this place, which is as follows, viz: They continue in possession of Col. Winn, who has them in the best repair; and from his personal attention to the good of the Society, we are well assured they will be kept so—and cannot find any way by which they can be appropriated to more advantage to the Society, than be continued as at present. However, should anything offer which will answer a better purpose or you think proper to give us any instruction upon the occasion, we will gladly comply.

On the same day the above was written describing the condition of the buildings, another letter was addressed by the Committee to the Society announcing the destruction of the journals of the former. It states that these Journals were "entirely destroyed by the enemy," and contains the request that the Society will transmit to the Committee a catalogue of the names of its members, as well as inform it "what mode had been fixed upon for the collection of the arrears due the Mount Zion Society."

At this time it was agreed that the meetings of the Committee should be every fortnight, at 12M., on Saturday; and an effort was made to require the members to attend regularly. To effect this a committee was appointed "to draw up a resolution for a limitation of members to attend, and to ascertain fines for their non-attendance." Captains Hugh and John Milling, Col. Jno. Winn, Maj. Ellison and Lieut. Minor Winn composed the committee. The plan was to fine members residing within 12 miles of Winnsboro one shilling and two pence for non-attendance at each meeting: those within 20 miles, six pence; and those within 30 miles, one dollar for non-attendance at the Annual meeting. Thus the members thirty miles off were excused from attending any other than annual meetings.

But this method must have proved a failure, for the resolution enforcing it were rescinded in December of the same year.

The College Lands

1783. On the eleventh of October a committee was appointed “to run out the Mount Sion land,” the following gentleman composing it: Gen. Richard Winn. Col. Henry Hampton and William Boyd.

It would be a matter of interest in this connection to know by what means and when the Society can in possession of its lands. There is a discrepancy between the record and tradition in regard to this matter. It is said by some now living, who received what they think to be the true version of it from those who were contemporary with the time in question, that although the titles were made to the Society by Gen. Richard Winn, yet the land was really a donation from Col. John Vanderhorst. It is difficult to reconcile this discrepancy, as there is no record of the real facts in the case.

There were evidently donations made twice to the Society. It may be that Gen. Winn and Col. Vanderhorst, each made a donation of land, the latter making the first, and the former, the second.

Eleven days after the committee was appointed to run out the land they reported “that they had run out the land, but that the plat was misplaced, so that they could not make a full report at that time,” therefore requested further time—which was granted.

Seventeen days afterwards, on the 8th of November, the same committee reported the plat of the land, which had been run out, and on the 6th of December Messrs. Kemp Strother and Francis Pringle were appointed a committee “to draw up the deeds of Mount Sion Land.” There is nothing to show by whom this tract of land was given, if given at all, to the Society. There can be no doubt that it was a small tract fronting on Congress (or Main) Street, just where the stores of Mr. J. P. Matthews, Jr. and Capt. Thos. Jordan now stand, and ran back as far as the residence of the latter gentleman stands.

No other action seems to have been taken in reference to the College lands, until the Fall of 1787, when the attention of the Committee in Winnsboro was called by the Society to the fact that parties had committed “great waste on the Society’s land.” But there had been in the meantime a donation of one hundred acres made the Society, and this is the gift about which the difference of opinion exists as to who is entitled to be called the benefactor. But, while there may be a discrepancy as to who gave the first tract of land of the Society, there can be none as to these hundred acres; for the original deed of conveyance has come down to the present day, and forms a part of the records of the Society which have been preserved. It is recorded upon parchment, dated July 20th, 1785, and is signed by “Richard Winn,” attested by Josiah Smith, D. DeSaussure and Geo. H. Smith, Jr., and examined and recorded by D. Mazyck, Register M. C. Though this last was not done until the 27th September 1786.

