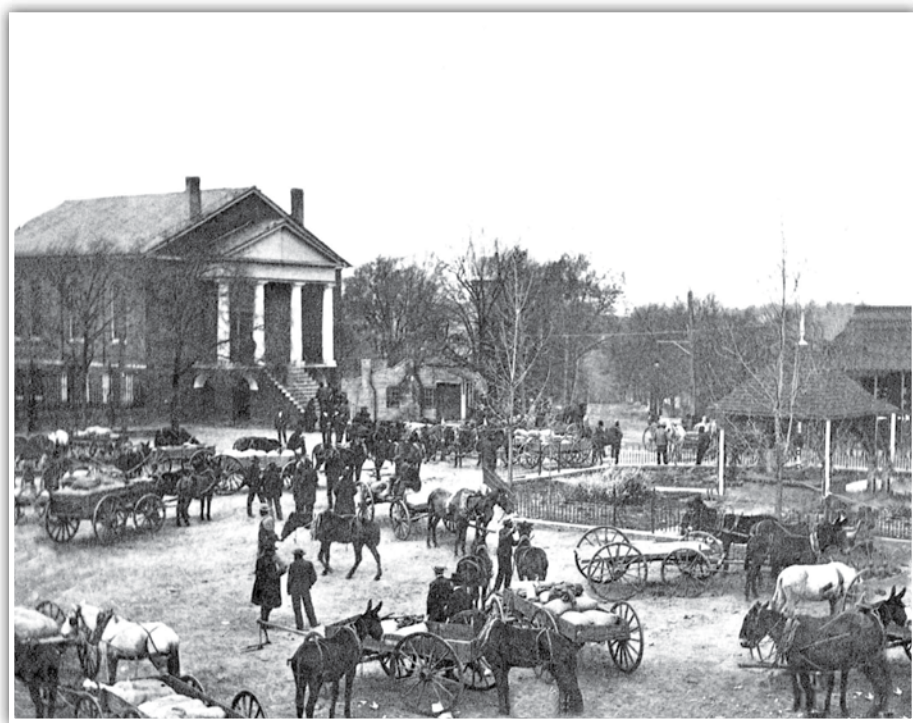


Memoirs of Litchwood

“I Have Things to Tell.”



**Francis Butler Simkins Remembers
the Edgefield of His Youth.**

An Edgefield County Historical Society Publication.

Edgefield County Historical Society

History and Mission

The Edgefield County Historical Society, founded in 1939, is one of the oldest historical societies in the State. Its mission is to promote the study of the history of Edgefield County and its people. Toward that end, it has published a number of books and pamphlets pertaining to the County. It has also been responsible for the preservation of a number of historic sites and buildings and the marking of numerous historical sites throughout the County.

In addition to its role in preserving and promoting the rich history of the County, the Society has always been committed to using our rich history to make Edgefield County more interesting and attractive to tourists, prospective residents and businesses so as to bring recognition and economic vitality to the region. Toward that end, it has operated over the years the Discovery Center Museum, Magnolia Dale House Museum, the Old Edgefield Pottery, the Village Blacksmith and Carpenter's Stand.

It also sponsors the Edgefield History Class which has been meeting every Sunday afternoon at 3:00 p.m. for more than twenty years. This Class is a casual gathering of persons interested in local history who discuss various subjects over coffee and cookies. For more information, call the Society office at 803-637-2233. In 2009 the Class authored *The Story of Edgefield*. It is also engaged in writing *The American Revolution in Edgefield – from Ninety Six to Augusta* which the Society hopes to publish in the next several years.

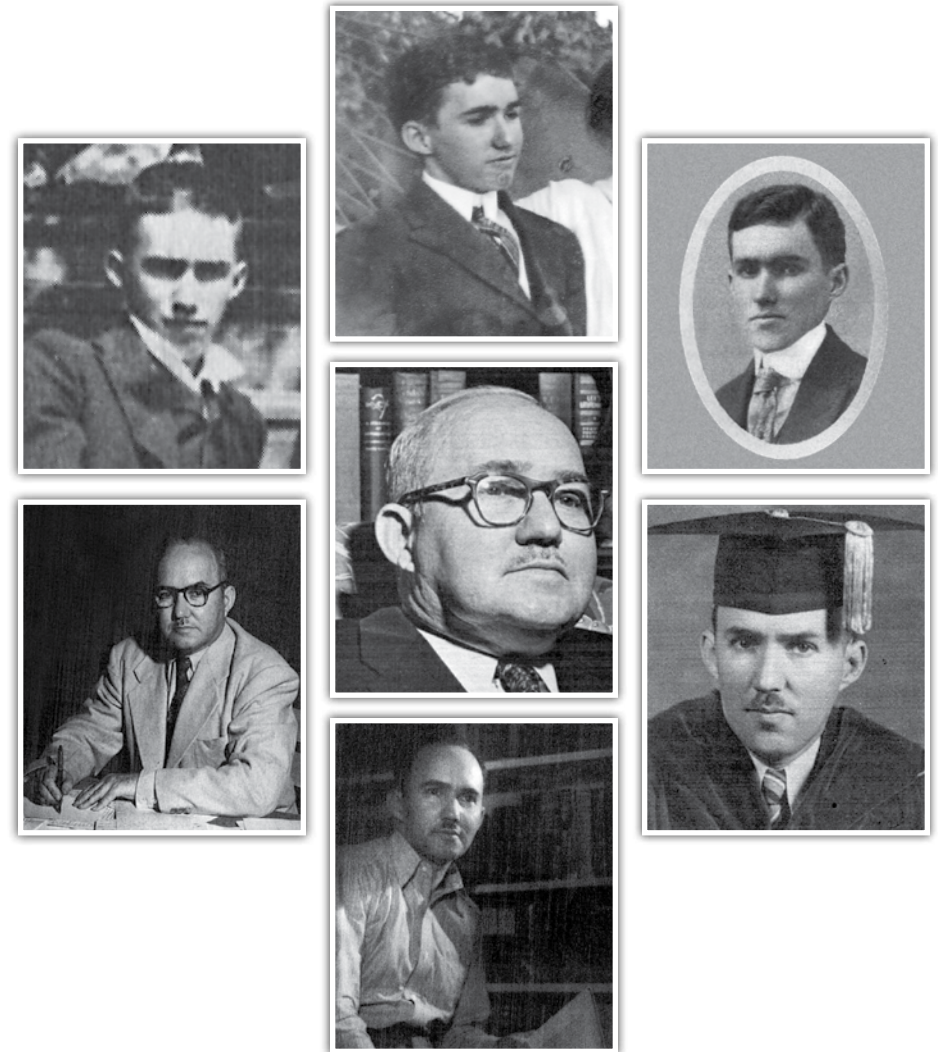
The Society welcomes all of those interested in the history of Edgefield County to join its ranks. Membership applications can be obtained from the Society at P.O. Box 174, Edgefield, SC 29824.

Thus, during its more than seventy-five year history, the Edgefield County Historical Society has brought much to the County in terms of historical and cultural interest, and has promoted, sponsored and supported many efforts to make the County a better, more attractive and more interesting place in which to live or visit. We look forward to the future with enthusiasm and excitement.

MEMOIRS OF LITCHWOOD

"I Have Things to Tell" Francis Butler Simkins Remembers the Edgefield of His Youth

By Francis Butler Simkins



Edited and Annotated by the
Edgefield County Historical Society

Introduction

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The Edgefield History Class

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Francis Butler Simkins was one of the most renowned Southern historians of the twentieth century. Born in Edgefield, South Carolina in 1897, he grew up in a household of distinguished ancestry, but limited means. His father’s ancestors were among the founders of Edgefield; his mother’s ancestors were of Charleston and New York aristocracy. Under the influence of a mother resentful of her limited circumstances, and a kindly, but alcoholic father, Simkins grew to maturity in this small village in the edge of the South Carolina piedmont.

Despite its small size, Edgefield is one of the most historic towns in the Nation, having produced many significant leaders of South Carolina and the Nation. Simkins grew up knowing some of these leaders, and being imbued with stories of all them. It is not surprising, therefore, that he chose a career of writing and teaching history.

In the fall of 1914, Simkins entered the University of South Carolina where he studied history under the Professor Yates Snowden. After graduation he went on to Columbia University where he obtained his masters and doctoral degrees. Later he taught briefly as a visiting or regular professor at the Citadel, Randolph-Macon Women’s College, the University of North Carolina, Emory University, Farmville State Teachers’ College, Louisiana State University, the University of Mississippi, Princeton University, Mississippi State University, the University of Texas and the University of Massachusetts. But most of his long academic career was at Longwood College in Farmville, Virginia.

Over the course of his career, he authored a number of books, including *The Tillman Movement in South Carolina* (1926), *South Carolina during Reconstruction*, with Robert Woody (1932), *The Women of the Confederacy* (1936), *Pitchfork Ben Tillman* (1944), *The South, Old and New: A History, 1820-1947* (1947), *A History of the South 2nd ed.* (1953), *A History of the South 3rd ed.* (1963), *The Everlasting South* (1963), and *A History of the South 4th ed.*, with Charles Pierce Roland (1972).

His 1932 *South Carolina during Reconstruction* was heralded for its revisionist approach in which Simkins and Woody presented Reconstruction as a period of many positive accomplishments and the Re-

Copies of this book may be purchased from the Edgefield County Historical Society for \$25.00 plus \$3.00 for handling and mailing.

Contact the Society at telephone number, 803-637-2233;
email address at info@historicedgefield.com; or
U.S. mail address at P.O. Box 174, Edgefield, SC 29824.

publican governments of that era as something other than all bad. This book challenged the Dunning School which had previously characterized Reconstruction as an unmitigated disaster. Thus, Simkins in his early career was viewed as a liberal. In his later life, during the onset of the Civil Rights movement, he was viewed as a conservative and a traditionalist. This metamorphosis has caused him to be compared to the character, Atticus Finch, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but who, after being the hero of the Southern liberals in the 1960 book, became a defender of segregation in the recently-published sequel *Go Set a Watchman* (2015). However, to those who come to know Simkins, it is apparent that he just reveled in challenging conventional wisdom both in his approach to Reconstruction in 1932 and in his reaction to the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s.

During his career Simkins received many honors: the Dunning Prize, the Guggenheim Fellowship, the Fleming Foundation Lectureship, a number of other awards, and election in 1954 as president of the Southern Historical Association, which later honored him by establishing the Francis Butler Simkins Prize awarded each year for the best first book in Southern history.

Simkins was married twice and had one son by his second wife, Francis Butler “Chip” Simkins, Jr. He lived for most of his adult life in Farmville, Virginia where he taught at Longwood College, now Longwood University. He was renowned for his often eccentric behavior which was wonderfully chronicled in an article by Grady McWhiney in *The Southern Partisan* in the second quarter of 1995. But, most importantly, Simkins was greatly beloved by his many students.

One afternoon in September of 2000 as I left my office on the Edgefield Town Square, I noticed an elderly couple walking down the street. Believing them to be tourists, I approached them and introduced myself, offering to help them or provide any information that they might need. The man introduced himself as Otis Singletary, an eminent historian and longtime president of the University of Kentucky. He had known Francis Butler Simkins when he was a graduate student at Louisiana State University in 1948 and 1949 and was devoted to him. He credited Simkins with much of his success as a historian. As he and his wife were driving from Texas to Washington, DC on this autumn day in 2000, he decided to visit Edgefield, the town about which old professor had so

often spoken. I was pleased to be able to give the Singletarys a tour of the town with particular reference to the Simkins sites, including the Simkins cottage on Columbia Road, Trinity Episcopal Church and Willowbrook Cemetery. That so eminent a man as Singletary would make a special effort to visit the hometown of his professor who had taught him more than a half century earlier is, in itself, a remarkable testament to this, our most famous historian.

Francis Butler Simkins had taught history for over forty years when he died in Farmville in February of 1966 at the age of 68. He was buried in Farmville, but, through the efforts of his nephew, Augustus Tompkins “Gus” Graydon, is memorialized in Edgefield with a marble plaque in Trinity Episcopal Church. He was, through and through, a product of Edgefield, and is revered here as one of our most illustrious native sons.

In 2002, when the historian James S. Humphreys was in Edgefield working on his doctoral thesis on Francis Butler Simkins (which was published as a full-blown biography in 2008), he made us aware that Simkins had written an autobiographical manuscript which had never been published, but which was stored in the library at Longwood University. We realized that this could be of real significance to our further understanding of early twentieth century Edgefield. We immediately contacted the Director of the Archives and Records Management Department at Longwood, Ms. Lydia Williams, and she graciously made us a full copy of the document.

When we received the document we were immediately enthralled. Simkins had provided us, in the first six chapters of his manuscript, with a most interesting, detailed and entertaining view of Edgefield at the end of the nineteenth century and the first several decades of the twentieth century. In subsequent chapters he recounts the remainder of his life, including his years as an undergraduate at the University of South Carolina, as a graduate student at Columbia University in New York, as a teacher at Emory University, Louisiana State University, and Longwood College.

While those subsequent chapters are interesting and provide many fascinating glimpses of Simkins’s varied life and his unique perspectives on many issues, it was those first six chapters which captured our attention. Typical of Simkins who liked to shock his audiences, these

chapters were full of scandalous revelations and highly critical remarks about many of the people who lived here in that era. We recognized that these six chapters provided a unique perspective, not only on Edgefield, but on the American South generally. While the stories in these chapters are true and largely accurate, they provide a perspective of the South which is as significant to understanding the South as the novels of Faulkner. For this reason, the Edgefield County Historical Society decided to publish these six chapters separately, knowing that they would appeal not only to Edgefieldians, but also to the much wider audience which is interested in the unique nature of the American South – “the Everlasting South” about which Simkins had written.

The first thing which is noticeable about this book is that Simkins has used pseudonyms through much of the text. Thus, he doesn't speak of Edgefield, but rather uses the fanciful name “Litchwood” instead; he doesn't use the name “Edgewood,” but rather “Longwood”; and so forth. The names of many, but not all, of the characters are pseudonyms. The reason for this is presumably that much of what he recounts is scandalous. Had he published this in his lifetime, and, particularly if he had used real names, he might have been shot in the Edgefield tradition. Now, fifty years after his death, and long after the deaths of most of the characters described in the book, there should be little risk in its publication. Nevertheless, in publishing this, we made the decision to publish it just as he had written it with the pseudonyms. However, we have annotated it with footnotes, providing the real names of the people where we could decipher them. Unfortunately, there are many instances where we have had to note that the people are “unidentified.”

In many cases the manuscript was in its second draft, typed and edited, but in other cases was still in its first draft in Simkins's own handwriting. It therefore has required much careful reading and slight editing, but in all cases we have attempted to make our final published version just what Simkins had intended.

The reader should be prepared to encounter the eccentric Simkins's tendency to try to shock his readers by making rather outrageous statements. He also uses extensively the “N-word,” even entitling the sixth chapter “The Niggers.” Some readers will undoubtedly be offended by his use of this term, and we debated extensively as to whether we should change it. However, after long consideration, we concluded that

we should publish this work just as he wrote it. Taken as a whole, this memoir is not unfair or derogatory to African Americans. Indeed, many of our white readers will find very uncomfortable Simkins's graphic accounts of the ways in which blacks were mistreated by whites in his childhood. Moreover, he shows many of his black characters in a very favorable light. As Simkins states in his Forward, “Here, some will say is an unpleasant tale, . . . but I cry for the reader's indulgence because beneath brittle comments is a vein of tenderness.”

Each chapter of this book is enthralling in its own way. Chapter I, “Mother's Mold” provides a wonderful picture of Simkins's mother, “Miss Sally,” including her ancestry, her close association with the fascinating Pickens family and her struggles in Edgefield. Chapter II, “Father” shows Simkins's father, “Mr. Mac,” to be a kindly man, but a failure as a breadwinner, primarily caused by his alcoholism.

Chapter III, “Litchwood Alive,” begins with a rather harsh condemnation of the unsanitary conditions in the Town of Edgefield. We strongly suspect that this was greatly overdrawn, as conditions were not nearly as bad as he states, and probably no worse than many other small communities in South Carolina. In this chapter he goes on to describe the rise of those of German descent, gradually replacing the Anglo-Saxon leadership which was beset by alcoholism. He then concludes with an extensive discussion of J. William Thurmond, “the most popular man in Edgefield for forty years,” and his son, Strom Thurmond.

Chapter IV, “Litchwood In Decline,” describes the challenges of Prohibition, the crippling impact of modern highways, the ancestral researches of Mrs. Agatha Woodson, and the aristocratic pretensions of the Seth Butler family of Hillcrest. Chapter V, “Layton,” tells the story of the Bacon/Cheatham family of *The Edgefield Chronicle* newspaper, disparaging his mother's closest friend, James T. Bacon, Bacon's nephew, Louis Wigfall Cheatham, and Bacon's sister, Kate Wigfall Cheatham.

Chapter VI, “The Niggers,” begins by recounting a series of events of the worst sort of mistreatment of African Americans imaginable. It then goes on to describe “Miss Sally's” relationship with many of her black friends. Simkins then tells us about the famous mixed race couple of Edgefield of his youth, and of the role of his father's African American first cousin.

Foreword

Publishing this book has been a project of the Edgefield History Class of the Edgefield County Historical Society, a group which meets informally every Sunday afternoon to discuss some part of Edgefield history. The names of those who have participated in this effort are listed on the copyright page at the beginning of this book. Several individuals have made more substantial contributions by transcribing the text, collecting images and proof-reading the text. Deserving special note are, in alphabetical order, Tricia Price Glenn, Vernon Miller, Carrie Monday, and Haigh Reiniger. We also want to acknowledge the cheerful assistance of Ms. Lydia Williams, Director of the Archives and Records Management of the Greenwood Library at Longwood University. Finally, we want to extend our deepest appreciation to Francis Butler "Chip" Simkins, Jr. who has given the Society all of the rights to his father's autobiography.

The Edgefield County Historical Society is pleased present what we have entitled *Memoirs of Litchwood, "I Have Things to Tell," Francis Butler Simkins Remembers the Edgefield of His Youth*.

Bettis C. Rainsford
March, 2016

In 1932 William T. Couch of the University of North Carolina refused to publish my *Women of the Confederacy*. He said I adhered too closely to my multitudinous notes and that little more than an orderly scrapbook resulted; that I was unwilling to allow full play to the need for a created unity because of unimaginative loyalty to the documents on which the book was based. "Throw away your manuscript and rewrite from memory," advised Mr. Couch. I am attempting to profit by this admonition in my present effort.

In 1948 I published *The South, Old and New*, a history of my native region based on the researches of others. This composition was well enough written to win the attention of a few thousand readers. But it was unsuccessful in avoiding the technical errors over which academic historians make much. A few of my ten thousand facts were wrong, and I experienced the humiliation of being told of these mistakes. It was gravely proclaimed that I had put the middle initial of Confederate Secretary of the Treasury Memminger as "C" when it should have been "G"; that I had said that the initials of the Negro hair straightener Madame Walker were "J. C." when they should have been "C. J."; that I began Theodore G. Bilbo's governorship of Mississippi in 1926 instead of correctly in 1928; and so on.

In the present book I am not worried by the fear that my names and dates will be challenged. I have tried to make them accurate, but that is not my principal concern. My principal concern is to convey the realities of Southern life based on what I have seen and heard during the forty-odd years I have lived in the region below the Potomac. Is this not as valid a method of recording history as making gleanings from the writings of others?

Who am I to feel that my life experiences are worthy of a book as elaborate as this one? What have I done worthy of record? I was born poor and now I am not rich enough to own other than a modest cottage. I went to college and University, received a Ph.D., and since have kept body and soul together by holding an obscure position in a little college. I have published four scholarly works that never made me famous or given me, all told, a profit of a thousand dollars. If I am an important person, no one has ever told me so. My triumphs have been small and my frustrations have been great.

But I have things to tell. I have heard tales and seen deeds the formal historian fails to record. I have felt the Southern past in both its exalting and depressing moods. I have traveled throughout the South, through its mountains and its forests, through its briar patches and its swamps. I have lived forty years in at least five of the Southern States and I have visited all eight of the others. I have traveled through the rest of the United States, through its centers of learning and of wealth, through its slums and its factories. I have retired behind Southern pretense and I have also seen its transparency. I know the glories of the Southern legend, and through contact with the outside world, I have pierced this legend. Ancestor worship has given me the opportunity both to cheer and to jeer. I have emerged with the realization that there is much about the Southern way of life worthy of imitation.

Here, some will say, is an unpleasant tale, a record born of the acceptance of the value of a too-Yankeefied world. But I cry for the reader's indulgence because beneath brittle comments is a vein of tenderness, the same vein of tenderness which the South's gloomiest novelists feel toward a windless and abandoned land. The region below the Potomac is the only land I know and can love. If asked, "Why do you hate the South?" I can reply as quickly as Quinton Compton in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*; "I don't hate it. I don't. I don't hate it! I don't hate it!"

About this task of explaining the South through my own experiences, I am much in earnest. I believe I have an exacting conception of the truth, even to the point of risking the accusation of being an arch-scalawag. I am violating the Southern sense of reticence, exposing pride, the one remaining asset of the broken-down aristocrat. In pursuit of this object, I spare no one, not even myself. Yet my exposure reveals much that is noble. "An honorable end," says the Southern pessimist Ellen Glasgow, "is the one thing that cannot be taken away from man."

Francis Butler Simkins
Written circa 1950

Chapter I Mother's Mold

My earliest recollection of childhood is being dressed by Mother in Scotch kilts, the regalia of skirt, brooch, sporran and glengarry, all except the dirk. It was a second-hand gift from a Northern friend of Aunt Elizabeth, and the reader may rest assured that the like of this costume has never before or since appeared on the streets of our little town of Litchwood, hidden as it is on the South Carolina side of the Savannah River, remote from the whims of changing fashion. Abashed by the conspicuousness of his attire, the timid little fellow of five protested. But Mother was sharply insistent. "The little princes and earls of England," she said, "wear such clothes. Why not a little gentleman of Litchwood?" I protested again.

Mother let the secret out of the bag. "The Simkins children," she eloquently proclaimed, "are different from other children." The inevitable inference from different was superior. Like a little prince or a little earl, I proudly advanced through the unpaved streets of Litchwood impelled by an inspired confidence. If any street urchins cried "funny," neither proud mother nor proud child opened ears to the ridicule.

The overwhelming facts will convince the objective reader that the actual circumstances of my childhood were not "different" or "superior" but quite ordinary. The Simkins family – Father, Mother and four children – was as poor as the average white family of poor little towns of South Carolina. Our front yard was grass-less and gully-washed except where sturdy shrubs of native origin checked the devastations of summer torrents. No fence or stone wall separated the yard from the dusty or muddy street; there was only a red and eroded clay bank. The house was a cottage of four main rooms with a long but narrow piazza and with an



Sarah "Miss Sally" Raven Lewis Simkins (1858-1938), at the time she first came to Edgefield



The Simkins Cottage on Columbia Road.

unlined kitchen loosely attached to the back porch. This flimsy establishment cost less than two thousand dollars. It sat high on brick stilts with its undersides exposed to winter winds which were at times bitter. We possessed all the utilities provided in Litchwood. This did not mean central heating, milk deliveries, or municipal water, gas or electricity. It did mean great piles of wood for the open fires, kerosene lamps, and a cow, pigs, chickens, vegetables and fruit trees on the back premises.

The income of the Simkins family was so meager that, but for two circumstances, our house and lot could not have long remained in our possession. If custom or town regulations had required the purchase of lights, refrigeration, fuel, meat, eggs and vegetables, we would have been forced to mortgage the house to meet these obligations. If Mother had not been extremely economical in the conduct of the household, we would not have had enough money to buy the necessities not produced on the place. Our monthly grocery account never ran over ten dollars. Our table was probably the lightest in town, and on those rare occasions when there were leftovers, they were carefully redressed for the next meal. We did not produce in our backyard as much as the neighbors. Our pigs were smaller and our cow less fruitful. Most of our peaches and pears rotted before they were gathered; only wild plums, blackberries and muscadines gathered from forests and old fields did we have in profusion. Only sweet potatoes, okra and cowpeas flowed freely from our garden. The drought got the beans and English peas; the worms got the

squash and the cucumbers; and Irish potatoes out of our sun-scorched earth were as rare as red apples. Our garden spot was poor and we could not afford enough fertilizer or manure. We seemed always to plant too late to avoid the ravages of the summer sun, failing perhaps to realize that we were living under the influence of seasons different from those of our English ancestors.

For all our poverty and enforced economy the Simkinses believed we were different and superior. Mother told us so. This assertion was, of course, false measured by the material standards which rule in most societies. But in the South Carolina of my childhood there were other social forces at work besides material wealth. Let one aspire to distinction on the basis of pure wealth and then see how ineffective his aspirations were. Mother was enough of a realist to understand this and constantly impressed upon her family the necessity of making use of its non-material assets. The first and most obvious of these assets was family. Our pedigree, the Simkins children were told, was the most aristocratic of any family in Litchwood. Here was a legacy to be prouder of than gold and rich raiment.

The critic can easily be scornful of the Southerner's aristocratic pretensions. Rudiger Bilden, a German who was a sincere friend of the South, once said to me that in all his long years in New York City, he never met anyone from below the Potomac who was not a "professional Southerner," that is, one whose grandfather did not possess as many as one hundred slaves. Here was an aristocracy which included everyone who wished to join it; for in the South, the ambitious person looked up every kinsman and called himself distinguished if one earl, knight, senator, planter or general could be found among the multitude. There was no laughter in the South as there was in England over the aristocratic pretensions of d'Urberville in Thomas Hardy's novel.¹ Moreover, Southern genealogical claims were often fantastic. Wilbur J. Cash² tells of Southerners who trace themselves back to German Emperors and Scotch and Irish Kings and to such mythical personages as the daughter of the Pharaoh and the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. The Colonel and his Lady from whom so many compute descent can, under cold examination of the scholars, often be reduced to ordinary folk who neither dwelt in colonnaded mansions nor rode on fine horses.

¹ Hardy, Thomas, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Harper & Row, 1892.

² Wilbur J. Cash (1900-1941), author of the widely-read and acclaimed work, *The Mind of the South*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1941.

There is something which scholars sometimes forget. It is that one's belief about his ancestors, however inaccurate may be these beliefs, are more important than the true facts. Southerners live by what they think their ancestors were like, not by the discoveries of some critical scholar who perhaps will never be heard or perhaps has never existed. Southerners, without the satisfaction of wealth or education, find in ancestor-worship compensations not unlike those of religion. Who would be cruel enough to take this one insurance against misery from them? Southerners who have achieved wealth or education, on the other hand, may secure social recognition and personal satisfaction by having professional genealogists discover distinguished forebears for them. It is no accident that looking up family trees is the most widespread form of historical research in the South.

That Mother possessed distinguished ancestors was literally true. She was the granddaughter of Elias Vander Horst,³ a Charleston merchant-planter who was in turn the son of Arnoldus Vander Horst, Governor of South Carolina and Intendant of Charleston. Relics of their importance were Vander Horst Street, Vander Horst Wharf, the Vander Horst mansion, Vander Horst portraits in the Gibbes Art Gallery as well as the Vander Horst pew in famed St. Michael's Church in which George Washington sat while in Charleston. Through her maternal grandmother, Mother was descended from the Morris family of New York. Here is a family as distinguished as the Kips, Van Rensselaers, Schuylers and the Roosevelts. Eight of its members were important enough to be sketched in *The Dictionary of American Biography*. Mother was a direct descendant of Lewis Morris, a Signer of the Declaration of Independence; his brother was Gouverneur Morris, the stylist of the Constitution of the United States.

But only in a limited sense did the Vander Horsts of Charleston and the Morrises of New York belong to the Simkinses of Litchwood. Only one sixteenth part of my hereditary strain came from Governor Vander Horst and only one thirty-second part from Signer Morris. The other nineteen-twentieth of me was blood which was more plebian. Oh, the large number of cousins, near and remote, who shared with me the Vander Horst and Morris blood. Contemplation of this fact should have made the Simkinses of Litchwood feel as inconspicuous as those several

³ Vander Horst, a name of Dutch origin is pronounced in South Carolina, "van dross."

million people in the English-speaking world who are descended from William the Conqueror. We were cut off from the Vander Horsts who still owned Kiawah Island and the pew and the Charleston mansion, and Mother was bitter that the portrait of her mother by Thomas Sully was, under the law of primogeniture, the property of a cousin. Her plantation inheritance had been sold to a Yankee sportsman and lumbermen for fifty cents an acre after the cultivation of rice, in the post-bellum years, had proved uneconomic. The proceeds of this sale were just enough to pay for the Litchwood cottage.

The Morris descendants were living in New York in current affluence – one was married to the Ambassador of Germany, another was a successful novelist, and Newbold Morris was high in the politics in New York City. My Aunt Susan was bold enough to visit these people; they gave her old clothes and a little money. My immediate family saw no use in approaching them, feeling that they would have no reason to recognize poor and remote kin from the rural South. Mother's only touch with them was an occasional visit from a lawyer representing the City of New York asking her, as a descendant of who once owned a goodly portion of the Borough of the Bronx, to sign a paper providing for the construction of a street. Our hopes were raised over the possibility of a remote inheritance. Nothing came of the transaction but a five-dollar courtesy fee in return for her signature.



"Miss Sally" as a 10 year old.

Mother had reasons to despise her Charleston kin. Orphaned by the death of her mother who had died from exposure during Sherman's burning of Columbia, she was the ward of Elias Vander Horst, her grandfather. At the early age of ten she left his home, never to return except for brief visits. Elias Vander Horst, mother told her children, was a heartless ass who demanded ceremonial kisses from his descendants and who had fathered so many mulatto children on his Kiawah Island plantation that his wife and children avoided the embarrassment of visiting the place. The lion's share of his property was left

to the family of his oldest son; this included the family portraits and miniatures and the silver.

An old saying is that Charlestonians believe the sun rises on the Cooper River and sets in the Ashley, with the world of nowhere beyond these local estuaries. This statement applied with special emphasis to Mother's relations. The Vander Horst's cherished a minimum of well-known Southern propensity for kinspeople and therefore did not follow with interest Mother's fortunes in Litchwood. This was true despite the fact that she married the son of a Confederate colonel who died on a parapet defending Charleston. They would not visit her; and after she was unable to arouse their curiosity with her home in the back country, she stopped visiting them. Their conduct seemed heartless to a good Southerner like Mother. She knew that her Charleston kin were materialistic and therefore not interested in a poor kinswoman in a country town. She ascribed this attitude to sheer stupidity. In a shrill voice which filled every corner of our cottage, she called her Charlestonian kinsmen "goers-by-the-ground," little men whose heads both physically and mentally were nearer the earth than those of most Southern gentlemen. She recalled how ignorant they were of even the elements of South Carolina geography and history; how their urban insularity kept their minds in narrow grooves; how they lacked the expansive imagination and romantic recklessness of country gentlemen; how they frequently talked in the lingo of the Gullah niggers; how they allowed their municipal college to sink almost into non-existence; and how the only good students in the school she attended in earliest childhood were the fair-headed daughters of German immigrants. She read with glee William Peterfield Trent's exposure⁴ of how stupidly the city treated Simms,⁵ its most talented writer. She recalled with equal glee how Ben Tillman,⁶ called "the Adullamite" by a Charleston editor, brought Litchwood to the attention of the complacent Charlestonians by heaping insults upon their city as he stood in the shadow of St. Michael's Church.

⁴ William Peterfield Trent (1862-1939), professor of English at Sewanee, University of the South, and Columbia University, who wrote extensively of Southern literature and authors, including a biography of William Gilmore Simms (1892).

⁵ William Gilmore Simms (1806-1870), South Carolina's best known and most prolific writer during the antebellum period.

⁶ Benjamin Ryan Tillman (1847-1918), the scion of an old Edgefield family who became Governor of South Carolina (1890-1894) and United States Senator (1895-1918), has been described as the most powerful political figure in the history of South Carolina. Francis Butler Simkins became his chief biographer.

Mother, nevertheless, was too good a South Carolinian not to impart her family legend to her children. Despite the faults of her relatives, she knew that they were aristocrats and that through them her children were aristocrats. She led us to believe that no family in Litchwood was equal to the Vander Horsts and the Morrises. She knew that because of her Charleston background she was able to impart to the Simkins children a degree of urbanity previously unknown in rural Litchwood. She scorned hot biscuits and gummy rice as proof par excellence of not having a rustic background. Because she was city-bred, she made the relative poverty of her family comfortable by knowing the wisdom of limited expenditures on her table; she was too sophisticated to follow the rural habit of loading it down with all sorts of viands impossible to consume. And she possessed one and only one relic of past grandeur; it was what we called Mother's vases, beautiful containers of Dresden china decorated with figures of shepherds and shepherdesses. There was nothing else like them in Litchwood.

In place of the broken ties with her Charleston kin, Mother established other aristocratic ties which probably influenced her and her children. It was the connection Mother established between herself and the Pickett⁷ family of Litchwood. While at St. Mary's School⁸ she became the closest friend of Katrina,⁹ the only child of Hannah Petross Holmes¹⁰ and the late Governor Frederick H. Pickett.¹¹ Instead of returning to her unloved



*Lucy Francis Olga Neva
"Douschka" Pickens
(1859-1893)*

⁷ The Francis Pickens family.

⁸ St. Mary's School in Raleigh, North Carolina was founded in 1842 and became one of the most popular schools for girls in the South.

⁹ Francis Eugenia Olga Neva "Douschka" Pickens (1859-1893), the only child of Francis and Lucy Holcombe Pickens was born in the Winter Palace of the Czar in St. Petersburg, Russia while her father was United States Ambassador to Russia.

¹⁰ Lucy Petway Holcombe (1832-1899), who grew up in Marshall, Texas, was a beautiful, intelligent and ambitious woman who became the bride of Francis W. Pickens in 1858. She has been described as "the Queen of the Confederacy."

¹¹ Francis Wilkerson Pickens (1805-1869), the son of Governor Andrew Pickens (1779-1837) and the grandson of General Andrew Pickens (1739-1817), was a wealthy planter of Edgefield who served as Congressman, United States Ambassador to Russia and

grandfather in Charleston, Mother spent her vacations at Longwood,¹² the Pickett estate one mile from Litchwood Courthouse. At the end of her school career in 1878, she went to Litchwood to spend the rest of her life. She was not legally adopted by Mrs. Pickett, but she became such a fixture in the Longwood household that she was treated like a daughter, virtually an only daughter to Mrs. Pickett after Katrina's untimely death.

Here was life as completely different from that of Charleston as something genuinely Southern and South Carolinian could be. About Litchwood and Longwood was a rural expansiveness and recklessness beyond the imagination of those who lived on the spit between the Ashley and Cooper Rivers.



*Edgewood, circa 1900
Plantation home of Francis and Lucy Pickens*

There was a great forest, a waste of worn out fields, a hunting-jacket sort of bohemianism which expressed itself in extravagant dress, drinking and shooting. Here was the "bloody Litchwood" of Mason L. Weems's¹³ pamphlet, the home of a batch of fireaters who had been more responsible for precipitating the War Between the States than the Charlestonians. Here had lived George McDuffie,¹⁴ the leader of Nullification; James Bonham¹⁵ who died at

Governor of South Carolina.

¹² Edgewood, the 1836 plantation of Francis Pickens a mile north of the Edgefield County Courthouse, was widely acknowledged as one of the most significant antebellum plantation in the South Carolina upcountry. The house itself was not architecturally the grandest or most detailed in the state, but the setting, the furnishings and the aura of its occupants created an impression of grandeur on a scale unsurpassed in the South.

¹³ Parson Mason Locke Weems (1759-1825) was an itinerate Episcopal minister who lived in Edgefield for a time in the early 19th century and who wrote two sermons while here: one about Becky Cotton, a husband-killer, and another about Ned Findley, a wife-killer. His sermons portrayed Edgefield as a violent and bloody place.

¹⁴ George McDuffie (1790-1851), a native of McDuffie County, Georgia, began his political career in Edgefield in the early 19th century and served as Congressman, Governor and United States Senator.

¹⁵ James "Jim" Bonham (1807-1836) grew up in Edgefield, but moved to Alabama and then to Texas where he became involved in the fight for Texas Independence. At the Alamo, he was given the job of going out to find reinforcements, but when he was unable to get any of the other Texas forces to come to the rescue, he returned to the

the Alamo; Andrew Pickens Butler¹⁶ whom Charles Sumner¹⁷ insulted and Preston Brooks¹⁸ who assaulted Sumner; and Frederick H. Pickett¹⁹ who led in South Carolina's reckoning with the United States at Fort Sumter. Out of the Litchwood backwoods in Mother's time emerged Ben Tillman, a revolutionary conservative who resented the capitulation of the rural south before the commercial spirit of the cities.

But all was not turbulence in the Litchwood of Mother's youth. About it was the mellow glow of the sunset of the Confederacy and of the classical training of the ante-bellum academies. There was the company of men who had imbibed the Ciceronian manners and rhetoric and who had led in honorable defeats of the Virginia and Tennessee battlefields. These ex-Confederate officers wore their aureoles with equanimity if not with modesty.

Hannah Petross Holmes Pickett was an almost fabulous figure taken bodily out of the pages of romance. Nurtured in Texas of a Virginia family, she visited the springs of Virginia in the summer of 1857 under the escort of her mother. There she met and became engaged to Frederick H. Pickett, grandson of the Revolutionary hero Andrew Pickett,²⁰ the younger Pickett, a large slave holder and a congressman experienced in Washington politics and the philosophy of Calhoun. Hannah was twenty-five and positively beautiful, one



*Lucy Petway Holcombe
Pickens (1832-1899), circa
1869, as a young widow*

Alamo to fight and die with his colleagues.

¹⁶ "Judge" Andrew Pickens Butler (1790-1857), the son of General William Butler (1759-1821), served as a member of the South Carolina House of Representatives, a Judge and a United States Senator.

¹⁷ Charles Sumner (1811-1874), a United States Senator from Massachusetts, was a virulent abolitionist who delivered a speech on the floor the United States Senate in which he grossly insulted South Carolina and Senator Butler.

¹⁸ Preston Smith Brooks (1819-1857), a native of Edgefield Village, was serving as Congressman in 1856 when Sumner delivered his speech. As Senator Butler, a cousin of Brooks's, was elderly and infirm, Brooks went into the Senate chamber and gave Sumner a sound beating with his cane, perhaps the most galvanizing event which led to the Civil War.

¹⁹ Francis W. Pickens (1805-1869) was elected Governor upon returning from Russia in December, 1860. He presided over Secession and the Battle of Fort Sumter.

²⁰ General Andrew Pickens (1739-1817)

of “perfect figure and graceful carriage, with regular features, abundant hair of a shade called titian.” Congressman Pickett was ugly, pedantic, middle aged and twice widowed. Litchwood gossips used to say that Hannah’s mother was a pipe-smoking woman of the frontier who came east to sacrifice her daughter for position. Actually, she was of sufficient social standing and wealth for her home in Marshall, Texas, to be regarded as one of the showplaces of the town.

It was customary in the Old South for the great planters of the lower South to visit the Virginia watering places in order that they and their families might escape from the lonesomeness of their forest dwellings. All sorts of things, the historians tell us, happened at the springs; not the least among these activities was the age-old quest for advantageous marriages. As a marriage price, Hannah Holmes got a husband who was rich and distinguished. This gave her entrance into political society and made her mistress of a large plantation. But she wanted in addition, broad experiences before retiring to the routine of managing Negroes on an isolated plantation. That she was intellectually enterprising as well as beautiful is attested by the production in 1856 of a book called *The Free Flag of Cuba*. This book expressed the ambition of the imperialists of the Old South to extend the Slave Kingdom. She demanded that her husband secure a diplomatic position. Accordingly, President James Buchanan was prevailed upon to make Pickett minister to Russia. He and Lucy took up residence in St. Petersburg in 1858 and remained there two years.

Mother told her children of Hannah’s experiences at the court of the Tzars with a passion for detail which made us almost believe that those experiences had been Mother’s rather than those of a lady with whom she was no blood kin.²¹ Mrs. Pickett was an attractive figure at the palace



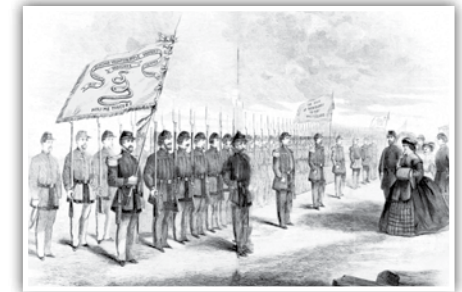
Francis Wilkinson Pickens (1805-1869), Congressman, Ambassador, Governor



Czar Alexander II of Russia (1818-1881), an ardent admirer of Lucy Pickens

of the Liberator Tzar Alexander II. She danced with the Tzaravitch. Her exquisite features were executed in marble by a German sculptor.²² She acquired much fine jewelry, china, paintings and clocks. The piece de resistance was a diamond ring which impecunious descendants were later able to pawn for five thousand dollars. At St. Petersburg was born her only child, Katrina, which in Russian means “Darling.” The Litchwood gossips said with romantic carelessness that the child was the daughter of one of the officers of the Imperial Guard.²³ But Mother knew that this assertion was untrue because Katrina looked like Minister Pickett. Unlike her mother, she was not pretty.

Pickett was Governor of South Carolina during the most fateful months of that state’s rash history. This was during the crisis of Secession and the bombardment of Fort Sumter. Hannah Holmes shown resplendent as the wife of the war governor. In cape, bonnet and hoops, she reviewed the South Carolina regiments which went forward



Lucy Pickens reviewing the Confederate troops

grand Court balls at the Winter Palace are in progress. One of them came off two weeks ago. The enchanted palace of Aladdin, nor aught of fairy tale, or ‘midsummer night’s dream’ could surpass the splendor magnificence beauty of these entertainments. Indeed some of the oldest Ministers here who have been at the Courts of St. James and St. Cloud told me that the ball we were then attending far exceeded anything they had ever imagined. During the supper, the Emperor *in propria persona* walked around the Diplomatic Table, in order to see that his guests were properly served. Just think, Sir, of the representatives of the Cow Vine Spring, Log Creek, Beaver Dam, the Dark Corner and the Bloody 7th being waited upon by the Emperor of all the Russias.” *Journal of Southern History, Volume III*, Baton Rouge, 1937, pp. 190-195.

²² The marble busts of Lucy and Francis are displayed in the main reading room of the South Caroliniana Library.

²³ The more prevalent rumor, but not possible because of the timing of Lucy’s pregnancy, was that she was the daughter of the Czar himself.

²¹ The grandeur of life at the Winter Palace of the Czar was graphically described in a letter from John Edmund Bacon, Secretary of Legation to Minister Pickens, to General Milledge Luke Bonham back here in Edgefield, dated February 24, 1859: “The

to repulse the Yankees at First Manassas. Her features adorned several issues of Confederate hundred dollar bills and there was a regiment known as the Holmes Legion.²⁴ Mounted on a spirited steed, attired in a riding habit of black velvet with a large black hat of the same material turned up at the side, with a long white plume as its only ornament, she bestowed a farewell salute upon this organization as it departed for the Virginia battles.

Governor Pickett died in 1869. His widow then became the sole owner of Longwood. It fulfilled romantic expectations. An avenue of cedars one mile in length led to a rambling house of one story, a widely-spread



Sitting on the steps at Edgewood, circa 1888, Mrs. Sally Lewis Simkins bottom left, 6 year old Miss Lucy Dugas standing on steps, Mrs. Lucy Pickens on porch

edifice of large rooms, great pantries and broad porches. There were a kitchen and two smoke houses in the backyard and the slave quarters in a grove of oaks. There was a garden too profuse to maintain the rigid lines of its English designer. Beneath a dense shade of magnolia and hickory, bronze statuary dripped with the seepings of summer rains. This twilight effect was given color by a profusion of camellias, azaleas and roses in the few sunny spots. Beyond the inner garden symmetrical hedges of boxwood cut figurines and an avenue of crepe myrtle led to a lake studded with water lilies. The house was undistinguished architecturally but it possessed a rich interior which proved

that its master and mistress had not visited Europe in vain. While there they acquired vases, chandeliers, French rugs, Dresden china to give beauty to a house which Pickett had long before made interesting with books of Sir Walter Scott and the literary worthies of England. There were portraits of Russian royalty and busts of Pickett in all his ugliness and Hannah in all her beauty.

When mother came to Longwood to dwell with Mrs. Pickett, Longwood had already become the center of a long series of festivities which did not end until the plantation's great mistress died in 1899. The cost of

²⁴ The Holcombe Legion was outfitted by Mrs. Pickens.

the Russian mission, the catastrophe of 1865, and four years later the death of the shrewd manager who had built the estate, meant the gradual decay and ultimate extinction of Longwood. Despite the fact that there were fifteen cows in the yard, butter and milk had to be purchased for the family table. The Negroes neglected the milking and stole extravagantly. It was not beneath the dignity of Colonel Holmes,²⁵ Mrs. Pickett's brother, to make wholesale raids upon the pantries for the benefit of his mulatto brood.



Judge Richard Carpenter (1830-18??), carpetbagger judge who Lucy invited to dinner.

Mrs. Pickett and Katrina were extravagant, and guests, invited and uninvited, did not know when to leave a bountiful board. They would linger for days and weeks and months. Yet life went on merrily. The Negroes went on with their tasks as if they were still slaves. It was the aftermath of the Old South when ladies were fair and returned warriors were gay and leisurely. There was time to drink and dance and to make love. If mortgagees were inclined to be impatient, they could be satisfied through the sale of a piece of land or they could be delayed by Circuit Court Judge Carpenter.²⁶ He was a witty carpetbagger whose favor Mrs. Pickett won by unconventionally inviting him to her table.

Hannah Holmes was a gay widow. Between midnight and three in the morning she ate heartily of the collards and drank heavily of native corn whiskey. "Do you wish to see the Pickett graveyard?" said Andrew Simkins²⁷ to me in later years. This colored ex-member of the Legislature showed me a great pile of whisky bottles in a wooded dell.

Through the Longwood gate passed a long procession of guests. Among them was every white man of position in Litchwood County ex-

²⁵ John Theodore H. Holcombe (1834-1907).

²⁶ Not a pseudonym. Judge Richard Brinsley Carpenter (1830-18??), a native of Kentucky who had fought for the Union, came after the War to South Carolina where he was elected Judge of the First Circuit in 1868. In 1870 he was an unsuccessful candidate for Governor with M. C. Butler as his running mate for Lieutenant Governor. After 1876 he moved to Colorado.

²⁷ Not a pseudonym. Andrew Simkins (1854-1935) was the son of Charlotte, the slave of Arthur Simkins (1819-1863) by either Arthur Simkins or by a Simkins cousin. He lived on a farm adjoining Edgewood. While his full or half-brother, Paris Simkins (1851-1930), had been a member of the state legislature during Reconstruction, Andrew Simkins never served in that body.

cept the mad farmer who was conspiring against the old order. Ben Tillman was too rustic and too studious to be gay and gallant. From all over South Carolina came the ex-brigadiers and the Bourbon statesmen and even a few of the more charmingly adaptable among the carpet-baggers and the ex-carpetbaggers. And there also came the richer and brighter of citizens of the nearby cotton town of Augusta. The gayest of the gay was Captain Markert,²⁸ a German-born merchant of Hamburg-on-the-Savannah who was sufficiently South Carolinian to espouse the cause of the Confederacy and drink quantities of raw whiskey. From North Carolina came Major Kirkland,²⁹ a gentleman who had lost a leg in a drunken buggy ride. He came for a morning call and stayed thirty years. I saw him lonesomely traverse the Edgewood porch years after Mrs. Pickett was dead. Long after he was dead, in my youthful imagination, I heard the thud of his peg-leg on the wooden floor.