But there is further proof that to Gen. Winn the Society is indebted for this generous donation. On the 4th of February 1788, the Committee of Correspondence of the Society in Charleston, addressed a letter of some length to the Committee at this place, in which, among other things, they again called attention to the depredation committed upon the College lands. It seems that from some cause the Society had failed to receive information that the Committee acted promptly upon the instruction given the previous Fall in regard to taking action to stop the depredations. As this correspondence will appear in full in another part of this history, only so much of the reply of the

Committee to the Society will be given as will suffice to establish the point now at issue. The following is the extract:

“A committee was appointed sometime ago to run round and mark the Society’s lands, but a plat could not be found.” [This is the plat reported in the proceedings of November 8th, 1783; for although two donations of land had very probably been made to the Society, yet only one survey had been made. The committee here alluded to was appointed November 10th, 1787.]

The letter continues—“Gen Winn now informs us that he had the plat, and as soon as the weather permits he will run out the land and plat the additional one hundred acres adjoining the former *which he gives the Society*, and will execute titles hereof with a plat annexed, and transmit them to town as soon as possible.

“One hundred acres adjoining the former.” Who gave that “former” tract, or whether Society bought it, it is impossible to tell.

The College land at this time was composed (1) of a part of a tract of two hundred acres originally granted to Robert Wilson in April, 1768; and (2) of a part of another tract of five hundred acres granted to Archibald McNeil in 1772. The tract of Wilson’s grant embraced what is now the northern (inhabited) half of Winnsboro.

When the Committee appointed for that purpose—who were Col. John Winn, Mr. McCaule (the first president of the College after the war) J. Milling and Gen. Winn—made the second plat of the College tract, the lands bounding it on the northern side belonged to Kemp Strother and those on the southern side, to Colonel John Vanderhorst.

Since the Society has been removed from Charleston to Winnsboro, several parcels have been cut off and sold from the College lands until the amount has been reduced to about twenty acres.

Note to No. 6—The author has been called by two gentlemen to an apparent error in the sketch given Capt. Thos. Woodward—that it was on Little Dutchman’s Creek, instead of Cedar that the Captain was killed. There is no discrepancy in the case since the fork of Big Dutchman’s Creek, where this event occurred, was at that time called “Cedar Fork” and was so denominated and marked upon the maps of the State.

No. 14

Neglecting History, 1783—Accession of Members

Biographical Sketches

A digression here in order to call public attention to a matter worthy of its consideration, will not be amiss. The subject before us suggests it.

In the course of the proceedings of the Committee for the year 1783, it was agreed that the President should “get the minutes of the Mount Sion Committee fairly copied into a book, and in less than two months that resolution was declared null and void.” This action seems to be characteristic of the makers of history—and where is the corporation or community or section that does not make history.

There is a felt want of material whenever history has to be recorded, whether it be general or local history. But it is the aggregate of the latter that makes up the details of

the former. What care then should be exercised to have these details full and fair. Take, as a case in point, the history of Fairfield during the past seven years. Will that, so far as the record has been made and preserved in the midst of passing events, satisfy the citizens of this District when he comes to read it incorporated in the history of the State?

It required organized efforts to secure these details. Where are even the names of those who embarked upon the billows of a stormy revolution seven years ago, and since, - where are the events recorded which made up the career of squads and companies for Fairfield? Where is the organization to map out the District into sub districts, and its committee to canvass them respectively, and gather all the details, the woof and warp of our local history? Where is the Historical Society of Fairfield District?

One thoughtful Clerk of Court for this District showed some appreciation of "fairly" recording passing events. It was when the company of volunteers from Fairfield took up the line of march for the Everglades of Florida. But he stopped short of this undertaking. He simply recorded the fact that those volunteers left this place for Florida on the 11th of February, 1837. There is no list of names of the members of that company. That brief record, however, stands among the archives of the District, and is regularly indexed. An individual appeal was made last year, and again this year, to all the citizens of the District whom it concerned—and who does it not?—to lend their aid in putting the history of their own District upon the record, but the response was as feeble as the flame flickering in the socket.