There were rumors that Mrs. Pickett extricated herself from financial difficulties caused by her fast life by exacting "loans" from her guests. Whether or not this is true, Mother did not know. I do know that in her later years Mother had a visitor, Colonel Phillips³⁰ of Augusta. He said that once, as he drove away from Edgewood, he had nothing in the form of money to give Uncle Lucius,³¹ the bowing Negro who opened the gate for him. His only expedient was to take the coat off his back and throw it to the receptive servant.

Had Mrs. Pickett been nothing but a wastrel she would not have enjoyed the admiration of a person exacting as Mother. She presided over the Pickett patrimony with a generous dignity which left no room for a wise economy. She recognized everyone with the graciousness of a French king. This included both the humblest Negro and the most

²⁸ Not a pseudonym. Captain Michael Anton Markert (1831-1895), a native of Austria, was an Edgefield merchant and later contractor who built or enlarged many houses around Edgefield, including Magnolia Dale, Carnoosie, the Old Law Building and Mulberry Hill. He lived both in the town of Edgefield at Carnoosie and later on the plank road toward the Pine House near Darby. In more recent years his descendants purchased the old plantation on the Savannah River just north and west of the mouth of Stevens Creek which had been owned by John Bauskett and Francis Pickens and was the home of M. C. Butler after the war. We have found no record of his living at Hamburg.

²⁹ Not a pseudonym. Major Samuel Simpson Kirkland (1831-1904) was a native of Hillsborough, North Carolina.

³⁰ Unidentified.

³¹ Uncle Harper.

pompous Bourbon statesman. She was a loyal Episcopalian who observed all the externals of that ceremonious faith. At the same time, Dr. Greenwood, the Baptist minister,³² had as much reason to love her as did Mr. Cornwall, the rector of the little Episcopal Church.³³ She read extensively in the English and French classics and, as a consequence, possessed conversational powers which gave her distinction among plantation mistresses. She was as much a feminist as possible in a region where the ideals of Sir Walter Scott and St. Paul showed few signs of abating. She could not be a politician or a bishop but she could be active in the Confederate monument and memorial associations. She was an officer of the Mt. Vernon Ladies Association.

Hannah Holmes Pickett was most ambitious for Katrina. In the child's early years she was provided with a French governess. For her middle childhood she was sent to St. Mary's School where she was trained in religion, French and other adornments of a lady. The next step, of course, in Hannah's plans for her daughter was an advantageous marriage. The daughter must marry as well as her mother! For this purpose was selected Dr. Joseph Dumond,³⁴ a member of a family long-distinguished in Augusta's medical circles.

Katrina had other ideas for herself than the ambition of conforming to the conventions and urbanities of Augusta. She developed into a girl of the Longwood forest, a sort of rural bohemian who loved dogs and horses and hunting and camping. She and Mother fried fish on the banks of the Ashepoo, a river on the Vander Horst estate. She and Mother roamed through the balsam forests on the side of Mount Mitchell in Western North Carolina, burning bright fires at night to keep the wolves away. Through the streets of Asheville rode Katrina behind a pair of black horses with her knee-length tresses dangling behind. A bit theatrical one might say for a lady of a great South Carolina family. Had Katrina been less casual and had she lived in a community where there was a theatre she might have been an actress. As the situation was, she had many beaux, most of whom did not come up to the specifications of the calculating Mrs. Pickett.

³² The Reverend Dr. Luther Rice Gwaltney (1830-1910).

³³ Reverend A. E. Cornish (18??-19??), who served as rector from 1886 to 1887 and from 1889 until 1892.

³⁴ Dr. George Dugas (1852-1903).

When the time appointed by her mother came, Katrina married Dr. Dumond and in due course bore him three children. But the night of her marriage she went on the dark porch of Longwood and kissed several of her more precious boyfriends.³⁵ She was not happy in Augusta. She spent most of her time in Litchwood, riding, shooting, dancing and flirting. On a calm day in 1893 she was seen bestowing a kiss on Litchwood's handsomest lawyer³⁶ as she alighted with him from a boat ride on the Ashepoo River. She died a week later, aged thirty-four;³⁷ her escort lived to be an unromantic and pedantic justice of the South Carolina Supreme Court. He did not die until the fifth decade of the twentieth century, aged eighty-eight.

Mrs. Pickett gave her daughter Litchwood's most unusual funeral. Former slaves of Governor Pickett, white-haired black men, were summoned to the side of Katrina's coffin of white velvet and told that they were to be the pallbearers. "I have sent for you to do this honor," said their mistress as she stood erect with a hand on the bier, "because I wish to make a public acknowledgement of your faithfulness and devotion through all her sweet life to this, your young mistress. When your master died, you remember he sent for you and confided to your faithful care and protection his wife and little child. You have been faithful to that trust. In all the dreary times of riot and thieving you have stood by us and protected us, and I thank you now in the presence of all these friends for your loyalty and devotion. That sweet young life is over, and you will carry from this room her precious body. Her spirit is with God; she is an angel in heaven; and now I ask you to continue your faithful devotion to your mistress and to these little children."

The black men bore the white coffin down the great avenue of cedars, followed by Katrina's hounds and her riderless horse. In the Litchwood church the mistress of Longwood addressed the assembled whites

³⁵ Martha Juliet "Mattie" Nicholson Rainsford (1866-1962) was a guest at the wedding at Edgewood and reported that, just prior to the ceremony, the assembled guests heard Douschka scream out, "I am not going to marry that old man." But marry him she did; her mother forced her to march down the aisle. This story was told by June Rainsford Butler Henderson (1895-1993), daughter of Mattie Nicholson Rainsford.

³⁶ Milledge Lipscomb Bonham (1854-1942).

³⁷ Douschka's untimely and unexpected death has always been somewhat of a mystery. There was a story that she fell while riding her horse at Edgewood and died unexpectedly several days later of internal injuries that were sustained in the fall but apparently unknown. Other observers have suggested that she may have committed suicide. Her mother was very secretive about the cause of Douschka's demise.

in the same vein she had spoken to the pallbearers. Mother thought she had behaved like a Hapsburg, like Marie Antoinette on the scaffold or Elizabeth of Austria announcing the death of the Archduke Rudolph to the Emperor. The Picketts were like queens; they knew how to die, if not how to live.

After Katrina's death the decay at Longwood grew progressive. It was the normal process of old age hastened by the extravagance and carelessness which possessed both mistress and household. The meticulous English gardener died and the black yahoos let the weeds and brambles make a once-orderly arrangement into a semi-tropical tangle. There was too much drunken laughter; Mrs. Pickett in her cups after midnight and Colonel Holmes reeling in from Augusta where he had gambled up a good portion of the returns of the yearly cotton harvest. The Colonel, on sobering, was forced to become more and more energetic in stealing from his sister's larder in order to feed his growing family of mulattoes in the cabin beyond the woods. "Oh how can I get rid of him?" vainly complained their handsome black mother³⁸ to Miss Sallie.

And there was Pince,³⁹ the boon companion of the aging Mrs. Pickett. She was a girl who managed to get the maximum of fun and the last pint of whiskey out of the decrepit gentlemen who frequented Longwood. I saw her last in her old age when she returned to Litchwood to recall old times with Miss Sallie. She was toothless and faded but the spirit of gayety was still in her one bright eye and in her hectic cackle. Laughter never ceased as long as a Pickett or a Pickett companion survived.

The death of Katrina's only son "Oui-Oui"⁴⁰ in 1898 in Augusta of smallpox gave the aging Hannah Holmes an opportunity for a final act of wild heroism before she too was gathered to her fathers. Because of the fear of contagion, the health authorities of the Georgia city forbade the removal of the child to Litchwood where the child might rest beside his mother in the town cemetery. Defiantly did Mrs. Pickett order a grave opened in the Longwood garden and have the corpse placed on the seat of her carriage. She and Miss Sallie climbed beside the coachman and rode all night to Litchwood, twenty-three miles away. When at dawn the black grave-diggers heard the rattle of the carriage in the Longwood Av-

³⁸ Ann Simpo (18??-19??)

³⁹ Unidentified.

⁴⁰ Louis Alexander "Oui-Oui" Dugas (1884-1898).

enue, they fled from their post of duty, fearing the possibility of smallpox. Mother and the coachman placed the body in the grave, and while the coachman piled on the earth, Mother and Mrs. Pickett, repeated in resonant tones, the burial service of the Episcopal Church.⁴¹

After Mrs. Pickett's death in 1899, the decay of Longwood proceeded at a still more rapid pace. The heirs to the Pickett family fortune were Linda⁴² and Molly,⁴³ Katrina's daughters. They were two flowers who became wild weeds as soon as they were old enough to escape their governesses. They would tolerate the restraints of neither high school nor college. Their ignorance of the things one learns in school is illustrated by their division of Governor Pickett's library. Molly took twenty-four of Walter Scott's novels and Linda took twenty-two. Molly took three of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and Linda took two; and so on for the creation of an unimaginative triumph of broken sets.

Linda, against the aristocratic prejudices of her kin and friends, married the son of Ben Tillman, the very man who had successfully conspired against aristocratic oligarchy in South Carolina. "Come to me on my own terms and I will love you," the stern statesman-patriarch told his daughter-in-law on his first visit to Longwood. But there was no love. The imaginative old puritan tagged on the lovely girls his suspicions of the bohemian license for which Longwood had long been noted. The never-ending revelry of the place was too much for Ben's son. He

⁴¹ Another version of this story, told by June Rainsford Butler Henderson (1895-1993), was that when the Augusta authorities would not let the body be brought back to Edgefield, he was buried in Magnolia Cemetery in Augusta. Mrs. Pickens, however, was very unhappy with this and therefore engaged Henry C. Watson (18??-1916), a dashing admirer of hers who ran a livery stable in Edgefield, to go to Augusta, dig up the body and bring it back to Edgewood where she had had a grave dug in the garden beside the long drive up to the house. Watson made a valiant effort, going to the Augusta cemetery, digging up the body and heading back to Edgefield, but, while crossing the bridge over the Savannah River, he was stopped by the Georgia authorities and forced to return the body to the grave in Magnolia Cemetery. Thereafter, when Edgefield children went out to Edgewood they would see the depression where "Oui-Oui" was to have been buried, and would hear the story of Mrs. Pickens' efforts to bring her grandson home. The facts that there was never any marker on a grave to "Oui-Oui" at Edgewood and that "Oui-Oui's" grave can be seen today at Magnolia Cemetery in Augusta, causes us to conclude that Mrs. Henderson's story is more likely to be the accurate one.

⁴² Lucy Francis Pickens Dugas (1882-1970).

⁴³ Adrienne Dorothea "Dolly" Dugas (1886-1947).



Lucy Francis Pickens Dugas
(1882-1970)

took to drink and to that unreasoning jealousy which drink inevitably arouses. There was a sensational divorce⁴⁴ and tedious lawsuits over possessions. There might have been bloodshed had not the chivalric heritage of South Carolinians reduced the Tillmans to silence in matters of feminine honor.

"Say what you will about the living but utter not a word about the dead or else you will get a bullet in the heart," Molly wrote Hog Stoope,⁴⁵ the Tillman attorney, the morning before the hearing in the Supreme Court of South Carolina over the possession

of Linda's two children. That Molly meant what she wrote is attested by the fact that Miss Sallie and I saw her put a pearl-handled, twenty-two revolver in her pocket as she left for the court room.

Stoope, in his pleas before the court, said nothing derogatory of the Pickett women. Perhaps he, too, was moved by a sense of chivalric restraint. Or perhaps as a Litchwood man he knew well that the granddaughter of Hannah Holmes was capable of implementing her words.

Miss Sallie was mistress of ceremonies at Molly's marriage. Bon fires of the fattest pine knots led five hundred guests up the Longwood Avenue to an altar described as a "very miracle of beauty" before which Mr. Cornwell, who had buried Katrina, heard the solemn vows. Mother was happy for two reasons. Her five-year-old son had a part in the ceremony. "Beautiful little Francis Simkins, habited like Puck in *Midsummer's Night Dream*," said the *Charleston News and Courier*, "bore the ring on an embroidered white satin pillow." Molly was marrying Wallace Singleton,⁴⁶ the son of the Bourbon ex-governor whom Ben Tillman had

⁴⁴ The couple was only legally "separated" as South Carolina law did not permit divorce at that time.

⁴⁵ John William Thurmond (1862-1934) was the father of James Strom Thurmond (1902-2003).

⁴⁶ William Wallace Sheppard (1880-1961), son of John Calhoun Sheppard (1850-1931).



Adrienne Dorothea "Dolly" Dugas Sheppard (1886-1947) with her niece Douschka Tillman Thatch (1904-1970)

defeated for reelection.⁴⁷ Young Singleton belonged to Litchwood's best known family aside from the Picketts and the Tillmans; he had recently graduated from Virginia Military Institute, the College of Stonewall Jackson; and he had ambitions to follow his distinguished father into the profession of law.

But Wallace and Molly's marriage was destined for a hectic failure. He disappointed his father and friends by turning to what, in the opinion of conservative South Carolinians, was worse than drink and murder. He proclaimed himself a free thinker, a sort of village atheist. He wrote a book on the subject which might have been published had Governor Singleton not threat-

ened him with disinheritance. The chamber of horrors to the children of Litchwood was the secluded chamber in the Singleton house where Wallace kept the works of Voltaire. He left Litchwood shortly after the controversy over his religious views to the Antipodes where he became a member of the Philippine constabulary. He was doubtless running away from the embarrassment caused by the loose conduct of his wife. The people of Litchwood designated him a conscienceless weakling; by quitting his wife's bed, they said, he was subjecting her to moral temptations no spirited young woman could withstand.

Miss Sallie and her children loved Molly. She was the daughter of a dearest friend and we believed her to be the most beautiful woman in South Carolina. She was described in the newspapers at the time of her marriage as "a radiant, Aurora-like beauty, tall, gliding, graceful." The greatest thrill of my childhood was to sit in the pommel of her saddle while she, Bonnie Belle and I dashed over the countryside. Among the

⁴⁷ Governor Tillman defeated John C. Sheppard in the 1892 election in which Sheppard, who had served as Governor in the mid-1880s, was the candidate of the Conservatives in opposition to Tillman.

greatest favors bestowed upon Mother was for Molly to appear on the Simkins backdoor on news that Mother had unexpected company. In apron and cap the young lady waited upon the table with the grace of the best colored servant.

On her husband's departure, Molly immediately threw her reputation to the winds. She was seen in the company of numerous men and held drunken parties in her apartment in her father-in-law's house.⁴⁸ Her third child was believed to have been sired by Bob Matherly,⁴⁹ a wealthy young rake of Litchwood County who ultimately died in an automobile accident. Governor Singleton, who had long prided himself on the spotless reputations of his five daughters, was overwhelmed by the conduct of his daughter-in-law; he was either too timid or too kind-hearted to turn her out of his house. Undoubtedly, worry over her was a main reason he ultimately lost his mind. He lived on until 1931.

Molly's Litchwood career was ended suddenly by a dramatic incident. Riding whip in hand, she dashed up and down the main street of the town in an automobile driven by a young woman nurse from Augusta. Both women were wildly drunk. When the Mayor⁵⁰ was finally able to get them to stop, Molly administered him a thrashing with her whip. That night a committee of citizens ordered her from



Dolly, circa 1917, an alluring woman

⁴⁸ Wallace and Dolly had begun their married life at "Holly Hill," the old house on Gray Street, about a half-mile south of the Town Square, which Wallace purchased from Kate Butler Devore in 1908. Dolly's youngest daughter, Dorothea Sheppard Jenkins Mewshaw Weston (1910-2004), stated that she was born in this house. Wallace deeded the house to Dolly, presumably pursuant to a property settlement agreement, in 1913. Dolly sold the house to B.L. Mims in 1915. At what point, and under what circumstances, she moved into an apartment in her father-in-law's house, we do not know.

⁴⁹ Could this have been Benjamin W. "Bub" Bettis (1888-1911) who was killed in an automobile accident near Hendersonville, North Carolina in July of 1911?

⁵⁰ Dr. John G. Edwards (1884-1931), the progressive mayor of Edgefield who served from 1910 to 1924.

Litchwood.⁵¹ Never did she return alive.⁵² But thirty years after her exile, her body was brought back to rest beside Katrina. A goodly crowd bringing plenty of flowers turned out for the burial. They remembered her mother and her grandmother and her charm and beauty, forgetting, in Christian charity, the evil she had done to herself and to others.

“I’ll bring out old Pince,” laughingly cried Molly’s daughter Hannah⁵³ as I entered her apartment one August afternoon in 1937. “Old Pince,” said I, “she has been dead for ten years.” “She has come back to life,” said Hannah as her mother entered from the rear of the apartment. Molly had lost all good looks, teeth, figure, one eye – all except the other bright eye and gay cackle. “Watch her run for the bottle,” said her daughter cynically as we stopped that evening at various houses to visit family friends. Molly was a harmless soul sustained only by alcohol.

Hannah solemnly resolved not to follow in her mother’s footsteps. But it was not because she was determined to miss the joys of the great sins of cohabitating with a variety of healthy men and tasting the exhilarating effects of the strong drink. She was a product of the twentieth century, a time when shrewd women learned to escape the wages of sin. She took up a calling in which calculation, common sense and physical attractiveness counted more than gentility and learning. She became a trained nurse. Inevitably she married a doctor. Doctor Bolling⁵⁴ was too busy with his practice to give her anything but money. She led a life full of sensual joy, always, however, avoiding the noisy excesses which might lead to divorce and want and premature haggardness. She got drunk but did not become a slave of drink. She loved to retire from Washington to Litchwood and ride and drink and swim with the animal-like lads who loafed around gasoline stations. One hot July night

⁵¹ Another version of this story, told by June Rainsford Butler Henderson (1895-1993), was that she was in a carriage and drove around and around the Square casting off her clothing until she was completely naked. The next day Governor Sheppard told her, “Dolly, you must leave Edgefield,” and presented her with a one-way railway ticket to New York City. She took the ticket and went to New York where she quickly found herself in the company of some of the wealthiest men of that city.

⁵² She apparently did make a visit to Edgefield in her later life. See *The Edgefield Advertiser*, April 9, 1947.

⁵³ Lucy Holcombe Sheppard Bradley (1906-2000).

⁵⁴ Dr. Jeter Carroll “Brad” Bradley (1890-1984), a native of Weaverville, North Carolina, had become a medical doctor and practiced very successfully in Washington, DC for a number of years before retiring to his hometown of Weaverville in 1948.

I saw her leave a drinking party and, under the eyes of her boyfriends, dive naked into a pond with a pagan lack of modesty. Hannah may have been morally stinking but she was no fool.

Hannah’s cousin Katrina⁵⁵ got to be a respectable hedonist. A trained nurse, too, she consorted with a rich patient.⁵⁶ After she had engineered a divorce for him, she married him and then tied him securely to her by bearing him two children. She purchased a fine home and fine clothes for herself, carefully looked after her health and the health and education of her children. All but the most searching observer would have concluded that the wild hereditary strain in her had given way to the common sense morality of her Tillman grandfather. But at heart she was still a descendant of Hannah Holmes. She knew little and cared less about education, religion and the other amenities of upper class society. She dressed garishly in furs and jewels, appreciating only the fine things money could buy. She was a most perfect Philistine, knowing nothing of the books and letters great ladies are supposed to understand. Yet she was such a magnificent teller of Negro jokes and singer of Negro songs that Gilberto, my Brazilian friend, thought she was a Negro girl. The blood of her ancestors came out in her selection of friends. Her most congenial companions were the Litchwood gasoline station boys. And in Washington, with a fine modesty, she entertained Litchwood wastrels who were seeking Federal positions.

Mother took almost as much pride in my father’s family as she did in that of her own. This was in part compensation for the indifferent pretense of my father’s inheritance and the lack of his success in law and in part resentment against Charleston and Charleston kin for their neglect of her Litchwood connections. Proudest was she of the life and death of my father’s father, John C. Simkins,⁵⁷ who had been sent to war as a lieutenant colonel of the First South Carolina Regiment by Governor Pickett, whose first wife had been Simkins’s sister. He died, sword in hand, on the parapet of Fort Wagner while engaged in the act of repelling Colonel Robert G. Shaw and his black Massachusetts regiment from the Charleston defenses. We were proud of a letter to my grandmother in which a fellow officer told of his heroic death. We were

⁵⁵ Douschka Tillman Thach (1904-1976).

⁵⁶ Robert Gordan “Bob” Thach (1892-1955), founder, vice-president and general counsel of Pan American Airways.

⁵⁷ Not a pseudonym. John C. Simkins (1828-1863).

also proud of the fact that the Lieutenant Colonel Simkins's name is inscribed on a monument in Magnolia Cemetery memorializing Charleston's defenders.

It occurred to both Mother and me that Governor Pickett had cheated the Simkins family by sending him off to war while he (Pickett) stayed at home in a civilian capacity. In later years it occurred to me that my grandfather had been somewhat foolhardy by exposing himself to enemy bullets. He left a widow and five sons behind to find their way in the dark days of Reconstruction. But such thoughts only occurred many, many years after I was an adult. During childhood I was never so impious as to once think that grandfather's tragic sacrifice for South Carolina and the Confederacy was too noble to be unwise. The memory of his death was something more precious than the material wealth he might have accumulated had he lived to post-bellum days.

Mother also taught us to be proud of Arthur Simkins,⁵⁸ the ancestor who had come down from Virginia shortly before the American Revolution as the principal Litchwood pioneer. The derogatory remarks about him by jealous commentators made no difference: he was said to have been most parsimonious and the stringy white hair and weasoned countenance proved that the first Simkins of Litchwood was not handsome.⁵⁹ He owned a generous estate on Log Creek called Cedar Fields⁶⁰ and the materials from his dismantled house had been used for the construction of Longwood after Frederick W. Pickett married his granddaughter.

"Your great grandfather," Mother used to say to the Simkins children, "served in Congress when it was a great honor to serve South Carolina in that capacity." This was a dig perhaps at those narrow contemporary days when my father had difficulty in getting to the state

⁵⁸ Not a pseudonym. Arthur Simkins (1742-1826).

⁵⁹ Although Simkins did not make reference to the Arthur Simkins portrait which was in the Simkins family home during his childhood and which is now at the Edgefield County Historical Society's house museum, Magnolia Dale, his references to the "stringy white hair" and "weasoned countenance" doubtless came from that portrait. However, some observers would contend that the portrait shows Arthur Simkins to be a handsome man.

⁶⁰ Cedar Fields, the plantation of Arthur Simkins was located three miles north of the Edgefield Court House. The Simkins family cemetery is located on the plantation.

legislature. She was referring to Eldred Simkins,⁶¹ the political ally and successor of Calhoun⁶² who had retired from Congress in 1820 to make way for his gifted protégé, George McDuffie.⁶³ His handsome countenance looked down from the walls of our Litchwood cottage.⁶⁴

We were also proud of Arthur Simkins,⁶⁵ the brother of my grandfather who edited the *Litchwood Advertiser* during those crucial years in which the aggressive ambition of the Litchwood fireaters had had more than a little part in starting secession. This Arthur Simkins handled very effectively the pedantic rhetoric of the Southern defense.⁶⁶ It was quite beside the point when an unkind person suggested that he killed his drunken self under the open spigot of a keg of apple brandy.

On February 23, 1887, Miss Sallie was married to McGowan Simkins,⁶⁷ a connection of the Picketts by marriage who brought with him, without a single bit of wealth, the prestige of one of Litchwood's oldest families. The wedding invitations were issued by Mrs. Pickett. Colonel Holmes gave the bride away and the wedding supper was held at Longwood.

Mother's position in Litchwood was difficult. Actually she was poor and child-ridden, a contrast with her proud heritage and the prestige of having been a member of the Pickett household. She was too much of a realist not to see an element of bitter irony in the fact that her inheritance was non-material. Inevitably she must take vengeance against the outrageous circumstances of her life. She indulged in demonstrations of

⁶¹ Not a pseudonym. Eldred Simkins (1779-1831).

⁶² Not a pseudonym. John C. Calhoun (1776-1850).

⁶³ Not a pseudonym. George McDuffie (1790-1851).

⁶⁴ Sadly, this portrait, which had been given to Furman University by Francis Butler Simkins's sister, was largely ruined by some amateur artist who was presumably trying to restore it. Hopefully, some finer restorer of portraits might be able to return the portrait to its original form.

⁶⁵ Not a pseudonym. Arthur Simkins (1819-1863).

⁶⁶ Arthur Simkins (1819-1863) was described by his protégé and successor, James T. Bacon, as follows: "Col. Simkins was of the old regime – finely educated, brilliant, gay, witty, worldly, generous, reckless, volatile, horribly licentious, generous, [and] merciful. The breaking out of the war found him in harness [as editor of *The Edgefield Advertiser*]. He was the idol of the soldiers. From 1861 to 1863 he wrote in *The Advertiser* a weekly letter to the Edgefield soldiers in Virginia. It was bread & meat & home to them. In the spring of 1863 he died."

⁶⁷ Not a pseudonym. Samuel McGowan Simkins (1858-1928).

superiority. Her table, she asserted, was better than that of her neighbors of rural descents. Hers, she explained, exhibited the selective restraint of one with an urban background; theirs was a loading down which ended in senseless dispensations to hogs and dogs. She did not fail to let her neighbors know that she was better educated than they. She did this by flaunting before them big words which they did not understand.

She was strong on ridicule. She called ex-Governor Singleton⁶⁸ “Mr. Pomposity” because of his over-dignified strut and his boastful talk. Another neighbor was “Mrs. Skim Milk” because of the inferior quality of the milk she sold.⁶⁹ One poor creature was “Ophelia” because in a fit of unreason she attempted to drown herself.⁷⁰ Margaret, the grass widow of Litchwood, was “Fino-Margo” because of her fiendish love of drugs.⁷¹ The most pious lady member of the Baptist Church was “Holy Oil Tims” because of the eruptive character of her skin.⁷² The political boss of Litchwood County was called “Hog” because of his slanting countenance and the excessive size of his body.⁷³ One Episcopal minister, because of his fancied resemblance to a sheep, was called “Co-nanny.”⁷⁴ Another minister of the same denomination, because of his rosy cheeks and uncultivated manners, was called the “Moonshiner,” one who should have a jug of corn whiskey on his back instead of the holy robes of his church.⁷⁵ A rural hostess was called “Belching Louise” because the heavy and greasy food she often served caused her to emit impolite sounds.⁷⁶

Mother told dangerous tales, most of which I still believe were true. There was Mistress Maria⁷⁷ who lived in the historic mansion behind the oaks. She drove her Negro tenants off her lands just before the cotton was picked in order to deprive them of their rightful share of the harvest.

⁶⁸ John Calhoun Sheppard (1850-1931).

⁶⁹ Mrs. N. Milton (Alice S.) Jones (1860-1932).

⁷⁰ Unidentified.

⁷¹ Margaret Carlisle Holstein (18??-19??), widow of Julian Dozier “Bubba” Holstein (1891-1934).

⁷² Florence Adams Mims (1873-1951).

⁷³ John William Thurmond (1862-1934).

⁷⁴ Rev. Herbert Boyce Satcher (1890-1966).

⁷⁵ Rev. Royal Graham Shannonhouse (1875-1949).

⁷⁶ Lydia Brunson (18??-19??).

⁷⁷ Mary Martin Evans (1868-1934), the spinster sister of Governor John Gary Evans (1863-1942) who lived at Oakley Park.

There was Blind Blanton,⁷⁸ a rich preacher, who, with the aid of his seeing wife, manipulated the accounts of his illiterate tenants in order to keep them in perpetual debt. There was Joe Morris,⁷⁹ the stingy planter, who returned favors of his comeliest field hands who retired with him to the bushes by telling these colored girls he would not reduce their wages for the time lost spent with him in the bushes. There was Richard,⁸⁰ the lawyer brother of Mistress Maria, who lived in a fine house with his wife, son and black maid. There would have been a second son had not lawyer Richard and the maid murdered her mulatto infant. There was Bundy,⁸¹ a second brother of Mistress Maria who murdered a drunken companion in a hotel room in order to acquire this companion’s wallet and gold watch. Benny Johnson⁸² was a lawyer who did not smoke or drink, went regularly to the Methodist church, worked diligently at his profession, went to the State Senate and would probably have become Governor of the state had he lived longer. This paragon of virtue took half the estates of the widows and orphans who trusted him. Even the ex-Governor,⁸³ despite his reputation for probity, was known to cheat at poker during his annual excursions to Glen Springs.⁸⁴

Mother always said that she possessed such confidence in the literal Bible that she believed there existed a devil with a fork and horns. This somewhat admirable creature, she felt, went about doing the good work of impaling the numerous other devils with which we were surrounded. But I doubt if Miss Sallie was governed by such simple dogma; her affirmations about the devil were always tinged with humor. Certainly she was not moved by the more hopeful side of the Biblical faith. She was neither reverent nor pious and not even awed by the Holy Ghost. In fact she was impious in a joking fashion. I fear that in her serious moments she believed that not enough good people had ever existed to make the City of God other than a small place. How she enjoyed the request of

⁷⁸ Rev. Pinckney Pattillo Blalock (1863-1929).

⁷⁹ Unidentified.

⁸⁰ Nathan George Evans (1861-1924) who lived at Harwood, 609 Main Street, now the home of Herbert and Susan Yarborough.

⁸¹ Barney Evans (1864-1942), the black sheep brother of the Evans clan who later moved to Columbia.

⁸² Benjamin Edwin Nicholson (1875-1919) who lived at East Hill and who was married to Helen Sheppard (1882-1946), daughter of Governor John C. Sheppard.

⁸³ Governor John C. Sheppard (1850-1931).

⁸⁴ Not a pseudonym. Glenn Springs was a popular resort or watering hole in Spartanburg County, SC.

the impious Ben Tillman: “I want to be buried in a hickory coffin so that I can go to hell a-crackin.” She read with humorous puzzlement such impossible Biblical stories as the whale swallowing Jonah, the Children of Israel passing through the Red Sea and Moses bringing water out of rocks. Her favorite book was Shakespeare, not the Bible.

Perhaps one might say that Mother was just another one of those Charleston Episcopalians who put common sense and material realities above sacrificial piety and a wonder-working faith. But she was no nearer a good Episcopalian than she was a Charlestonian. It was our duty, she always told the Simkins children, to be in their pew at the proper hour. Why? I don’t know why. Perhaps it was because the church had always been where it was. Miss Sallie explained that the minister was a poor man whose family needed the support of as many as possible among the few Episcopalians of Litchwood.

We did not have to pretend that we enjoyed going to church. In fact we were privileged to pray to God that the minister would be absent on those alternate Sundays he was scheduled to perform in Litchwood. What he would say, we were always warned, would be a dull homily copied from the writings of a dead bishop. The services were vain repetitions. Mother secretly groaned over the monotony of what she sat through; she laughed mockingly when one of them shouted and sweated as though he thought he was a prominent Methodist minister, addressing a multitude. She thought some of our ministers were hateful. One with a wooden hand was supposed to possess such a hot temper that he used his artificial member as a means of knocking disobedient children into insensibility.⁸⁵ Another killed the dog of a Baptist child for molesting his chickens.⁸⁶ The protection of the cloth did not prevent Mother from giving these aggressors a scolding.

On those Sundays when the Episcopal Church was closed, Mother said to her children: “Your father is going to the Baptist church; he is a candidate for the legislature. You need not go with him if you do not wish to do so.” She was, in fact, emphatically prejudiced against the Baptists. The causes of this prejudice were many. One reason was that

⁸⁵ Rev. Royal Graham Shannonhouse (1875-1949) who served Trinity Episcopal Church from 1904 to 1919.

⁸⁶ Rev. A. E. Cornish (18??-19??) who served Trinity from 1886 to 1887 and from 1889 to 1892.

almost everyone in Litchwood well enough informed to be any kind of Christian was a Baptist; this meant high and low, black and white and even the original Simkinses who had helped settle Litchwood. Mother was an incurable dissenter, one who got a perverted pleasure in being set apart from the many. Her Charleston heritage, if not her Litchwood experiences, taught her that the Baptists were low in the hierarchy of social classes. She preferred the sonorous monotony of readings from *The Book of Common Prayer* to the irregularity and vehemence of the Baptist procedures.

The Baptist and Episcopalian churches in Litchwood were only a few hundred yards apart and Mother lived under fear that Baptist singing and preaching might become loud enough to drown out the less voluble Episcopalians. She classified the great body of Baptist music as a monotonous whole no more worthy of hearing than “Old dog Tray.” Mother’s pet aversion was the Reverend William E. Bertz, the Litchwood Baptist pastor during my childhood.⁸⁷ Quite fittingly did she nickname him Bellowing Bertz because of his energetic speaking habits. The immense power he had over his congregation he used, she felt, meddlesomely and tyrannically. She suspected him of conspiring to bring about Father’s defeat for the legislature.

Miss Sallie wanted only a few things from the ministers. They were the recitation of written prayers, short sermons, visits to the sick and lonesome, and charity for the distressed. Political and other controversial issues, she felt, should be omitted in favor of pointing the way to heavenly salvation. That the Litchwood community accorded its Baptist pastor as much esteem as it accorded its politicians and lawyers was not appreciated by Mother. She was sure that in the case of Dr. Bertz it was due to a malevolent fanaticism rather than to superior wisdom.

The people of Litchwood were divided between their love of whiskey and their love of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union; with some of them the love of the latter was a means of protecting themselves or their male kin against the love of the former. Mother, on the other hand, despised both whiskey and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. As a person of urban discipline she never understood why so many Litchwood men allowed themselves to become drunkards. She did not

⁸⁷ Dr. Charles E. Burts (1867-1939) who served the Edgefield Village Baptist Church from 1903 to 1911.

hate the drunkards; rather did she feel sorry for them. She thought the Woman's Christian Temperance Union persecuted these weaklings, that it stupidly showed a vindictive spirit worse than the sin it condemned. In her concept of morality was no sympathy for the wild resentment which led these women to wish to drive Demon Rum from the land because it had done their sons or husbands wrong. Oh how she hated those pharisaical members of the organization who, having no relatives who were victims of drink, spent their time declaring how superior they were to the unfortunates who had drunken relatives. Mother did not believe in total abstinence, keeping wine and liquor and openly serving them to female guests. She would not serve them to Litchwood males for she feared excesses.

Miss Sallie's love of moderation led her to ridicule the narrow puritanism which dominated the small town. She believed that it was absurd to play games with rook cards and at the same time condemn those who used cards with spades, diamonds, hearts and clubs printed upon them. She did not object to gentlemen gathering at her house for an occasional game of poker. The dominant sentiment in the local Baptist church was against dancing; Mother crossed this sentiment by giving dances in her home and by being the prime promoter of community balls. Herself an uncompromising adherent of the fundamentals of Christian morality, she was forever looking for the major sins the sticklers for the minor puritanical conventions were likely to commit. It goes without saying that she found many whited sepulchers and many wolves in sheep's clothing. They were the liars who would not play cards, the adulterers who would not drink whiskey, and the thieves who went to church regularly. The Baptist whom she liked most was a certain minister's wife who constantly caused trouble by exposing the hypocrites in the holy temple.⁸⁸

How Mother flaunted her virtues in the face of those who were superior to her in money! One July morning the Simkinses were painfully making their way to the Center Springs picnic grounds behind an emaciated mule which was being urged forward by a whip in the hands of a little Negro. The two spirited mares of Banker Purdom's wife⁸⁹ dashed

⁸⁸ Unidentified.

⁸⁹ There were two Padgett bankers in Edgefield, Augustus Elliott Padgett (1860-1936) and Ransom C. Padgett (1875-1944). The wife of Augustus Elliott Padgett was Cora Reynolds Padgett (1873-1924). The wife of Ransom C. Padgett was Lizzie G. Padgett

by us kicking the red dust in our faces. We broken-down aristocrats cried: "Rich poor whites" then we recited verses from Tennyson about the beauty of the morning.

When my sister Louise⁹⁰ wished to go to the dance, old finery given by a strange New York lady was decorated with Christmas berries plucked from a convenient forest. It was the certain opinion of all the Simkinses that Louise was the best dressed girl at the ball. Self-criticism and a feeling of modesty or defeat did not enter the family mind. Of money and fine raiment Louise had little when she set out for college in Columbia. But she possessed family prestige and therefore entered social circles denied Litchwood girls richer but more plebian. That our family took malicious delight in this little triumph over our neighbors can be understood if not justified.

Despite Mother's many criticisms of the Litchwood environment, she loved it as much as anyone who ever voluntarily accepted it. She saw vividly the contrasts between Litchwood and Charleston. As has been made clear, her dislikes of Litchwood were sharp; but her likes were sharper. She loved to ramble over the community's bare hills and to visit its weedy gardens and broken-down mansions. These houses were unpainted and moldy and the landscapes were sometimes ornamented with nothing more attractive than buzzard's roosts. Miss Sallie could discover spare beauty. When the forests were bare in winter she could tramp beyond their ugliness into dells where she plucked mistletoe, holly and evergreens for Christmas decorations. She knew the name and location of every wild flower of the countryside – the yellow jasmine, the woodbine, the ash, the sweet shrub and the pink honeysuckle. Warmly did she applaud her children when they brought her gifts of these precious things. And these were the only shrubs, the wild flowers of Litchwood that adorned her front garden. She visited the old and abandoned graveyards, carefully catalogued the transcriptions, and gathered romantic tales about every person the less patriotic had forgotten. She would push herself through the weeds and the brambles that she might recover the outlines of abandoned gardens, and sitting on sagging porches she would tell us tales of elegance and romance which were fading from the memory of Litchwood.

(1873-1951). We do not know which of these women dashed by with the spirited mares.

⁹⁰ Raven Simkins Graydon (1890-1976) who was married to Clint Tompkins Graydon (1890-1962).

Naturally Longwood was the center of her devotion to things Litchwoodian. At least once a week she and her children walked out to contemplate the spot where Hannah and Katrina dined and danced and drank. These excursions were made eloquent by Mother's protest against the progressive decay and destruction. First, it was the weeds and the overgrown bushes which destroyed the symmetry of the garden. Then the garden statuary



*Eulalie Chafee Salley (1883-1975),
the Aiken entrepreneur who
moved Edgewood*

fell from its pedestals and then disappeared in the night. Next the house was invaded by curio hunters and persons more mercenary, and letters and books and old furniture were carted away. Later I discovered some of these letters in university libraries of North Carolina and some of the furniture in the best homes of Litchwood. Finally the house itself was torn down and rebuilt at Aiken, a tourist resort twenty miles away. A woman real estate dealer had exaggerated its historic importance and then induced a Yankee to pay a handsome price for the restoration.⁹¹ Incidentally, the restoration with modern conveniences added, was more comfortable, if not as interesting, as the original.

Mother bemoaned the loss of the Longwood house but still we had the tangled garden for our walks and ruminations. One afternoon in late winter, however, I was reprimanded severely for plucking some Longwood camellias. It was the Aiken real estate promoter. This woman, utilizing the mighty Yankee mechanical skill, was planning to move the garden to Aiken, trees and all. At Mother's suggestion I protested in an article in the *Charleston News and Courier*. I protested against making Birnam Forest

⁹¹ Eulalie Chafee Salley (1883-1975) was the remarkable real estate dealer who moved Edgewood ("the Pickens House") to Aiken in 1929. Although it was probably her plan to sell the house to some wealthy Yankee, the stock market crash of 1929 intervened and Mrs. Salley was therefore stuck with the house. She then beautifully restored it and lived there until her death in 1975. Following the death of her daughter, Eulalie Salley Rutledge (1907-1983), the house was moved to the campus of the University of South Carolina Aiken where today it houses the administrative offices of the University.

come to Dunsinane. The miracle was accomplished. Nothing was left of Longwood except holes in the ground like those made by shrapnel in Flanders. Some years later Mother and I paid a final visit to the uprooted estate. There was a sign of progress. A bootlegger had established his cottage in the deepest hole.

Miss Sallie's pride in the ways of Litchwood is illustrated by the behavior of her three sisters. Aunt Louise, on coming up from Charleston, observed the unkempt gardens, dilapidated houses and rough streets of our town. She imagined she was in slums and therefore wore only her poorest clothes. Mother was indignant, telling Aunt Louise that the ladies who would call deserved to be received in the stranger's best dress.

Equally indignant was Mother over the conducts of Aunts Lillian and Anne. One Friday morning at nine in January, 1912, they arrived in Litchwood with a railway carload of furniture. They were planning to establish a home. But at five of the same day of their arrival, they and their carload of furniture moved out. They had observed the muddy streets, the bare, unheated houses, the lack of plumbing and central water and leading citizens who had not shaved since the previous Sabbath. When they told Mother that the town was barbarian, they received a tongue lashing in reply.

Mother's sensibilities were deeply touched by the naïve generosity of the people of Litchwood. If there was sickness or visitors in our house, a veritable line of servants would come bearing custards, cakes and meats. All summer long in churchyards and in wooded dells were held picnic lunches of whose bounties everyone was free to partake. There was not much use of having a vegetable garden of our own since neighbors were in the habit of showering us with free produce. A gift always provoked a return gift of superior worth.

Both Mother and I got amused satisfaction in distributing among the neighbors used copies of the *New York Herald Tribune* during the year we spent in Litchwood after Father's death. Mind you the little town was Southern, Baptist and Democratic and therefore had no use for a newspaper which was Yankee, secular and Republican. All that could be done with such a gift was to pass it on to the Negroes who used it for wallpaper. Nevertheless its bestowal caused counter gifts of pies, cakes and fried chicken. Mother and I might be called clever swindlers except for the fact that she returned neighbors' generosity,

sending them hot rolls, wafers and buns and visiting their houses when there was sickness.

Mother was in her way quite public spirited. She wrote articles for the *Charleston News and Courier*, telling of the devotion of the slaves, the heroism of the Confederates, and the prodigious hospitality of the Litchwood County people. The article which gave her the most pride was the story of Becky Cotton, the county's famous murderess. Always was she ready to give the young people of the community advice on literary problems. Sometimes she wrote their school essays and orations. Perhaps her greatest service was a generous distribution of her knowledge of cooking. She was noted for her rolls, her loaf bread, her baked possum and her rich custards. Unlike many of her richer and less frugal neighbors, she knew how to fashion something out of almost nothing: delicious ice cream out of a ten cents gallon of buttermilk; something that looked like meat out of eggplant; savory stews out of five cents' worth of lamb kidneys.

She judged the cultural attainments of South Carolina people, not by the quality of their books but by the quality of their food. From five to ten questions about the quality of the table was for Mother sufficient evidence to establish the class status of a family one of her children visited. Therefore she had a missionary zeal to elevate through improvements in cooking rather than through improvements in literary instruction. And she did this long before home economics became a prominent item on the school curriculum.

Mother did not realize how many satisfactions life in Litchwood had given her until during her widowhood she left the town to live in the house of my sister Louise in Columbia. All the bitterness of the exile from Charleston and all the rasping handicaps of poverty in Litchwood in part gave way to sweet memories. There were the memories of camping on the creeks, of dancing in the town opera house and at the Center Springs picnic and of the possum suppers she often gave.

"Make way for me; I want to vote for Cole L. Blease," ordered Mother late one August afternoon as in a cloud of dust I drove into the Litchwood town square. These were the words of defiance against Dr. Bertz, Hog Stoope and the whole hierarchy of fools, tyrants and puritans who had done Father and Mother wrong. A Charleston lady was voting for a rascally plebeian who drank and whored all the night long and cursed and prayed all day – so ran the rumors. It was a purely negative act.

But that August day was not over until Miss Sallie learned that Litchwood loved her. All homes were opened to the exile. Old friends and acquaintances called and there was laughter and tears as Mother, without bitterness but with sharp wit, recalled the old days. That same evening Dr. Bertz called and by his warm hand clasp satisfied Mother that she had been mistaken in her previous opinion of him. Both were nearing the end of their lives and were therefore free of the petty ambitions and jealousies of earlier life. Mother saw in him a deeply spiritual divine, one whose bellowing had not been to cause Father's defeat but to help sick souls enter heaven.

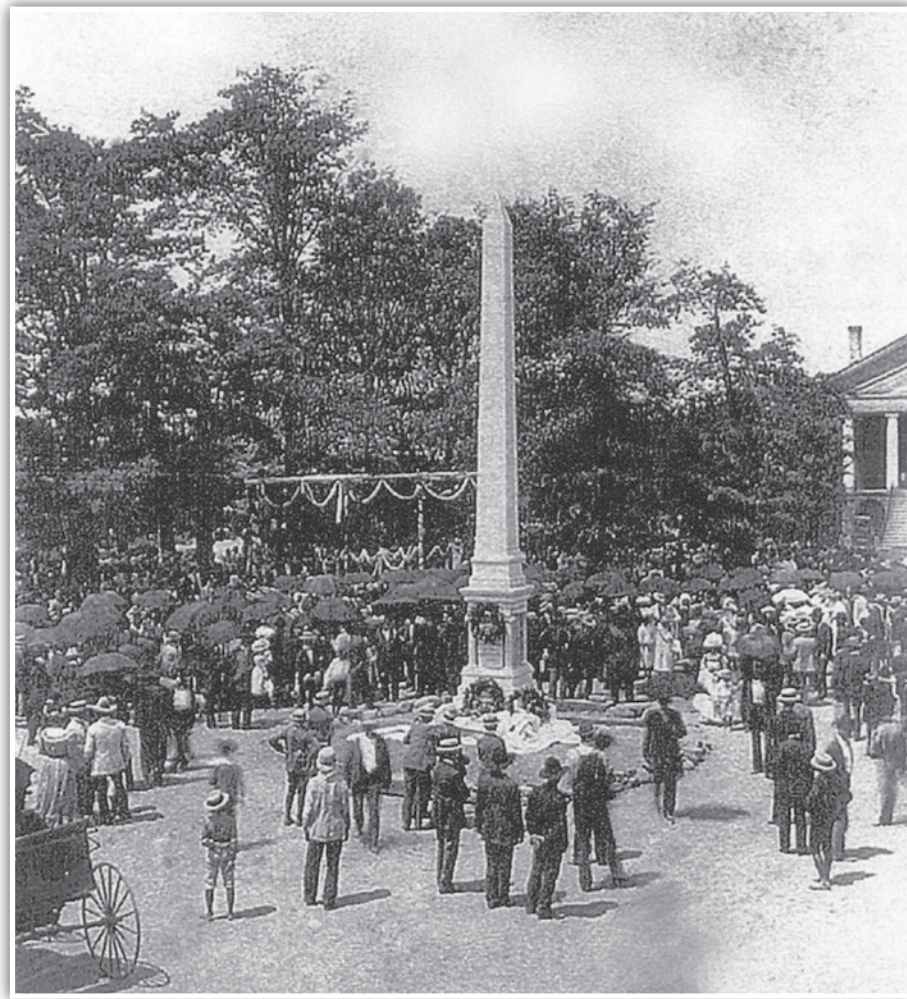


Miss Sally at the end of her life

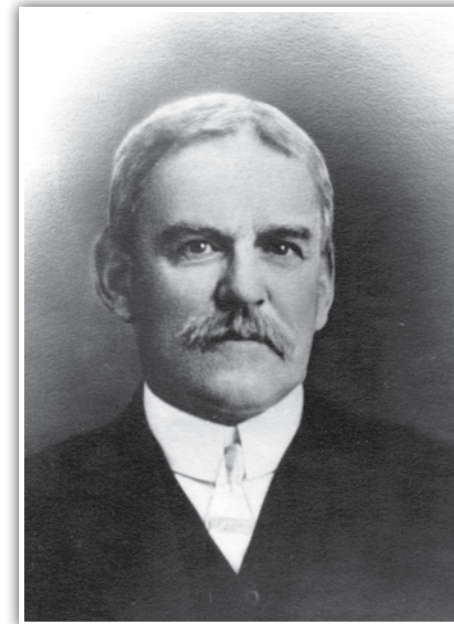


*The McGowan Simkins Family
circa 1912
Francis Butler Simkins is on the left*

Chapter II Father



Dedication of the Confederate Monument, 1900

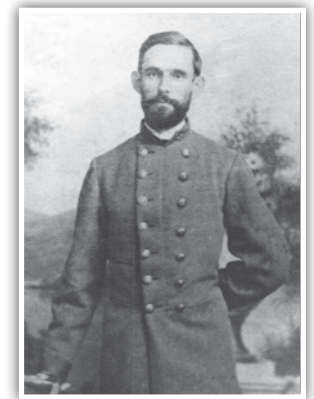


*Samuel McGowan "Mr. Mac" Simkins
(1858-1829)*

My most precious paternal heritage was the following statement about my grandfather taken from the principal History of the Confederate Army: "Lieutenant Colonel Simkins, standing on the rampart and cheering his artillery, fell in the heat of the battle, a noble type living or dying, of the gentleman and brave soldier." Ellison Capers in *Confederate Military History* (Atlanta, 1899, p. 240). It was at dusk of July 18, 1863. The occasion was the defense of the Battery Wagoner in Charleston Harbor against the bravest charge of Negro Troops in the Annals of the United States. My grandfather

lay dead on the parapet and below lay dead most of the men of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment along with its gallant leader Colonel Robert Gould Shaw. The gallantry of these black men and their white Chieftain has been memorialized in Augustus Saint-Gaudens bas-relief monument on the Boston Common.