1783. The membership this year in its increase was encouraging. Beside the three names already given, are the following, which were enrolled by the committee: Minor Winn. Benj. and Jas Harrison, Jas. Kennedy, Francis Kirkland, Charles Miles, Daniel, Isaac and Francis Huger.

The fact that so many gentlemen from Charleston became members of the Society through the Committee at Winnsboro, is strong evidence that these were a number of refugees from the dangers on the City by the sea. Nor was that the last time that the Society gained strength in numbers in that way.

Francis Kirkland, of Fairfield, served in the American army in the Revolution. He was imprisoned by Lord Rawdon in the jail in Camden, under condemnation of death, but was released upon the interposition of the Winns, very probably Col. Winn. About 1802 he went to Charleston on business on behalf of his benefactor, between whom and himself there was an intimate friendship, and while there Mr. Kirkland contracted the yellow fever, returned home and died of it.

Isaac Huger was a member of the Provincial Congress and was elected by that body Lieut. Col., of the first regiment. When in March, 1776, it was resolved to raise two regiments of riflemen, he was appointed Colonel of the first. Before the close of the war he became Brigadier-General.

Francis Huger was a commissioned Captain in the first regiment.

Benjamin Guerard was made one of the victims of Lieut. Col. Belfour's retaliatory scheme, when in May 1781, he caused to be seized one hundred and thirty unarmed citizens in Charleston and confined them on board the prison ships. After the war he was highly honored by the State, having been chosen Governor for the term embracing 1783-84.

One of the most remarkable men who enrolled themselves among the members of the Society this year, was Commodore Alexander Gillon. A very interesting sketch of his

life is found in Johnston's Traditions of the Revolution. He was a merchant in Charleston, and did a very extensive business. In 1777 and '78 the royal navy blockaded the port of Charleston. At one time there were three vessels on duty off the city, which proved very troublesome to the blockade runners. Alexander Gillon proposed with the sanction of the Governor, at attack them with the only armed vessel in the port of Charleston. Consent being given, the gallant merchant put out to sea, and by a most ingenious device captured all three of the annoying blockaders and brought them safely into port, without firing a gun. This act of daring "transferred him from the counting house to the quarter deck of the finest frigate then afloat," for soon after it, the State resolved to purchase three frigates, and Alexander Gillon was elected Commodore of the navy of South Carolina. In his various cruises he inflicted heavy damage upon the British commerce. Commodore Gillon could converse in seven different languages and write in five of them. After the Revolution, he was elected Senator in U. S. Congress, where he served for many years. When not there he was a member of the State Legislature.

He was a principal part in two episodes in the proceedings of the General Assembly, one of which is here given: Once, in a debate, Mr. Charles Pinckney, to elucidate the subject, introduced a Latin quotation in that body where very few of the members understood that language. When he resumed his seat, Commodore Gillon replied to him and in the course of his remarks observed, "that the learned gentleman had enlightened the minds of his audience by a Latin sentence, and he would follow his good example as far as possible, but would prove the reverse of his position by a quote from High Dutch, which he hoped would be equally well understood by his hearers. He then gave the house a sentence from a German author, which he assured them was applicable to the subject before the Assembly. This put a stop to quotations from dead of foreign languages for that session.

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Historical Stories about our County

W. W. Dixon writes interesting facts about Fairfield County and People

Tragic Events:

Two Hall brothers and a Negro girl made an effort to cross the river at the mouth of Rocky Creek in a boat. All three drown in 1821.

Isaac and Jacob Meek, workers on the canal were drown in 1830.

John Montgomery was drowned while bathing in the river in 1833.

Arthur Owens, while playing leapfrog with a companion, pitched head foremost in to the creek near the mouth of Haynes Branch and was drowned in 1830.

Capt. Charles Thorn was killed and his body thrown into the river by his slave Bob, in 1835. The Negro was executed, his head cut off and stuck on the end of a pole and the pole erected on the roadside. It remained there until it was thoroughly decayed.

Thomas Pickett was stabbed to death in a fight with John Sweat. This occurred in Link's Tavern in 1830.