We were not jealous of such recognition to our enemy, not even gloating over the fact that Colonel Shaw's body was buried along with those of his black men without any of the distinctions usually accorded a gallant foe under such circumstances. We were busy reading and rereading our most precious family memorial: It was a letter to my grandmother from the man who was with Colonel Simkins when he died. "He requested to know his condition," wrote Benjamin Rhett, "and upon being notified he was wounded through the right lung with small chance of recovery, he took my hand and said,



*Colonel John Calhoun
Simkins (1828-1863)*

‘Bid my sweet wife farewell. I desire to live, but if I must die, I fall in a just cause.’ His last words were, ‘Dear girl.’ He gradually sank with apparently little pain.” This to us was the perfect death. It was as it should have been. We never speculated that Colonel Simkins might have sacrificed some of the gallant shouting on the rampart in order to have made use of that shelter at the very moment the fatal damage was done by the bullet from one of Colonel Shaw’s riflemen.



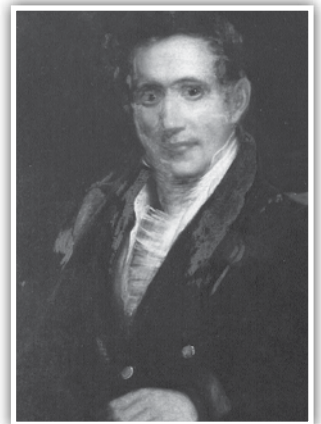
Currier & Ives Print of the Assault on Battery Wagoner

Indeed the Simkins family thought on his heroic sacrifice as the inevitable climax in its own history. This proud record was preserved in a few relics, in the tales of the elders, and in the family scrapbook. We read that book more frequently than we did our Bible or our Shakespeare. The seeker after the truths of history, perhaps can rightly say that it should not have been believed because it was filled with exaggerations phrased in the rodomontade of provincial Victorians, and that it was just one of the many scrapbooks which 1,001 South Carolina families were able to glean from the reminiscences with which the fifty-odd newspapers of the state were glutted in the decades after the fall of the Confederacy. But such critical disillusionment never crossed my mind until long after I had the experience of being contaminated by skeptical Yankees and Europeans at Columbia University.

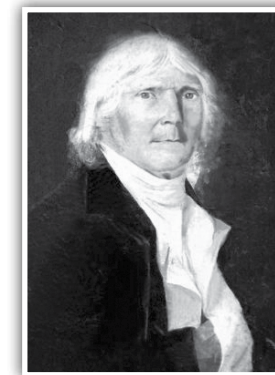
Most resplendent in the Simkins records was, of course, the Colonel who died at dusk on the Charleston rampart. Grandfather looked down

upon us from our parlor wall in military grey and with his blue eyes and kindly countenance only partly hidden by a heavy Confederate beard. In the corner nearby was the sabre he had held before dying and the richly carved dress sword which the City of Litchwood had given for gallantry in action in the battle against the Mexicans at Churubusco. The scrapbook told of his “beautiful old fashioned wedding” at Abbeville to Rosalie, a daughter of Judge David Lewis Wardlaw, who was described as “a great beauty and belle with large violet eyes,” the settlement of the young couple at Chappell’s Depot, in Newberry District, of his body lying in state at Judge Wardlaw’s house, and of the notice given him on war monuments in Newberry and in Magnolia Cemetery, Charleston, for his part in the defense of South Carolina against the invader.

The record of my great grandfather seemed as splendid in the art of peace as was his son in the art of war. Colonel Eldred Simkins, according to the portrait which hung on our walls, was a combination of Lord Byron and Jefferson Davis, a handsome creature with a sharp face and delicate hands. He was a success according to the conventions of his day. Along with John C. Calhoun he attended Moses Waddel’s Academy and the law school at Litchfield, Connecticut. He married the granddaughter of Elijah Clarke, the Georgia patriot, and enjoyed such a lucrative law practice that George McDuffie and Francis W. Pickens, Litchwood lawyers with national reputations, were glad to be his partners.



Colonel Eldred Simkins (1779-1831), Congressman and Lieutenant Governor



Arthur Simkins (1742-1826), Founder of Edgfield

He worthily championed South Carolina’s peculiar interests during his two terms in Congress.

The man who brought the Simkins name and influence to Litchwood was Arthur Simkins, Eldred’s father. He established himself at Cedar Fields on Log Creek in Litchwood District shortly before the American Revolution, and thereby gained the reputation of being the Founder of Litchwood. He served as a Captain on the patriot side in the American Revolution and after that event was for many years a county judge or mem-

ber of the state legislature. His Cedar Fields homestead, according to an article in the scrapbook smacking more of legend than of fact, possessed “terraced gardens with fountains and conservatories, winding walks among the roses and lilacs, fragrant bowers of English honeysuckle, and an avenue of cedars” “Judge Simkins,” continued the description, “in his four-in-hand chaise, with outriders, rode beneath the shadows of his avenue.”

Social life and manners in old Litchwood, if we are to believe the narratives in the family scrapbooks, possessed a charm and virtue worthy of the great claims made for the Simkinses. “Never,” asserted the fond recollections, “was there a land so blessed by God, for it was the oasis of refinement, wealth, education and virtue.” Its women were “truly like the polished corners of the temple” and its men were so protective that the lover who jilted a lass was inevitably confronted with the perils of a duel. Dishonesty was held in such disesteem that the man who refused to pay his honest debts was unceremoniously thrown in jail, and the Holy Sabbath was so strictly observed that it was not an occasion for visiting and dinner parties. Money, as the element causing social success, had not as yet been imported from Yankeeland. Yet we are solemnly told that in Old Litchwood “almost every family lived in luxury,” enjoying “two sleek pairs of bays hitched to an elegant carriage” with a coachman and outrider in livery. And the dominant social trait was never-ending hospitality: “The traditional fruit cake was there; the elegant preserves, brandy peaches, immaculate homemade pickle, the fat brown Southern-cooked turkey, and obedient servants.” (Louise Charlton¹ in *Litchwood Chronicle*, Aug. 13, 1913).

It was well that the family traditions which father inherited were so spacious, for that was, with the exception of a few pieces of furniture, all that he was able to salvage out of the wreck of the Civil War and its aftermath. The Litchwood estate was galloped up by the famous old politician Governor Frederick H. Pickett² who married my grandfather’s sister, tore down “Cedar Fields” in order to use the lumber for the building of his new house “Longwood,”³ and sent my grandfather to die in a war which Picketts himself had no small part in making. A few scraggly Cedars and a weed-harassed cluster of family tombstones was all father and his family could point to as proof that the glory of Arthur and Eldred Simkins once had reality. Left a widow by the glorious tragedy on July

¹ Kate Wigfall Cheatham (1849-1926).

² Francis W. Pickens (1805-1869).

³ Edgewood.

18, 1863, Rosalie Wardlaw, with five little Simkins children, could not make her plantation at Chappell’s Depot a success. When she died in 1891 there was no inheritance to divide. The pilfering and inefficiency of Negroes, the thievery of white men, and the eating away of the soil by the mortgages and torrential rains had destroyed her land and credit. Two of her sons, gentle but not strong-minded, adjusted themselves to the ruins, virtually declining into poor whites. They whiled away their time sitting beside hot fires and drinking large quantities of corn whiskey. They married mountain women and settled comfortably in the miserable cottages these women were able to provide them. They escaped out of the past; not knowing that they had illustrious ancestors.

It was well for father’s survival that he knew how to live on mist, liking, it is true, a more substantial diet, but able to survive on the thinner substance. He, too, sat by the hot fires and drank whiskey. But he never forgot his genteel heritage. He was reared an Episcopalian, and somehow he managed to spend a year or so at Sewanee, the educational center of the Southern aristocrats, and to acquire the knowledge and ideals of the conventional Southern Gentleman. Never was friend or enemy ever able to say that Mac Simkins was not the perfect gentleman. Developing marked oratorical talents, he learned to recite passages from the poets and acquired a taste for reading the great orators of history. In 1883 he took up his residence in Litchwood and began the practice of law.

On February 23, 1887, Mac Simkins performed the wisest act of his life. He married my mother. The invitations were issued by Hannah Holmes,⁴ the bride was presented by Colonel Holmes,⁵ and the wedding supper was given at Longwood. “From that very merry midsummer day when she first arrived in our town,” said the local *Press*, “Sallie Lewis has loved Litchwood. Litchwood, in turn, has loved her, petted her, caressed her, and demanded her on all occasions.” She was proclaimed the wife of “a worthy scion of one of Litchwood’s oldest and noblest families.”

There were many reasons why Father should have been one of the most successful of the many lawyers who have practiced at Litchwood. Perhaps he could become rich enough to reestablish the ancestral estate. Perhaps he could become distinguished enough to become a judge or a congressman. He had the family background and was well married. He knew how, in silver tones, to proclaim the ancient Roman and Southern

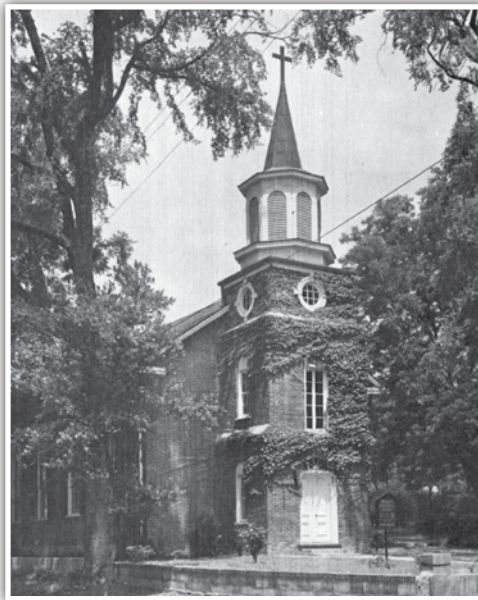
⁴ Lucy Petway Holcombe Pickens (1832-1899).

⁵ Colonel John t H. Holcombe (1834-1907).

platitudes to the complete content of his old-fashioned audiences. He was an orthodox South Carolinian in his opinions without going to the disagreeable extremes of the demagogues.

He was sentimental about poetry and about women and was devoid of the common greed for money as it was possible for one following a money-seeking profession. Yet, he was not impractical. He demanded fees for his services and showed capacity for collecting them. He was nearly brilliant as a trial lawyer, skillfully drawing out witnesses and charming juries with his flow of oratory. Without giving the disagreeable impression of being in a hurry, he was able to dispatch business.

Father was so pious and good. He taught Sunday school, believing the Bible stories he read with the same simple faith of his eight-year-old auditors. He was the senior warden of his church,⁶ supporting its budget to the limit of his ability, acting as chief counsellor of the minister and attending each year the diocesan convention. He never joined Mother in criticizing the resident minister for ineptitudes or stupidities. Withal he was no bigot Episcopalian prejudiced, on social or moral grounds, against the other forms of Christianity in his community. On those alternate Sundays on which the Episcopal minister was ministering to other churches of his circuit, Father always attended the Baptist Church, joining fervently in the common hymns of the Protestant faith. This was the church of his Simkins ancestors. Father was orthodox and low church in his inclinations, putting more emphasis on the old time religion of the Bible, Prayer Book and the Apostles Creed than on the ritualistic and Apostolic succession formulas of the newer Episcopalians.



*Trinity Episcopal Church,
built 1836*

⁶Trinity Episcopal Church in Edgefield.

His goodness consisted largely of his moderation. He never hated – not even those who voted against him or the Yankee Negroes who killed his father in battle. Unlike most blacks and whites of his day, he never carried a gun or weapon or was tempted to indulge in the crimes of passion for which Litchwood was famous. In all his long experiences in legal and political controversies he never disturbed the peace to the extent of engaging in a fistfight. He was too well immersed in the traditions of a race which glorified bloodletting to say so, but I think that he was subconsciously opposed to capital punishment. His sense of Christian charity and benevolence was so great that he had a clear conscience when he resorted to all the tricks of his profession to get juries or judges to nullify or mitigate the penalties of the law. Oh, how he never tired of repeating the protections which the common law and the Bill of Rights gave the accused, and when these were not broad enough to give protection, he knew how to paraphrase Shakespeare's and the New Testament's admonitions for mercy and forbearance. Apparently, Father was not capable of indignation, righteous or otherwise. I have often wondered how he would have acted had he been successful in his candidacy for prosecuting attorney of the Litchwood judicial circuit.

Father was by nature a politician. He loved meeting people, high and low, black and white, those who had business and those only interested in idling away the moments. Each day he circled the Litchwood public square, visiting the post office, the offices of the other lawyers, the drug stores, the shaded benches around the courthouse steps and the general stores. When he visited Columbia, it took him an hour to walk a city block because he met so many people with whom he wished to chat. He knew everybody in South Carolina, ecclesiastical, legal and political, and he felt everybody of importance should know him. He did not object to being indiscriminately interrupted for a conversation, and he reserved for himself the right to interrupt indiscriminately. He had no sense of time, being the one responsible householder in Litchwood who never possessed a watch and never aspired after the possession of one. Mother called him the champion ruminator and interrupter of business in Litchwood. He demanded and received the time of governors, judges, and busy corporation executives. Had he lived in New York City where another South Carolinian said iron gates protected people of importance against interruptions, I think Father's sense of frustration would have led him to commit the one desperate act of his life.



*Gathering on the Court House Steps, circa 1910.
Note Gov. Sheppard in front center with cane, "Mr.
Mac" sitting on the far right on the fourth step*

The greatest talent of this kindly man was political and patriotic oratory. He was invited to speak at funerals, at school commencements, at church gatherings and, above all, at the numerous occasions on which the Confederacy was memorialized. His voice was powerful and resonant, his countenance was serene and reverential, his periods were round and not heavily laden, and he knew how to decorate the substance of his remarks with the usual properties of formal speech in the South. He loved Shakespeare for his soliloquies and Walter Scott for his chivalry. He could bring forth the old Greek and Roman heroes: Agamemnon, Hector, Dionysus, Themistocles, Alexandria, Herodotus, Romulus and Remus, Brutus and Caesar. He could tell of Patrick Henry, Tom Paine, Fort Moultrie, King's Mountain, Washington, Sumter, Marion and Pickens and of the other men and places in the struggle for American independence. And, of course, he never tired of repeating the epic of the Confederacy, with a supposedly modest recital of the great part that South Carolina and Litchwood had in helping Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson in their great victories. To these inherited stereotypes Father added some heroic history of his own gleaned from the readings of his most prized literary possessions: *The World's Best Orators* as published by P. F. Collier in 1903 and the historical novels of Louisa Mulhback, the German Walter Scott. It was adjectives, adjectives and more endless adjectives.



*Men gathered in front of the R.L. Dunovant store on
Park Row, across from the Court House, circa 1895.
Note James T. Bacon in the top hat.*

Father was at his oratorical best when in 1915 he stood on the ruins of "Cedar Fields" to tell the Daughters of the American Revolution who were descended from Arthur Simkins of the glories of the common ancestors. He began with simulated apology "When I am asked by the fair Daughters of the American Revolution, whose gentle hands have done so much to secure and preserve the sacred memories of the past, to make an address on this occasion, the subject of which would be one of my progenitors, I was under that feeling of repression which one who has any measure of commendable modesty in his soul naturally feels in speaking of his own." The main part of the address was a business-like chronicle of the Simkins family with the dates and names in their logical places. It was just the sort of common sense information which those eager to link themselves with the illustrious dead – women proud of membership in the Daughters of the American Revolution through descent from Arthur Simkins – would like to hear.

Then came the bombastic peroration: "I believe the white soul of Arthur Simkins has taken its flight beyond the stars to dwell in the heavenly country. . . . and I know that these good women who have made it possible to do honor to his memory today, have my everlasting gratitude and the gratitude of all who love and keep alive the memories of the past."⁷

⁷This entire speech was printed in the July 2, 1919 issue of *The Edgefield Advertiser*.

Because of Father's virtues and attenuated sentiments, one should not get the impression that he was too saintly to be willing or able to adjust himself to the realities necessary for worldly success. It must be remembered that his oratorical and social talents were important qualifications of success in the law profession. Selfish design was not the preferred reason why he attained the stature and engaged in discriminate handshaking and oratory. But they were incidentally, at least, of help to the aspiring lawyer. And Father was not without the prosaic virtues of the lawyer. He was willing to study hard on his cases and present them in writing or orally in a masterly fashion. If cases did not come his way, he knew how to seek them and through tactics which would not meet with the approval of the bar associations in their formal moments. And with true professional instincts he could justify within himself the taking of any case which carried a fee, large or small. Usually his innately optimistic temperament prompted him to believe that his client was in the right. If he did not arrive at that conviction, he could always find refuge in the constitutional adage that all causes, good or bad, are entitled to a defender. In the courthouse Father used all the stratagems the liberal procedures South Carolina Courts allowed.

Father cheerfully pursued the tedious tactics if one hoped to make a candidacy for legislature successful. It's true he possessed certain initial advantages in this effort. He belonged to the profession usually given this position, and Litchwood was not too Democratic to make some distinction in favor of a man like Father of superior education and breeding. The fact that he had no real power in the community was not a barrier to success, for men of wealth and great political power did not need to be members of the legislature. They allowed that body to be an assembly of little men with the proviso that the little men were willing to accept their advice. Father was willing to do so. But the legislative seat was not handed to Father on a silver platter. If he, as a little man, had the honor of making a successful candidacy for the legislature, so did other little candidates. And one had to win the vote of many little men, for Litchwood, exclusive of its Negro majority, had very democratic suffrage requirements in Father's day.

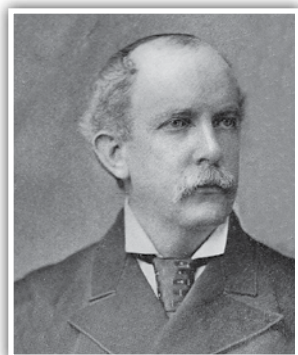
He was forced to spend a whole year in canvassing. The first nine months was given to speech-making on all possible occasions where invitations could be made available; to an expansion of Church-going inclinations to include every Baptist and Methodist church in the county; the shaking of every hand at each of the numerous public picnics which came with warm weather; and the well-nigh complete neglect of Fa-

ther's office duties in order to spend whole days palavering with every street loafer. Oh, the trite remarks about the weather, the crop prices, the preachers, the Republicans and the Negroes which had to be indulged in. The last two months before the August primary had to be given to a farm-to-farm canvass of the rural areas of the county. As a boy of nine, I accompanied Father on the excursions in 1908. We made the trip behind a sore old nag hitched to a rickety buggy which we had hired at a dollar a day from an accommodating black man. When the prospective farmer-voter was not available for interview in the shade of his porch, Father climbed over ridges and furrows and caught him in the field. Of course everyone, as a polite Southerner, expressed his preference for Father over the other candidates for the legislature.

Some, however, had the temerity to say they were not going to take the time or trouble to go to the polls on Election Day. Such a reaction prompted Father to deliver a spacious homily on the duties of citizenship in a democracy. It seemed scandalous to us that every citizen was not disposed to throw down his work in order to travel three miles or more to express his preference as to who among the Litchwood lawyers was to go to Columbia in January. It was beyond our imagination how this matter, which meant Father's receiving of four hundred dollars while he enjoyed the honors and pleasures of being the chosen representative of the people, might have meant for the voter merely a delay in completing the furrow which he was working on when he ran away to vote.

I learned to like those rural excursions as much as Father did. The ride in the old buggy was to me a series of varied experiences. The rolling landscape was studded with trees of all sizes and many varieties. There were limpid streams at which we stopped for the horse to drink and for me to wade. About the old houses we passed, Father told interesting histories. The farmers were so cordial and hospitable even in those years when they failed to return Father to the legislature. Many graciously threw down their plow lines in a most willing desire to hear Father talk. All classes were gentlemen in the sense that they were willing to take time out from their work to consider matters not purely utilitarian. We were lodged and generously fed and our horse pastured and fed without a thought of making payments. Except for the occasional purchase of a package of tobacco, Father's expenses on these trips were exactly zero.

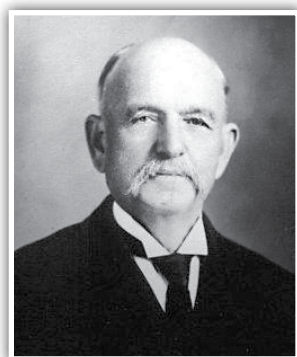
Associated with Father in the practice of law was a group of individuals who offered him a wide variety of experiences, personal and pro-



Matthew Calbraith Butler (1836-1909), Confederate General and United States Senator

fessional. During his early career at the bar, Father enjoyed a partnership with no less a person than Matthew C. Butler,⁸ United States Senator from South Carolina and a former major general of the Confederate Army. At times during his career he had the assistance in the preparation of legal briefs of Bill Ramey,⁹ a white law clerk with a colored wife. With ex-Governor Singleton,¹⁰ the pompous old gentleman who was the dean of the local bar, he was as intimate as any other lawyer. The two men were fairly friendly and neighbors and occasionally played poker together and spoke from the same platform. With Hog Stoope,¹¹ the legal and political boss of Litchwood and surrounding counties, Father received cases. Despite the fact that he had aided in the prosecution of Stoope when this powerful man was accused of murder, he let Father share his spacious offices with him. Most congenial of all Father's legal associates was Mouzon Smith,¹² a gentlemanly alcoholic who always had plenty of time for leisurely conversation.

Father's most useful legal connections were with Ed Folk¹³ who was his opposite in many respects. Folk was so miserly or skeptical that he was the only white man in Litchwood above the rank of poor white who had never joined the



William D. "Bill" Ramey (1840-1912), Trial Justice and law clerk

⁸ Not a pseudonym. Matthew Calbraith "M. C." Butler (1836-1909) played a major role in Edgefield and South Carolina history.

⁹ Not a pseudonym. Judge William D. "Bill" Ramey (1840-1912), the son of a prominent antebellum planter and owner of Pottersville, became a Republican and Trial Justice during Reconstruction and reputedly married his wife, Katie (or "Kitty"), a former slave, on the steps of the Edgefield County Courthouse in 1872.

¹⁰ Governor John Calhoun Sheppard (1850-1931).

¹¹ John William Thurmond (1862-1934), father of James Strom Thurmond (1902-2003).

¹² Not a pseudonym. Gamewell Mouzon Smith (1849-1924) was a native of the Harmony area.

¹³ Not a pseudonym. Edwin Folk (1863-1940), one of two lawyer brothers in Edgefield, practiced in the little office with Gothic windows just to the east of the Mercantile Building on the Town Square where Folk Street enters the Square, now the law office of Jennifer P. Sumner.

church. His tyrannical stinginess was so great that he did not let his wife go to church. It took the audacity of a famous Prohibitionist orator to induce Folk to make a single contribution of his life to a public cause. "You will give five dollars," said Will D. Upshaw of Georgia, as he pointed to the conspicuous bald head of the Litchwood lawyer sticking high above the prisoner's dock in the great prohibitionist rally in the county Courthouse. The multitude sensed the comic irony of the situation, laughed and applauded as the requested amount was surrendered.

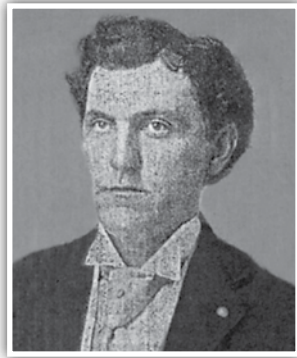
In addition to being stingy, Folk was meticulous to the fringe of insanity. It took him an hour to draw a check and a day to execute a single legal document. And it was often his habit to rush back to the bank or the court house three or four times to see if what he had written was correct. The Negroes believed that his crazy ways were caused by a mad dog bite. With this queer man, Father found much that was congenial. Folk drew up documents in the cases in which they were associated, and Simkins carried on the battle in the courthouse.

In Folk there was a vein of poetry which was expressed by the cultivation of Camellias. He was a graduate of the University of Virginia, and he and Father shared the reputation of being the town intellectuals. Both loved the poems of Father Ryan and kept up with national and world events by reading daily the great mine of information which their Congressman furnished them free in the form of the *Congressional Record*. Folk taught Simkins to appreciate that most unique form of Southernism and liberalism and skepticism and prejudice who expressed himself freely in the wild regions in Georgia across the Savannah River from Litchwood. This was Tom Watson, the most contentious and turbulent of intellectuals perhaps the South had ever produced. The two Litchwood lawyers learned through his books to love Napoleon and Jefferson and to be suspicious of the Hapsburgs and the Catholics. Latent prejudices were around in favor of the Old South and against the Jews, the Negroes, the missionaries and the Capitalists. Through this writer, they held Litchwood's greatest intellectual feast.

Father attained quite a bit of publicity attempting to be the mediator between two of the most lawless lawyers Litchwood ever had. One was Jim Tillman,¹⁴ the nephew of the great Ben, and the other was Bundy

¹⁴ Not a pseudonym. Jim Tillman (1868-1911) had served as lieutenant governor of South Carolina from 1901 to 1903 and had shot and killed the editor of *The State* newspaper, N. G. Gonzales, on the street corner in Columbia in 1903.

Levering,¹⁵ the brother of the man whom Ben made his successor as Governor of South Carolina.¹⁶ Jim and Bundy, who had unenviable reputations for shooting and drinking, became involved in a controversy over the division of an attorney's fee. Father, who was a friend of both, called them into his office to effect a possible mediation. The controversy grew more and more furious as the would-be conciliator pressed his mission, and suddenly there was an exchange of bullets as each of the antagonists emptied his six-shooters over Father's head in the direction of each other. Seemingly, it was a miracle that no one was hurt, but the extensive newspaper coverage the incident enhanced the two antagonists' reputations for lawlessness and Father's reputation as a man of peace.



James Hammond "Jim" Tillman (1868-1911), Lieutenant Governor

Father's assets for personal success were numerous. He was an heir of the great aristocratic conceit; he had good professional connections; he was affable and good; he was pious and orthodox; and his oratory talents were supplemented by considerable industry and legal learning. Yet he was not a success. He did not follow the examples of the sons of more aristocratic families who reestablished family fortunes in the New South on the ruins of the Old South. He did not succeed like the Mannings of Sumter, the Parkers of Abbeville, the Smyths of Greenville, or the Springs of Fort Mill.

It was not because he was not ambitious. He, too, would have loved to have built in Litchwood a Victorian mansion in the so-called colonial style of the Old South. He would have liked to have dressed in high collars, silk hats and long coats of broadcloth. He, too, would have liked to have had a suburban plantation where, following the rural urge of all true Southerners, he could have watched the cotton and the corn and the cows and pigs grow. He, too, would have liked to have used elections to the legislature as a prelude to a judgeship. That was the ultimate sinecure which meant income and authority with an almost uninterrupted leisure restrained only but the congenial necessity of being dignified.

He achieved none of these privileges. He spent his entire professional life in a modest cottage with a mere acre of land on which only a few

¹⁵ Barney Evans (1864-1942).

¹⁶ John Gary Evans (1863-1942).

pigs and vegetables could be produced. He spent his whole life walking, not owning even a modest horse and buggy. He was an unsuccessful candidate for prosecuting attorney of the judicial circuit, and after much striving was only able to get in the legislature for two brief intervals, thus missing the chance to become a candidate for a judgeship. Father was a frustrated man. Had he not been a man of philosophy, he would have broken under the burden of his disappointments.

Liquor was the cause of his disappointments. Give him the prospect or the actuality of a fat lawyer's fee, give him the salary which came from having a seat in the legislature, and behold, Mac Simkins would take to the liquor bottle. I tremble to think what would have become of him had his practice become lucrative or had he been elevated to an office guaranteeing a good salary for a long period of time. I fear the happiness thereby engendered would have led to a self-imposed drunken misery which could have ended only in early death. Reverses and the responsibilities of penury were what kept this good man sober most of the time.

He was not one of those who used alcoholic indulgence as a weapon of social, political or professional advance. With him one drink led to another and another and then to disappearance and prostration in the solitude of we did not know where. Perhaps he was protected by some Negro friend or some white of the lower classes. Or perhaps he had wandered off to some unspeakable dive where he was stripped of every penny. Sometimes when the liquor ran out, he, of his own volition, abandoned his drunken conduct and returned to his normal life, contrite and haggard. At other times he was pulled out of his retreat by kind searchers, and was brought home to undergo hardships of a week's successful battle for recovery. He would be escorted or dragged home, unshaven and unwashed and shaking in every joint and crying out against the snakes he observed in his delirium.

God only knows why a usually reasonable man should have imposed so much misery upon himself. Our anti-prohibitionist friends said some sort of emotional inadequacy prompted Father to reach out for an escape from himself, that if he did not escape into the hell of liquor it would have been in some other type of hell, perhaps into morphine or cocaine or crime. But whatever the cause, Father's dependents and loved ones were humiliated and grieved by these drunken orgies. While I was in college, it became my duty to watch him during the crucial last days of the legislative session. Afternoons and evenings I followed like

a guard with a prisoner under arrest, even into the men's toilet and to his bedside at his rooming house. How we watched for days and sleepless nights when he proved truant from his hearth and fireside. How in suspense we were each evening to know whether he would return home in a merry mood or return chewing gum as a vain device to hide a telltale breath. When he was discovered drinking or drunk, Mother's scoldings were sharp and uncompromising, the wild ravings of one who was both grieved and deeply wounded. Whether perhaps understanding the psychological cause of what had happened, she fought for a reprieve by the harshest and most direct method. Her method worked, for under her scolding, Father in a week recovered his usual balance. Had not this truly devoted wife been ready with her scoldings, Father, I think, would have drowned himself in a lake of alcohol.

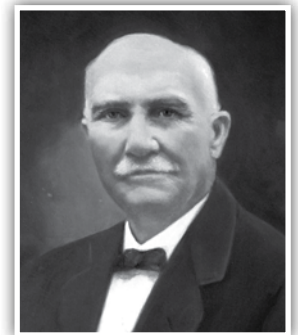
At crucial moments in his cases Father was likely to incapacitate himself with liquor. Therefore he could not for certain be depended upon to execute a commission, and naturally those who wanted their business discharged for certainty did not retain his services. I remember he once got drunk at the beginning of an important murder case in which he was scheduled to be the principal attorney for the defense. At another time he did the same thing just before his silver voice was scheduled to sound off in argument before a jury. Towards the end of the legislative sessions when the Litchwood member was supposed to be steering his county budget through the legislative mill, Father was absent in one of his fits. When after his defeat for the legislature he was able to land the position of reading clerk of the House, a substitute had to be hired during the last few days of the legislative session. Father had begun too early contemplating the joys hidden in the \$400 compensation he was to receive at the end of the session. Appointed a special archive judge a few times by a friendly Governor during the last years of his life, he could not abstain from the prostrating fluid long enough to hear the flattery which the grand jury wished to bestow upon him when the courts adjourned!

Despite his reverses, Father, with the exception of the interruption of his occasional drunks, remained active at the Litchwood bar for forty-five years. Let us remember that it was triumphs and not defeats which demoralized him. He kept body and soul together by matching frugality and thrift against meager income. Often he worked his own garden and cut his own wood. He indulged sparingly in the purchase of razor blades and new clothes. He took a satisfying pride in his family and the little compliments bestowed upon his oratorical efforts. He es-

chewed the more expensive diversions in order to read borrowed books and the *Congressional Record* his congressman gave him.

He survived as an active lawyer because he was willing to take the scraps when the larger fees went to more successful lawyers. He became an agent in the collection of deficient debts and thereby ran the risk of being unpopular with his neighbors. He defended poor Negroes and poor whites after their causes had been rejected by other lawyers. Such clients were usually forlorn creatures adjudged deserving of punishment by public opinion. Father was the bootleggers' lawyer and used all the legal stratagems which might get these guilty fellows out of the clutches of the law. This did not help the lawyer's reputation in a community convinced of the evils of liquor.

Father accepted from Hog Stoope the use of half the office space of the cottage in which that successful lawyer had his office. Father had been one of the prosecutors when Stoope was tried for murder, had been on the opposite side in the trial for the possession of the Ben Tillman grandchildren, and had never supported the Stoope's candidates for office, so why the great lawyer extended this favor is difficult to fathom.



To Mother and me it seemed a plot to give dramatic demonstration of the contrast between the successful and the unsuccessful lawyer. Stoope sat behind a window next to a door opening on the right side of the porch. Father sat behind a window next to a door opening to the left side of the porch. Daily client after client would climb the steps and almost invariably turn to the door to the right. Occasionally a stranger hesitated in the middle of the porch, then he turned to the right or, if he did turn to the left, it was Father's duty to tell him that a mistake had been made.

A few of those who entered the right side of the Stoope cottage office ultimately found their way to the left side of the office from a back passage which led from Stoope's to Father's office. Some of them were clients with forlorn or petty causes not worthy of a busy lawyer. Others were clients whom the politic Stoope did not wish to offend with outright rejections of his legal services. He farmed these cases out to his lawyer henchmen, Father among them. They were cases where Stoope had already been employed on the other side. Since both sides always

sought the favor of his employment, he did not feel guilty of chicanery by covertly being the lawyer on both sides of a litigation. Of course, in open court he was always on the stronger and more popular side.



*Thurmond Law Building:
on the right, Thurmond's office; on the
left, Simkins's*

The little legal practice which Stoope shunted off to Father meant meat and bread to the Simkinses for which perhaps we should have been duly grateful. And I'm sure our good Father was grateful if Mother and I were not. Perhaps Stoope's motive in this form of favoritism was supplemented by other than the practical considerations just explained. For poor and humble Father, the great lawyer in moments of leisure could commune with the aristocratic leg-

ends of the Old South. Every genuine Southerner – and Stoope had all the Southern prejudices – wants to reach after the genteel descendants of the pioneers who first seized the broad acres. He asked Father about Father Ryan, Macaulay's essays and Walter Scott's novels.

Father was not inept in his political affiliations. The city newspapers saw moderation and dignity in his advocacy in 1909 of allowing each county the option of having or not having legal whiskey. But the speech was quixotic, for he did not receive a dollar or a gallon of whiskey from the liquor lobby, but through it he insured his defeat for reelection to the legislature. The craze for state-wide prohibition held possession of the Litchwood people. As one of the aristocratic antecedents, it was natural for Father in the 1890s to have opposed the victorious onslaught of Ben Tillman against the Bourbons. It was possible for a Bourbon, as many of them did, to retrieve his political fortunes in the 1900s with the waning of Tillmanism in its harsher aspects. But it was well-nigh political – even moral – suicide to do as Father did, follow after what Ben Tillman called “bastard Tillmanism”: to follow after Jim Tillman and Cole L. Blease.

For such a peaceful gentleman like Father to admire a reckless individualist like Jim Tillman was a means of getting emotional vengeance at the expense of those conservative people who would not give him their law business and votes. Here was a man who gambled away all the

family substance, who sometimes menaced the peace of the community by his riotous exploits, who frequently drank himself into stupors and cursed and whipped Negroes, insulted aristocrats and Yankees, made fun of those proper people who went to church each Sunday morning, and shot a prominent editor, Gonzales, the editor of *The Columbia State* who dared to criticize his wild ways.

Jim paid no respect whatever to those prosaic individuals who attended to their business as lawyers. He took the cases of bootleggers, drank their mean whiskey out of fruit jars, and turned over the actual conduct of their cases to Mac Simkins. Yet this man was influential enough to be elected lieutenant governor and might have become governor had he not killed the editor. The common people of Litchwood never faltered in their loyalty to him. To them he was a symbol of those anarchistic liberties of the frontier which progress in community cooperation and in education, liquor control and other state activities were taking away from them.

Father told his family of Jim's exploits with a greater degree of approval than of disapproval. At first he joined in the national outcry against Tillman for shooting down the defenseless editor. But after thinking over the matter, Father joined the other Litchwood people in believing that a fatal bullet was a fitting retribution for the character-destroying remarks the editor had made. When Jim beat to the earth the New York journalist who came to Litchwood to write up Jim's conduct, Father thought the sensation-monger got his deserts. When Jim suspended his infant daughter out of a window in order to induce his wife to sign a check, Father could not approve.¹⁷ But when this wife expelled him from the comforts of her home and thereby forced him to live in his own squalid office, all of Father's sympathies went to the discomfited husband. He thought there was justice in Jim's futile effort, with pistol in hand, to repossess his wife against an armed barricade erected by the relatives of the distraught woman.

Tillman then housed himself in a tent under the belief that outdoor life would cure the consumption which was devouring him. He took with him a young Negro named Will Blalock whom he proceeded to

¹⁷ The more common version of this story is that, when Tillman's father-in-law, wealthy lawyer and businessman Alfred J. Norris (1839-1900), refused to give Tillman money with which to purchase liquor, Tillman got his own one-year-old daughter and held her over the well off the back porch and threatened to drop her in if he did not get the money. The child's grandfather ultimately complied and got the money for Tillman.

train as a bodyguard against imaginary enemies. When the lad showed reluctance to increase his shooting skill by target practice, the master hit him over the head with the butt end of the pistol. Father was moved by Jim's sorrows – his high fevers, the hard breathing of his sleepless nights. From the Simkins' house went trays of custards and soups to the tent in the pines.¹⁸

When he finally went away to a sanitarium in a strange city in search of health, Father put Jim's farewell note in the local newspaper. "When I think," he said to Father and the other Litchwoodians, "of the thousand kindnesses friends did me and of the forbearance they have shown my shortcomings, 'tis then the heart throngs strongest with gratitude, and beats the sad farewell." When the news came out that the distraught man had died, pistol in hand, Father wrote plaintively of the fallen man. "The death of Colonel Tillman," ran the dirge, "closes a career of light and shadows, of sunshine and tragedy, of fine physique and magnetic personality, of promise of a long life and distinguished service at the bar, which faces the Great Judge. The life of James H. Tillman has passed in review; no earthly forbearance, no earthly praise, no earthly blame, can affect him now."

As a reaction to his defeat for reelection to the legislature in 1910 Father espoused the cause of the famous demagogue-governor Cole L. Blease. It was a reckless move since Blease, despite his triumph in the state, was not liked in Litchwood. His vote there was smaller than Father's. It was a move difficult to comprehend: that a man of supposedly aristocratic prejudices supporting the most arrant of the demagogues. Blease got his greatest strength from the undivided support of the "lint heads," the poor whites who operated the cotton mills. He won their support by attacking the Negroes, advocating among other things the reduction of the budgets of the Negro schools to sums commensurate with the amounts these poor people paid in direct taxes.

Father justified his support of such a man by conjuring up unctuous dogmas about the "common man." Blease, he asserted, was a champion of the only democracy the South tolerated: that of the Negro-hating white men of the lower classes. His faith in this political philosophy blinded him to Blease's personal failings. Blease was said to be a whis-

¹⁸ According to June Rainsford Butler Henderson (1895-1993), the location of Tillman's tent was at the corner of Columbia Road and Pine Ridge Road, on the hill behind the Bi-Lo store where the offices of Log Creek Timber Company have been located in recent years.

key-drinking, whore-mongering reprobate. He was guilty of all sorts of abuses in office, particularly the turning loose of two thousand criminals through a too-free exercise of the pardoning power. Father did not count these as failings. In fact, his long record as a lawyer for the defense made him an advocate of the free exercise of the pardoning power. In fact, he could join Blease in quoting passages from the New Testament justifying no earthly penalty for crime. Moreover, Father got certain emotional and material compensations from supporting Blease. In a moment of ungentlemanly exaltation he one evening joined a rioting bootlegger in phoning all the diehard anti-Bleaseites of Litchwood, telling them that the voters of South Carolina had reelected the reprobate politician.

Blease bestowed upon Father the honorable position of membership on the State Board of Education and he allowed him to be among that select group of lawyers from whom the governor was willing to receive applications for the pardon of convicted criminals. This was a successful business for which Father received fees for helping some of the two thousand Blease pardons get loose. Such action created much talk of scandal, but Father had no consciousness of guilt. He passed no money to Blease and always believed that the biggest bribe the governor ever got was an occasional gallon of whiskey. The verdict of history supports this supposition; for contemporary and subsequent investigations never proved that Blease received a corrupt dime. As a Christian and a criminal lawyer, Father felt that the Governor in most cases was justified in his pardon policy.

"Gentlemen of the jury," cried a voice of sweetest melody, "I ask not for mercy but for simple justice. The Negro at the bar killed a white man, but he did this under circumstances so provoking that you cannot, in clear conscience, impose the extreme penalty of the law. Those circumstances have been made clear by a dozen witnesses. Let not feeling be your guide. Do unto this colored man the same you would do were he white and his victim of either race. Vindicate, gentlemen, the honor of old 'Litchwood' for even-handed justice."

It was Father finishing his plea for Joe Grant,¹⁹ a mulatto barber who killed Jim Whatley,²⁰ a white policeman. The circumstances were as clear as the open daylight in which the tragedy had taken place on the main street of Johnston, Litchwood County's second town. The barber was accused of what the pious inhabitants of this Baptist community felt

¹⁹ Not a pseudonym. Joe Grant was his real name as described in detail in an article in *The Edgefield Advertiser* of March 15, 1916.

²⁰ Jesse T. Durst (18??-1906).

was a heinous crime: the possession of a pint of homemade whiskey. Instead of Jim Whatley putting his hand on Joe Grant's shoulder and announcing politely, "You are under arrest!" the policeman flashed a pistol in the barber's face. The mulatto barber, fearing instant death, jerked his own pistol from the pocket which did not contain the pint of whiskey and instantly put a bullet through the heart of the policeman.

With a mob of whites in prompt pursuit, Joe Grant fled through the woods and swamp and city, not stopping till he reached Philadelphia. Protected by anonymity of a great city and by a disguise of glasses and a beard, he practiced his trade for two years without interruption. Then he was apprehended by a Negro detective working for the South Carolina authorities. The Dunkard²¹ governor of Pennsylvania refused to honor a request for extradition, believing that a Negro who killed a policeman could not get justice in South Carolina. The German pietist's successor in office, a former baseball player, felt otherwise and surrendered Joe Grant.²²

Father, as a patriotic South Carolinian, was impatient over the delay of the Dunkard governor. He wrote an article in the newspapers demonstrating that a Litchwood jury, in the not very remote past, had dispensed justice with an even hand in a murder trial involving members of opposite races. Father was, of course, sufficiently aware of local prejudices to know that factors aside from abstract justice inevitably enter into the trial of a Negro who had killed a white policeman. He knew that the more powerful members of the Litchwood bar would not endanger their popularity by accepting such a case. Nevertheless he accepted it. He was sure that the defendant had much justice on his side. Was it not easy to prove that conviction of manslaughter was the heaviest verdict possible within the limits of justice? Had not Grant been provoked by his hapless victim to the highest degree? If a man is ever justified in killing, was it not when another, without reasonable provocation, flashes a gun in the man's face?

²¹ A religious denomination in Pennsylvania of German origin which practiced the doctrine of immersion and refusing oaths and military service. The Dunkers regard non-conformity to the world as an important principle.

²² The facts set forth in *The Advertiser* of March 15, 1916, are somewhat different from the story told by FBS. Durst was not a policeman, but was the brother of a policeman who had come to Grant's barber shop with Durst to collect a debt from Grant. After the policeman brother was "in charge" of Grant, Grant broke loose, pulled out his pistol and shot Durst who died three days later from the wounds received. Grant hid out in Philadelphia for nearly ten years before being arrested and returned to South Carolina.

Besides, Father desired the three or four hundred dollars Negro friends of Grant were willing to pay. Under emotions moderately reckless he would do his professional duty and make a little money out of it. Recent defeat for the legislature taught him that he could never again win the political preferment of Litchwood. He would become unpopular; at the same time he knew that he possessed enough good sense not to do those radical things that would impair his standing as a lawyer. He asked not for an acquittal, but for a verdict of manslaughter. In doing this, he made it known that he believed, along with his neighbors, that a Negro should be punished more severely for a crime against a white man than a white man for one against a Negro.

"Old Mac Simkins," said the average white citizen of Litchwood in expressing a grudging tolerance of what Father was doing, "is making a pile of money out of that nigger's case." Father would not allow Yankee or Negro lawyers to aid in the defense. He might have done this had the Negro defense associations egged him on with more money. These associations were not effectively interested in any but the more sensational aspects of Southern justice. They showed little interest in a case like Grant's of obvious innocence of first degree murder. Father did not press them, for he felt that there would only be a verdict of manslaughter unless outside interference aroused local prejudices.

Father was wrong in his faith in the moderation of the Litchwood jury. Sound instinct should have told him that it was the race problem which had caused the difficulty and that it would be settled according to the prevailing code of race distinctions, not according to the principles of justice laid down in the law books. If Joe Grant had not been a member of the subordinate race, he would not have been called into account for the possession of a pint of whiskey; he would not have been approached by Policeman Whatley in such a high-handed way; and he would not have reacted to the policeman's show of force with such fatal consequences. Under the Litchwood code of social relations, the white man and the Negro hated and feared each other; each knew that the other carried a gun. So it was probable that both guns might flash when there was a clash of wills, and it was a matter of luck who should impose the fatal discharge. In the Joe Grant case, the Negro won the duel.

But there must be another chapter to the story. The doctrine of white supremacy demanded that there be condign punishment for the black man who made a white man fall in his own blood. The courts

and the juries existed for this purpose; should they fail to function, the lynching bee was substituted. It was applied with the greatest force in the rural areas of the Deep South of which Litchwood was an example. Ben Tillman had proclaimed the wisdom of this method of justice on lecture platforms of forty states. Sharing Tillman's views in a mild sort of way, Father should not have indulged in wishful thinking in behalf of Joe Grant. He should have known that his newspaper description of a case of even justice to blacks by whites was the exception which proved the rule.

Father's suggestion that the code of justice written in the law books by the guiding principal on the Joe Grant case was rejected by the Litchwood jury. His voice of silver filled every crevice of the courtroom without moving to compassion the set red faces before him. The public prosecutor, in rebuttal, proved that the killer of Jim Whatley was the worst Negro imaginable according to the code of White Supremacy. Joe Grant was a "Yankee Nigger" who affected a Northern accent; he was a "biggity Nigger" whose formal politeness to the white customers of his barber shop indicated an attitude of perpetual protest. He was far from being a "good Nigger," that sort of "colored gentleman" who said "yes sir" to every command of a white man.

When the jury retired to determine a verdict only one man in the courthouse crowd came forward to tell Father that the defense had been noble. He was the Reverend Joseph Hill²³ whose sense of Christian justice put him above and beyond the local code. The small contingent of Negroes not crowded out of the hall by interested whites was too inert or too cowered to express itself. Indeed it would have been unconventional had they pushed forward to offer congratulations. Father would have been embarrassed.

When the inevitable verdict of guilty without recommendation to the mercy of the court was rendered, Father thought of a bright idea. He would appeal to Governor Richard Irving Manning for clemency. Manning was an Episcopalian, an aristocrat, a graduate of Sewanee, an intelligent and progressive gentleman who had signified his liberal attitude toward the blacks by advocating increased appropriations for Negro colleges and welfare work. The Negro-hating Blease had even accused this enlightened gentleman of wanting a Negro bishop in the Episcopal Church and of sitting at the dinner table with colored clergymen at a church convention. The governor listened to Father's plea with

²³ unidentified

the utmost sympathy. He agreed that it was unjust to send a man to the electric chair for killing a policeman who recklessly drew a pistol on the man. The governor told Father he would commute the death penalty to life imprisonment and would telephone his order to the penitentiary. There Joe Grant was awaiting execution the next day.

Jubilant over the result of his interview with Manning, Father made the mile ride to the prison to tell the man in the death house what had happened. To his profound disappointment he discovered that the telephone order had not been sent. He patiently waited an hour before himself telephoning the Governor's Office. He was curtly told that Manning had departed for New York City on the financial business of the State without issuing a decree in the Joe Grant case.

The aristocrat and liberal who was Governor of South Carolina had, in Father's opinion, told the biggest lie ever told by a man in his high office. This big lie was not motivated by knavery or prejudice, but by cowardice. Governor Manning was too intelligent and too humane to turn down a just request to the petitioner's face. He was too cowardly to grant it because he feared harsh reactions from Litchwood. Blease, Manning's predecessor in office, might have acted favorably on Father's petition; he had so acted in several cases not unlike that of Joe Grant. It would not have been from motives of liberalism which had failed Manning; it would have been from motives more in the South Carolina tradition; it would have been from a generosity born of that Christian compassion which the Southern master in instances bestows upon the descendants of former slaves.

With hands trembling and eyes full of tears, Father told Joe Grant of Manning's deception. The big Negro put his hand on the shoulder of the Little White Man and said in a firm voice: "Sir, be comforted for I know you have done all you can for me. Try to sleep tonight. I know the penalty of the white man's law. Please give me a cigarette." The next morning, smoking that cigarette, the Big Negro marched with a firm step to his doom. The local newspaper announced simply that another Negro had died in the electric chair.²⁴ The radical press of the North, which often protests unreasonably against Southern justice, had nothing to say about what Father said was the greatest miscarriage of justice in his long experience at the bar.

²⁴ According to *The Edgefield Advertiser* of March 15, 1916, Grant was to be executed on April 14, 1916, the 10th anniversary of the killing of Durst.

Chapter III Litchwood Alive

Father died in a Columbia Hospital in 1929 after forty-six years of constant service to his family, church and clients. He made the ride to his final resting place at Litchwood in a great limousine hearse of the newer type. The body was enveloped in flowers, and behind it was a procession of richly dressed mourners. These were not the hearse, the flowers and the mourners due a poor man like Father. Indirectly they were not in Father's honor but in honor of a rich son-in-law²⁵ who was managing the affair. But I know that Father would have appreciated the honors of his last rites. I only caught the irony of the situation.

This irony became to me more bitter by a little incident. When the police stopped the traffic at an intersection in Columbia to let the funeral procession pass, the first car stopped was a limousine smaller than the one in which my dead father was riding. The smaller vehicle contained the justices of the South Carolina Supreme Court on their way to morning sessions. The justices did not take the trouble to inquire for whom they were stopping, but they could have known that it was for the body of a man who regarded being one of their number the acme of earthly felicity. I did not call this unpleasant incident to the attention of the funeral party, but I do know that members of Father's family would have agreed that he was better fitted in the point of birth, character and learning for a judgeship than many of the five forced to halt before his funeral coach.



*View of Main Street,
circa 1910*

²⁵ Clinton T. "Clint" Graydon (1890-1962), a highly-successful lawyer of Columbia who was married to Simkins's older sister, Raven.

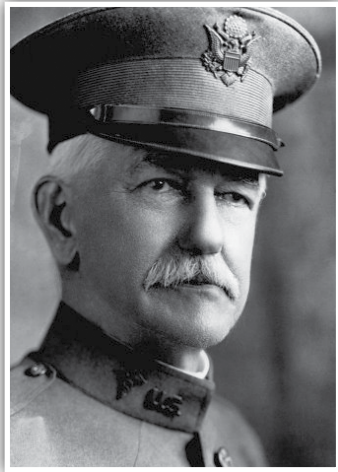


*View of the Town Square,
circa 1910*

Litchwood in the days of my childhood, that is, in the first decade of the twentieth century, was the filthiest place imaginable outside of Africa and the Orient.¹ "The condition of the town," said a citizen aspiring to be a reform mayor in a letter to *The Litchwood Press*, "is simply something to contemplate. The streets are unkempt. Back lots reek with filth. Hog pens are allowed in the populous portions of the town without any sanitary regulations of the same. The smell from them rises up under the windows."²

¹ This indictment of Edgefield seems, even for Simkins who liked to shock his audiences, a bit excessive. Although Simkins's points about the people of Edgefield being more interested in politics and ancestry than in public health are probably valid, Edgefield was not much later in addressing the needs for public health improvements than most similarly-sized towns across the nation. Public water and sewer systems and electrical power systems did not become prevalent anywhere in small towns in America until the last decade of the 19th century or the first two decades of the 20th century.

² John G. Edwards (1884-1931) in the *Edgefield Chronicle*.



Major William Crawford
Gorgas (1854-1920)

The tolerance of this condition was caused, in my opinion, by the uncritical adherence on the part of the local elite to the classical tradition. As John Gould Fletcher, the Arkansas poet, makes clear, the devotion of the Old South to Cicero and Shakespeare created an inordinate love of oratory, the most unrealistic of the literary forms. Hence, there was a neglect of knowledge of the local scene. To Mr. Fletcher's criticism can be added a more serious indictment of the Southern intelligence. Cicero and Shakespeare made no contributions to the knowledge of public or private sanitation. Therefore an emphasis on their writings disqualified the Litchwood elite from acting on the basis of the great body of newly-discovered knowledge about germs and mosquitos which was, in the 1900s, almost an obsession with the city newspapers to which this governing group subscribed. It was not impressed with the discoveries of Koch of Germany and Pasteur of France about germs and of Walter Reed of Virginia and William C. Gorgas of Alabama³ about mosquitos in warm climates.

Major Gorgas honored us with a visit.⁴ He had relatives in Litchwood.⁵ Because he was a celebrity, the whole town and countryside turned out to receive him. At the head of the welcoming committee was Father, ex-Governor Singleton⁶ and other silver tonged orators. Gorgas was praised. Something was said concerning his services to the great

³ Major William Crawford Gorgas (1854-1920) attained national and international fame in the first decade of the 20th century for battling the mosquito which was responsible for infecting the thousands of workers who were engaged in building the Panama Canal. Without his efforts to eradicate the mosquito, it is doubtful that the Panama Canal would have ever been completed. In 1914 he was named Surgeon General of the United States with the rank of Major General.

⁴ Major Gorgas visited Edgefield in December of 1915. See *The Edgefield Advertiser*, December 22, 1915.

⁵ Major Gorgas was a first cousin of Mrs. Samuel Bones (Sarah Crawford) Hughes (1852-1940) who lived at the Blocker House some six miles north of Edgefield. She was the daughter of Sarah Gayle and William Bones Crawford. Both she and Gorgas were grandchildren of Governor John Gayle of Alabama (1792-1859) who served as governor of Alabama from 1831-1835.

⁶ John Calhoun Sheppard (1850-1931).

government of the United States, but more was said about his being the son of Josiah Gorgas, a general of the Confederacy. The city newspapers, of course, had made it clear that Major Gorgas's fame rested on the elimination of mosquitos from Panama as a means of maintaining the health of the laborers engaged in the construction of the trans-isthmian canal. But Gorgas's sanitary devices, in the opinion of his Litchwood hosts, were meant for Negroes dwelling in a distant clime. That the illustrious sons of Litchwood, Anglo-Saxons all, needed such protections against the fevers of their own climate never occurred to those who turned out to praise the distinguished visitor.

That this was true is made clear by what happened a few days after Gorgas's visit. Billie Lee,⁷ a half-witted brother of ex-Governor Singleton's secretary, was appointed town health officer. He secured the position because Singleton was politically influential. Under state and municipal law, Billie's business was to see that cesspools were drained, privies screened, and yards cleared of refuse. His advice to householders was conscientious and thorough, but even the humblest Negro felt at liberty to laugh at the injunctions of the town's half-wit. Ex-Governor Singleton could have himself accepted the position of health officer. Had he done so, a critical outsider might have justified his action by telling him that the maintenance of the health of the community was more useful than orations in courthouses and in groves. Had the people of Litchwood offered the ex-governor the office, he would have believed they were joking. Had he accepted it, his fellow citizens would have hauled him off to the lunatic asylum.

William Bland,⁸ the beloved son of the family who lived next door to the Simkinses, accepted a position in the public health service of the United States. He became a sanitary engineer charged with mosquito eradication in the malaria-cursed area of the South Carolina low country. The acceptance of so useful a position brought disappointment to William's father and friends. They felt that this bright and supposedly ambitious youth had chosen the easier solution of his vocational problem. Instead of going through the intricate training necessary to enter the honored profession of the law or the ministry, he was throwing aside books honored by time in order to acquire the simple knowledge nec-

⁷ James Rivers Bee, brother of Miss Annie Bee (1871-1943), secretary to ex-Governor Sheppard.

⁸ Charles Fuller Byrd (1912-1967).

essary to boss the operators of earth-moving machinery. That type of modernist who believed that the future of South Carolina lay with the engineers, rather than the overstocked professions of law and divinity had not impressed the Litchwood mind.

We paid grievously for this blind classicism. We paid in deaths among our promising youth. I can count those who died of typhoid fever. There was John Raymond, captain of his company in the South Carolina Military College and son of Litchwood county's richest planter⁹; there was Will Dunn, the local lumber dealer's son¹⁰; and so on the number of two dozen. Those who did not die were lucky if they escaped typhoid less than twice in childhood. Malaria did not often kill, but it did, with the first October coolness, almost shake the flesh from our bones. The resulting fever sapped our energies and in part at least explained why we in Litchwood accomplished less than the inhabitants of a town of similar size in Pennsylvania or Indiana. To malaria and typhoid was added another climatic malady which we had to read about to know that we had it, but we did not do this reading. The disease was hookworm. Without sensational manifestations, it sapped our energies as much as malaria.¹¹

The lack of sanitary precautions in Litchwood was so colossal that it is difficult to understand how the children of the town survived the twenty summers necessary to become adults. Rupert B. Vance, a distinguished student of the Southern climate, believes this survival was caused by the curative powers of a generous sun. This was a force many of us foolishly believed was the cause of our illnesses. When a child came down with the fever, the older women said the cause was going bareheaded in the hot sun.

⁹Thomas Hobbs Rainsford, Jr. (1890-1910). However, Rainsford did not die because of disease contracted in Edgefield. After finishing at the Citadel, he had taken a position teaching at Staunton Military Academy in Staunton, Virginia. It was there that he contracted scarlet fever. He was brought home where he was well-cared-for but nevertheless died in 1910.

¹⁰Was this John Sheppard Mims (1914-1916)?

¹¹It has been estimated that 40% of school-age Southern children were infected with hookworm. Interestingly, John D. Rockefeller learned of this problem and launched a campaign in 1910 to eliminate the hookworm infestation. This campaign was so successful that, within five years, the campaign was a spectacular success. This has been termed a "rarely recalled, heart-warming chapter in the annals of public health." See "Lessons from Rockefeller's Hookworm War," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 30, 2003.

Our notion of sanitation was a clean shirt for the child and a clean tablecloth. It was as if we believed one caught typhoid or malaria from soiled cloth. As a means of avoiding the annoyances of flies and mosquitos, some of the Litchwood families installed poorly fitting window screens. But freedom-loving Negro and white children ruthlessly destroyed with baseball bats these obstructions against the fresh breezes of heaven. Affording the children greater pleasure than the destruction of the screens was the encouragement of cooks to throw out of kitchen windows soiled dishwater and other slops. This activity created moist earth out of which fishing worms could be dug even in the driest weather.

Our water supply was impure and scarce. It was drawn from open and shallow wells. The usually muddy texture of the water and the presence in it of dead frogs and dead snails gave visible evidence of impurity, while chemical analyses would have revealed the dreadful typhoid germs. Bad odors came from the privies, pig pens and cow lots with which all premises were cluttered. Diseases were caused by the free circulation of flies and by the polluted seepings which found their way into the wells and into the milk. Such waters as our wells afforded during the dry summer months were not sufficient to make possible a generous cleanliness. So to refresh ourselves, the boys of the community bathed in the muddy and semi-stagnant pools which the meager streams of our clay lands afforded. There was not enough water for adequate dishwashing and for the scouring of kitchen floors and shelves. A sensible remedy for this inadequacy would have been the maintenance of cisterns for the catching of the torrential rains. No one thought of this. Privies were not screened against the flies, chickens and other animals. Periodically their hideous contents were buried or scattered over the fields. Thereby was created a polluted soil for easy contacts with the bare feet of rollicking children.

Perhaps the examples of lack of sanitation which have been listed were not uniquely Litchwoodian; they may have prevailed in many towns in South Carolina and other Southern states. But Litchwood was unique in the manner in which many persons attended to the necessities of nature. The business section of the town was lacking in public or private water closets or privies. The woods, the open fields and the facilities of private houses were too far away. The common people, black and white, repaired to the livery stables. This expedient was too undignified for the town lawyers and their more

aristocratic friends. Lawyer Smith or Lawyer Brooks invited such persons to retire to the rear rooms of the spacious cottages on the town square in which the lawyers' offices were located. This was a species of thoughtfulness worthy of the Old South.

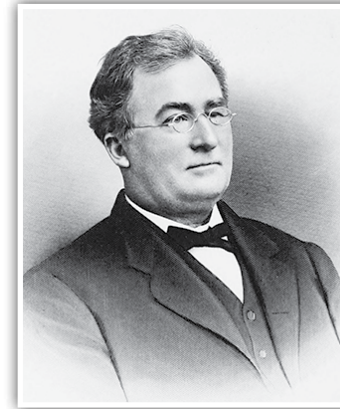
It was also an act of foolhardiness, violating the standards of sanitation the twentieth century was establishing. Yet the guilty gentlemen kept their dignity and their health. Perhaps the quick decay characteristic of a hot and sunny climate eliminated promptly this menace to health. Perhaps the gentlemen themselves had a special protection in the immunizing effects of age and in the use of generous portions of whiskey and chewing tobacco.

Litchwood in the days of my childhood was as tolerant of poverty as it was of filth. Rank weeds and tumbledown fences and porches caused no shame. There were no well-trimmed lawns. I cannot recall the existence of a single lawn mower. Probably there was not a town in South Carolina as large as Litchwood which used fewer gallons of paint. The leading citizens purchased on average one suit of clothes every third year. The fronts of the clothes of these people were heavily spotted; there was no shop devoted to clothes cleaning. Safety razors were not in common use, and the average gentleman made a trip to the barber shop only once a week.

These attributes of poverty did not handicap our people emotionally or spiritually. They had other interests besides the development of the disciplines necessary to create the money and the energy necessary to make themselves and their premises spic and span. That they spoke from dilapidated porches behind unkempt gardens did not make them unhappy. They did not worry when, for financial reasons, they were unable to buy paint or install electric lights. Some conservative old people thought it holier to read the Bible by candles or kerosene than by electricity. There was little jealousy of the rich, not even of the millionaire Northerners who disported themselves at nearby Aiken. There was only bitterness about the past, about what the Yankees had done fifty years earlier.

Having little money, the people of Litchwood did not feel the necessity of spending much. They did those things for which money was not necessary. They read Shakespeare, Cicero, Sir Walter Scott

and the thousand imitators of these authors. Unable to be extravagant themselves, they got a vicarious satisfaction out of the alleged extravagances of their plantation ancestors. Money could not buy their esteem. The factory operative who became superintendent of Litch-



Daniel Augustus Tompkins (1851-1914), "a Builder of the New South"

wood cotton mill¹² was not invited to join the circle of gentleman in soiled clothes. A professor in a technical college told me something I would have never learned on the streets of Litchwood. It was that the industrial engineer and cotton mill capitalist was the greatest man our town had produced since the Civil War.¹³ I never heard a Litchwood orator extol this man.

Litchwood gloried in its non-productive past. Its heroes were fighters and politicians and preachers and orators. It was proud of the many brigadiers and colonels furnished the Confederate army, of its many United States senators, of the governors it had furnished the state, and the eminent divines it had furnished the states of the southwest. These leaders fought, preached, prayed, drank, cursed, gambled, and orated; they did everything except organize successful businesses and work with their hands. Oh, the contempt we Anglo-Saxons had for persons of German decent who lived in the eastern end of Litchwood County. They remained at home and did little else but till their neat fields. When they gave picnics, they served sauerkraut and charged each guest fifty cents. Not one of them in the early days rose high enough politically to

¹² Thomas Allen Hightower (1874-1970) who came to Edgefield in 1914 and remained until World War II.

¹³ Daniel Augustus Tompkins (1851-1914), son of Dr. Dewitt Clinton Tompkins, a wealthy planter and medical doctor of the Meeting Street section of the County, was graduated from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, and moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, where he established an engineering firm. He designed and built over 200 textile mills across the South and was the father of the cotton seed oil industry. He was also the founder and owner of the *Charlotte Observer* newspaper and the author of the *History of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina*. Throughout his life he maintained a great interest in the Town of Edgefield. A story was related that on one occasion Tompkins was invited to Edgefield to speak at the Courthouse. After this event was announced, a political gathering was scheduled at Academy Grove at the same time as Tompkins's speech. While a huge crowd attended the political gathering, practically no one came to hear Tompkins.

be a member of the legislature or a Captain of the Confederate army. We called them Dutchmen, stupid people. When Reginald Kutz Eppes,¹⁴ half Anglo-Saxon and half German, married Lillian,¹⁵ the daughter of the Jim Tillman, who killed the editor, the young women's family omitted the tell-tale middle name from the wedding announcements.

Ultimately we Anglo-Saxons paid for our refusal to be thrifty. While we carried out our perpetual rounds of picnics, dances, and political and church meetings, our red clay lands were literally being swept away by the torrential summer rains; little was left but galls and gullies. The inhabitants, black and white, largely migrated to the new cities, leaving the broken lands to be taken over by poor whites and near poor whites. This was true even in the lands of Ben Tillman, the eminent politician who wrote and talked more vividly than any other South Carolinian against soil exhaustion. His once smiling farm became a wilderness of scrub pines and gullies, and after his death, not one of his children remained in Litchwood County to carry on his operations.

The Germans from the eastern end of the county inherited Litchwood. They did not refurbish the wasted lands. Instead they abandoned their peasant ways and used the surplus wealth of farmer ancestors to establish themselves in the town. Those who were successful in business indulged in the luxuries which for one hundred and fifty years had been the monopoly of the Anglo-Saxons. They became lawyers, legislators, merchants and cocktail drinkers. They even became proud Southerners. Reginald Kutz Eppes divorced Lillian Tillman because her family omitted his middle name from the wedding announcements. Someday the Litchwood Germans may be Governors and United States Senators and even enjoy the prestige of being broken-down aristocrats.

Some twenty years ago it was when I first noticed one of these emerging Germans at a party given by the Litchwood Lillingtons,¹⁶ Most of the guests were hollow cheeked Anglo-Saxons, countrified in their loose coats and open-bosomed shirts, some with frayed cuffs. They thought of themselves as gentlemen though many of them were actually work-

¹⁴ Preston Yonce Wright (18??-19??)

¹⁵ Helen Tillman Wright Stanley (1897-1984) was the daughter of James "Jim" Hammond Tillman (1867-1911) and Mamie Norris Tillman (1875-1962), longtime president of the Edgefield County Historical Society. After being divorced from Preston Wright, she married a second time to Taylor Stanley (1892-1973) of Cincinnati, Ohio.

¹⁶ Unidentified.

ing their own crops because they could not pay the wages the Negroes demanded. The German was rosy and round-cheeked, and dressed in the costume which up to that time was strange to our little province. He wore a stiff shirt and a tuxedo. According to the standards of the outside world his clothes indicated that he was the only gentleman present. The hollow-cheeked and opened-bosomed Anglo Saxons thought he was a boor. He was Bill Kutz,¹⁷ the first cousin of the man whose middle name had been deleted from the Tillman wedding announcements.

Bill Kutz had the future on his side. He was the local Chevrolet¹⁸ agent and therefore, through trickery a hundred times more elaborate than that of the ancient horse trader, was in the process of making himself richer than the richest cotton planter of ante-bellum Litchwood. He built the town's first Yankee-style house, with the comforts of steam heat and modern plumbing and the discomforts of low ceilings and no shade.¹⁹ It was not long after his indifferent reception at the Lillington's party that all Litchwood County was awakened to his importance. He defeated for the State Senate Benny Johnson, Jr.,²⁰ a member of one of the hereditary families of the county.

I have spoken of whiskey as one of the means through which some Litchwoodians protected themselves against filthy surroundings. Certainly at time the drinking of a glass of pure corn whiskey carried with it fewer perils than a glass of Litchwood well water. This is not to say that whiskey did not do more harm than it did good. It stands next to thriftlessness as a major cause of Litchwood's decline from its old estate.

Because of whiskey, the usual quiet streets of the town became such a bedlam on Saturdays that ladies and children dared not venture be-

¹⁷ William "Bill" Yonce (1889-1972).

¹⁸ Ford. William Preston "Bill" Yonce procured the Ford Dealership for Edgefield in 1918. He and his family owned and operated this dealership for nearly ninety-three years, from 1918 until 2011, becoming one of the oldest and longest-surviving family operated Ford dealerships in the United States.

¹⁹ Bill Yonce lived at the antebellum house at 709 Buncombe Street which has been the home for many years of Dr. & Mrs. George L. Rainsford. The Yankee-style house to which Simkins is referring was probably that built and owned by Bill Yonce's son, Charles Zobel Yonce (1918-1992), at 605 Penn Street in Edgefield.

²⁰ B. E. "Ned" Nicholson, III (1909-1960), son of B. E. "Ned" Nicholson, Jr. (1875-1919) and Helen Sheppard Nicholson (1882-1946), and grandson of Governor John C. Sheppard (1850-1931).

yond the covers of their roofs. Seemingly a majority of the male population of the county reeled in hot splendor of alcohol. Obstreperous blacks wounded their own kind with razors and knives and sometimes risked sudden death at the hands of whites they affronted. The whites whooped and halloed, drove their nags at reckless speeds, insulted each other, and at frequent intervals shed each other's blood. Perhaps their egotism had been so actively expanded that they were imagining repetitions of Pickett's charge at Gettysburg.

Whiskey was the hideous monster which caught so many of our best – and weakest – citizens in its coils and thereby put the dependents and loved ones of these citizens in a perpetual state of apprehension. Oh, how anxiously did the relatives and friends of a betrothed girl ask whether or not the prospective bridegroom drank. The answer was as likely to be “yes” as “no.” If “yes,” oh the anguish in store for the sweet wife. There were the long waits for the husband who did not return at nightfall; there was the awful news that he was cavorting in a saloon or bawdy house with all moral restraints unloosed by the liquid demon. The unfaithful husband would sober; but there would be other fallings from grace, the consequences perhaps of which would be the loss of employment and utter poverty for his family unless kin intervened. The process perhaps would continue until the miserable sinner sought the solace of a drunkard's grave.

My list of the old and the young who died drunk is longer than my list of typhoid victims. Bud Parks,²¹ a jovial old printer, was found dead clutching a bottle. Bubber Slaughter,²² the son of a prosperous druggist, turned over a kerosene lamp and was found dead in his burned house surrounded by charred beer bottles. Old Mr. James²³ meandered from the path to his home and fell in an abandoned well where he was drowned before he knew what had happened. Bill Lindler²⁴ was the son of a Presbyterian elder; he never missed Sunday school for seventeen years. His blood was strewn along the Litchwood-Augusta highway, the victim of a wild ride away from a saloon. Dr. Towler,²⁵ the druggist, never missed church, but was found dead in his store, the victim of overindulgence in grain alcohol.

²¹ Unidentified.

²² Julian D. “Bubber” Holstein, Jr. (1891-1934)

²³ Unidentified.

²⁴ Unidentified.

²⁵ Unidentified.

The greatest pervert which I have known was a Sunday school mate whose maiden aunts had forced him through all the years of childhood to walk in the straight and narrow path. Gaining at the age of nineteen the right to think and act for himself, Bender²⁶ immediately developed into a riotous drunkard, a curser and street fighter. Returning at midnight from a party in Augusta he committed a crowing act of impiety. He climbed upon the tombs of his ancestors in the Broadwater²⁷ churchyard and amused a gay crowd with tales of the dead not different from those of Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*. This gifted rascal died the victim of the knife of a night club guest whose lady friend Bender is supposed to have insulted.

The most formidable of the Litchwood drunkards who moved to other places was Bundy Levering,²⁸ a lawyer who had done some shooting in Father's office. This brother of a governor and son of a Confederate general won a limited amount of popular acclaim when he was an unsuccessful candidate for Attorney General of the state. Handsome in countenance and dignified in carriage, he supplemented the usual oratorical abilities with an unusual pugnacity in debate. He was motivated by a combination of family pride and alcohol. Always immaculately dressed, he stood beside his office on one of the busiest streets of Columbia engaged in his all-day pastime of analyzing the passing multitude. He shouted unctuous insults at those he recognized, especially at visitors from Litchwood. While a senior at the University of South Carolina, I passed Colonel Levering's rendezvous at twilight, the hour of grandiose culmination of his daily routine of intoxication. “Hey, you little shrimp,” he shouted. “You are getting a diploma at the University written in Latin, and you can't read a god-damned word of it.” I was forced to duck my head and move on. In truth, I knew little Latin; Colonel Levering had attended the Methodist Academy at Cokesbury where the classics had been drilled into him.

Liquor hurled such blows at one of Litchwood's best families that but, for its large size and the strength of its women, this family would have been annihilated. I refer to the family of Astor S. Trimmer,²⁹ who

²⁶ George Seth Butler (“Butler”) Thompson (1901-1961).

²⁷ Sweetwater Church.

²⁸ Barnard Bee “Barney” Evans (1864-1942).

²⁹ Arthur Smiley Tompkins (1854-1922)

inherited funds from David L. Trimmer.³⁰ The assault was so powerful that one son never found rest from a series of drunken orgies until he was committed to a soldier's hospital for mental cases.³¹ Another son married into a Columbia merchant family.³² He used his opportunity to mingle with the rich as a means of taking the first and last drink at every gathering. I remember him during the last year of his life at a Litchwood supper after he had been sent home to his kin by an impatient wife. His hands shook with palsy; he was poor and his tuxedo was shabby. Yet about this rogue was still the assurance of a proud gentleman. When faced with the opportunity of getting a twenty-four hour supply of liquor out of the limited quantity provided for the occasion by an autocratic relative from the city,³³ he acted with open courage. He did not steal a bottle while no one was looking. Instead, he boldly seized a bottle of Scotch whiskey out of the hand of the formidable relative while that autocrat was reduced to a confused silence of the type which sometimes brings on apoplexy.

The sons-in-law of the Trimmer family were worse behaved than the sons. Big Bill,³⁴ a lusty immigrant from Virginia, was rough both mentally and physically. When Mother asked him if he were marrying into the Trimmer family for money, he delighted her by saying, "The whole town of Litchwood was not worth a Virginia gentleman." He followed this bright remark by unloosening himself with drink to such a degree that he tore the bannisters out of the stairs of the town hotel and threw them at the Negro porter. Violence of this type landed him in the county jail so often that his final release was only had on condition that he return to Virginia.

Another Trimmer son-in-law was as wild as Big Bill but not so robust. John T. Eller³⁵ had the habit of disappearing at the every moment his services were needed as an official reporter of the state legislature. He could not be found; he had disappeared into the rural underworld. While on one of his insane drunks he entered the house

³⁰ Daniel Augustus Tompkins (1851-1914).

³¹ Daniel Augustus Tompkins (1896-1945).

³² Arthur Smiley Tompkins, Jr. (1895-1946) who married Mary Eliza Murray (1898-1966) of Columbia.

³³ Clint T. Graydon (1890-1962).

³⁴ William Fredericks Hawthorne (1902-1949), husband of Grace Tompkins (1900-1973).

³⁵ John Kinard Aull (1884-1940), husband of Kate Elizabeth Tompkins (1883-1957).

of an aged maid and tried to get in bed with her, thinking he was entering his own house and bed. Had he been a Negro he might have been lynched or executed for attempted rape. Had he been the usual white man he would have at least spent one night in jail. As a public official, he had the friendship of the police who allowed him to spend the night in the bed he had thought he was entering. The old lady was placated by being told that John was an escaped inhabitant of the nearby insane asylum.

In childhood I joined the other self-respecting youths of Litchwood in believing as true the lesson imparted by Parson Mason L. Weems' *The Drunkard's Looking Glass*. The admonition was that one drink of alcohol – even the lightest beer – would lead inevitably to larger and larger portions and to greater and greater disasters. Drink the polluted thing and there would be no end until the imbiber fell sack-like into the ditch, saw snakes in the fire, died in a wreck or was killed by an irate neighbor whose wife or daughter the drunk man had violated. Of course, in later life I knew men and women who consumed liquor in such moderation that no evil resulted. I have even met Episcopalian clergymen who said that the preaching of total abstinence was as great an offence against moderate living as the excessive indulgence in alcohol. Ben Tillman was the eminent Litchfieldian who proclaimed this golden mean; he did it to the extent of establishing the state dispensary which sold liquor under regulations designed to promote moderation.

Such ideas were not realistic in the Litchwood of my childhood. Moderate drinkers scarcely existed there. Tillman was a most exceptional person, expressing his extravagant inclinations in an unusual fashion. He got drunk on books; while those around him got drunk in the usual fashion. He learned that his seemingly reasonable solution of the liquor problem was not practical. The state dispensary failed because it did not promote moderation in drinking habits. The good people of Litchwood – and of most of the South in fact – tried to reckon with drunkenness in a radical fashion. They outlawed the liquor traffic in all of its aspects and made total abstinence into an Eleventh Commandment. They did this because they knew through personal experience what liquor had done for them. They knew how irresistible were the open dispensaries to the husbands, fathers and sons who passed by. They, therefore, made teetotalism a prerequisite of the virtuous life and indulgence in a wee bit of wine as a crime against the Holy Ghost. On the theory that conditions in modern South Carolina were different

from those in ancient Palestine, they substituted unfermented grape juice for wine at the Lord's Supper.

Old Cash Singleton³⁶ reeled in holy horror from the dinner table on which was placed small glasses of cordial. This brother of the ex-governor was not, as Mother believed, a hypocrite or a fool, a victim of a distorted sense of values. He was a converted Christian running away from the poison which, taken in large quantities, had made his early years a horror.

Those among the citizens of Litchwood who drank secretly while advocating Prohibition were hypocritical to no greater degree than the masses of this great nation of ours who, in the midst of patriotic wars, proclaim their undying love of peace. Both the prohibitionists and the peace advocates were self-critical Christians wishing to create a situation from which is eliminated the opportunity to commit their deadliest sins. If there is logic in a nation trying to destroy its predilection for fighting by destroying possible antagonists through violence, there is also logic in the drinker trying to destroy his predilection for drink by warring against the drinking habits of his neighbors. Did not Jesus say, "The way to save one's soul is to lose it in the service of others?"

The nearest approach to a Carrie Nation among the Litchwood prohibitionists was Mrs. Linda Marshall,³⁷ the old lady whose husband's death made it necessary for her to plow her own fields. Drink had killed Mr. Marshall, so when old Linda heard that her daughter Elizabeth³⁸ was arriving in Litchwood with a strange husband reputed to have evil habits, she decided to use a tool as unconventional for a South Carolina white woman as a plow. With a rifle in hand, she chased her son-in-law over ditches and fields for a distance great enough to assure that he would not return to Litchwood soil. His offense was that he came from the place Mrs. Marshall considered the worst place in Yankeeland. This was Peoria, where she assumed he had learned to imbibe freely the product for which that Illinois city was notorious.

Mother hated drunkenness as much as anyone I knew, but her gift at invoking the paradox which penetrated to the heart of the

³⁶ Orlando Sheppard (1844-1929).

³⁷ Unidentified.

³⁸ Unidentified.

matter led her to assert, "Look out for those who do not drink; they are the calculating ones who expend their diabolical energies upon others, not upon themselves. They are outright liars, thieves, cheats and murderers." This interesting thesis can be used as the basis for a plausible, if not entirely accurate, classification of the inhabitants of Litchwood. It is the division into drunken sheep and sober goats.

Among these sheep were many charming and good persons. There were the gallant youths at the country dances who, between bottles, were as attentive to chaperons and ugly cousins from the city as they were to the belles from nearby cotton plantations. There was the drunken evangelist of Otter Creek³⁹ who, instead of gambling his cotton money away, distributed it among the blacks who listened to his harangues. It was the semi-drunkards who, on moonlight nights, sang the sentimental songs of the Old South. They found time and inclination to participate in the amateur theatricals which gave some cultural distinction to the community.

Among these charming drinkers was Colonel Holmes⁴⁰ who, while casting practical considerations aside, carefully took care of the old animal which had once been the sleek riding horse of his long-deceased niece Katrina.⁴¹ Also among them were Milton Longworth,⁴² the drunken lawyer who sat all day in a rocking chair beside his dusty typewriter. When a clergyman friend of mine engaged him to draw up a deed of trust I became alarmed, foolishly assuming that Milton was incompetent. The paper was executed in the most efficient manner by the liquor-smelling gentleman on the dusty typewriter. No fee was charged on the grounds that one who had traveled so far and was of the clerical profession should not pay. Shortly after this, Milton was defeated for the office of prosecuting attorney because of alleged incompetence.

On the other side of the Litchwood ledger were the sober goats, as numerous a group of ungenerous characters as a small town could produce. There was Johnson Dinkens,⁴³ who spent his early evenings working over the accounts of his grocery store and the late evenings making love to the wife of his chief salesman. There was Ed Jones⁴⁴ who, after spending Sat-

³⁹ Unidentified.

⁴⁰ Colonel John Theodore H. Holcombe (1834-1907).

⁴¹ Francis Eugenia Olga Neva "Douschka" Pickens Dugas (1859-1893).

⁴² Unidentified.

⁴³ Unidentified.

⁴⁴ Unidentified.

urday night in his unmarried sister-in-law's bed, specialized on Sunday morning in presenting to the Sunday school class the scriptural injunctions against strong drink. There was Blind Blanton⁴⁵ who was so devout that he became a minister of the Gospel and yet who, with the cooperation of his seeing wife, short-weighted his cotton pickers. There was John Hillsman⁴⁶ who was so busy falsifying the accounts of his illiterate share-croppers that he found time neither to drink whiskey nor to go to church.

Mother believed that the success of Hog Stoo pes⁴⁷ and his son Stone⁴⁸ was due to the fact that they spent none of their time and money on whiskey. They were Litchwood's most successful twentieth century politicians with the exception of Ben Tillman. The father was for many years the political boss of Litchwood and four neighboring counties and was United States District Attorney by appointment of Woodrow Wilson. The son became governor of South Carolina in 1946 and got more electoral votes than any third-party candidate for President of the United States since Theodore Roosevelt.

Hog Stoo pes first came into public notice by an unfortunate tragedy. This sober man who had never insulted anyone felt obligated to shoot to kill after he was publically cursed by a young dandy who was under the influence of liquor. Jim Bradley⁴⁹ had called Stoo pes a vile Tillmanite before the Saturday night crowds on the town square. The killer was acquitted of a charge of murder by a jury of his friends, but it was whispered about Litchwood that Jim Bradley's ghost haunted Hog's pensive moments. Once he blanched in open court when an indiscreet woman witness whom he was questioning cried, "Murderer! Murderer!"

After the tragedy in his life, Stoo pes lived modestly, sitting always on the back seat of the church and never making himself heard in public

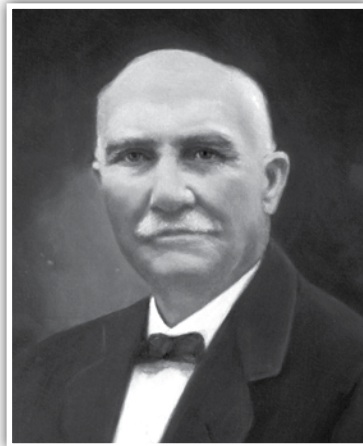
⁴⁵ Rev. Pinckney Pattillo Blalock (1863-1929).

⁴⁶ Unidentified.

⁴⁷ John William Thurmond (1862-1934).

⁴⁸ James Strom Thurmond (1902-2003).

⁴⁹ Willis G. Harris (18??-1897).



John William Thurmond (1862-1934), "the most popular man in Edgefield for forty years"

gatherings except when importuned. He was Litchwood's man of moderation and charity, the one who when possible settled disputes out of court and gave freely to persons in distress. He demonstrated his good sense by refusing to speak unkindly of anyone. He was such a diligent student of the law that I sometimes think that motives other than the political were responsible for the conference upon him by the University of South Carolina of the degree of doctor of laws. Mother and I thought of him as cold-blooded, learned in the technicalities of the law without the remotest interest in justice or in polite culture. Yet it must be remembered that he was sentimental enough to borrow a copy of Father Ryan's poems from Father.

Hog Stoo pes ruled Litchwood County through machinations so secret that one for decades could live under his authority without being aware of its existence. "Lester," he said to a departing school-master who came to shake his hand, "you are an excellent man, and I am grieved and surprised that you have been dismissed." Principal Lester⁵⁰ left Litchwood with a warm spot in his heart for the county's big man. Neither he nor his friends knew the real facts of the case. Stoo pes, while ostensibly inquiring of the school trustees the state of their crops, had whispered in their ears, "Get rid of Lester." The school principal had been guilty of overemphasizing athletics at the expense of the serious phases of the school program.

"Expect your defeat at the hands of your great friend," I sarcastically warned Milton Longworth as I pointed across the street in the direction of the ever-busy Stoo pes. Milton was unconvinced. When the vote involving his candidacy for prosecuting attorney was counted, he discovered that he did not carry his home precinct. Then he knew who was not his friend.

Neither Lester nor Milton deserved better fates. The former laid too much emphasis on football and the latter drank too heavily. Herein lay Stoo pes' strength. Sober and calculating, he rewarded only the deserving without incurring the wrath of any except the most sophisticated of those whom he struck down. He was Litchwood's most popular citizen for forty years. Whether or not a litigant won his case in the Litchwood courts was determined by whether or not he employed Stoo pes as his attorney. That prudent lawyer usually took the stronger or more popular side in a case; but in difficult cases his influence with the juries was so strong that he could work miracles. In fact, he was a successful jury fixer, lending money and doing all manner of other favors to the limited number of men in a small county from whom juries were drawn.

⁵⁰ Unidentified.

The career of J. Stone Stoores deserved fuller consideration because he enjoyed the distinction of being the only son of Litchwood since Ben Tillman who has enjoyed national fame. He possessed his father's sobriety, pleasing manners, industry and willingness to scheme to accomplish personal ambition. But here the analogy ceases, for the younger Stoores was only one half Stoores. The other half of him was Stone, which, when uninhibited by the wisdom which came from Stoores blood, might be expressed in acts of wild folly. Stone Stoores had an uncle named Will⁵¹ who was possessed of an energy so maniacal that he dissipated a fortune in numerous foolish enterprises. His most imprudent act was the building on Litchwood County's only mountain of a tin mansion in which he never took the trouble to live.⁵² He was the mad King Ludwig of Bavaria on a small scale.



James Strom Thurmond (1902-2003), Teacher, Superintendent of Education, State Senator, Judge, Governor, Presidential candidate and United States Senator

Stone Stoores was not mad, but he possessed his uncle's driving energy and his uncle's forthright way of accomplishing aims. This meant that he lacked his father's good sense and deceptiveness. When confronted with the problem of dismissing a Lester or defeating a Milton, Stone acted in an open manner which made enemies. The result was that at an early period of his career he almost sacrificed his future by becoming the county's most unpopular citizen.

He began his public career as a non-drinking young man conveniently proclaiming his virtues by teaching the men's Bible class of the Litchwood Baptist Church. Then his father secured his election as a county superintendent of education. While in this office he entrenched himself politically by padding the school enrollments to get larger state appropriations and by engineering the appointment of teachers who

⁵¹ William A. Strom (1865-1942).

⁵² Strom's Mountain is thirteen miles north of Edgefield in the northeast quadrant of the intersection of U.S. Highways 25 and 378. The remarkable old mansion is in an advanced state of decay as of 2016.

were not properly educated. By one such appointment he was indirectly responsible for a feud resulting in the murder of the Litchwood sheriff and four others and the executing of the three responsible for the killings. Stone had aroused the blood of the self-respecting elements of the White Lane⁵³ section by the appointment of Linda Long⁵⁴ as teacher. This woman was not qualified for the position socially, morally or educationally. She could scarcely read.

Stone's next position was the state senatorship from Litchwood. He was elected over the opposition of "B.R." Tillman, a son of the famous Ben. The younger Tillman, aged fifty, had just completed the study of law in the elder Stoores' office. Publically, the senatorial contest was the case of an ambitious commoner defeating the son of an erstwhile commoner who, with the passing of time, had mellowed into a broken-down aristocrat. In the opinion of local gossips, the younger Tillman was a dummy candidate who had entered the contest at the behest of the elder Stoores in order to forestall more formidable opposition.

Ironically, Tillman got his revenge for whatever his feelings of disappointment may have cherished. The Stooreses and their henchmen made a pilgrimage to Warm Springs, Georgia, in 1937 to see the Great Man of the Democratic Party⁵⁵ smile upon the faithful multitude; they allowed Tillman to fill a vacant seat in one of the automobiles. The Stoores did not cherish hopes of getting any of the manna which the Great Man was distributing that day, for they were certain that Roosevelt had never heard of them, not even of historic Litchwood. But the smiling man paused as he looked upon the face of the worshipful multitude and yelled, "Hello, Ben." Litchwood's defeated one went to the platform and was rewarded with a Federal appointment better than the lost senatorship. He had known Roosevelt when both held positions in the Navy Department during the Presidency of Woodrow Wilson and during Ben Tillman's chairmanship of the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs.

Hog Stoores was alarmed when the popularity which he had created in favor of his son seemed to be fading. This presaged possible defeat when the young man stood for re-election to the state senate in 1940. I observed what was happening while in 1939 attending the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the construction of the Litchwood

⁵³ Meeting Street or Pleasant Lane.

⁵⁴ Sue Stidham Logue (1896-1943).

⁵⁵ Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945).

Courthouse. Stone had done openly what his father would have done by indirection. He had engineered the defeat of Bob Walker,⁵⁶ a popular loafer about town, for commissioner of roads and thereby incurred the enmity of Walker's large family connection. He interfered with the distribution of Federal allotments designed for the needy veterans of the First World War. He secured a batch of public offices for his own kin without adequate consideration of the ambitions of other families. Instead of drinking liquor and visiting the bawdy houses of Augusta with other young men, he went about trying to be familiar with some of the best girls of the community. And worst of all, he placed a large neon sign advertising his hotel⁵⁷ in the public square so as to obstruct the view of the courthouse at the very time a multitude of Litchwoodians and former Litchwoodians were gathered to honor this building.



*Dixie Highway Hotel, built 1919-1920
Owned by Strom Thurmond 1937-1947*

“Damn Stone’s soul,” I heard a group of half-intoxicated youth cry on Centennial Day, “we’ll shoot his sign down and shoot him

⁵⁶ Unidentified.

⁵⁷ Known then as the Dixie Highway Hotel, this hotel has been known as the Plantation House for the last half-century. Strom Thurmond purchased the property in 1937 and sold it in 1947.

too if he resists.” These remarks were in part the exaggerations of hypercritical loafers who were jealous of an energetic person who had gone further in the world than they. But such remarks were also made by sober and industrious citizens. Stone’s father was alarmed, fearing that the political career of his family would come to an end by the defeat of his son for the state senate. This lack of popularity in Litchwood was a strange situation for a Stooopes. And stranger still for the older man, this situation that had been brought about by Stone’s acting the part of a fool.⁵⁸

The father and others in Litchwood were destined to a surprise. The so-called fool possessed an energetic impudence equal to the task of redeeming himself from his foolish acts. As soon as he heard that Judge James C. Randall⁵⁹ of the circuit court was dying, he canvassed the entire state and got pledges of the majority of the legislature in favor of his being Randall’s successor. When the legislature met, less energetic candidates soon realized that they had been out-manuevered and withdrew from the contest. Senator Stooopes became a judge without opposition. He now had a position which relieved him from the obligation of risking his career at the hands of the Litchwood voters.

Unlike his studious and wise father, Judge Stooopes was completely unfit for the bench. He lacked the judicial temperament; he knew no law and had little common sense. And his sense of justice was no greater than that of his father. Yet he was shrewd and affable, making friends in his judicial travels over South Carolina and fitting all his decisions to political purposes. Lawyers with an old-fashioned sense of equity demurred. The majority of the people were pleased.

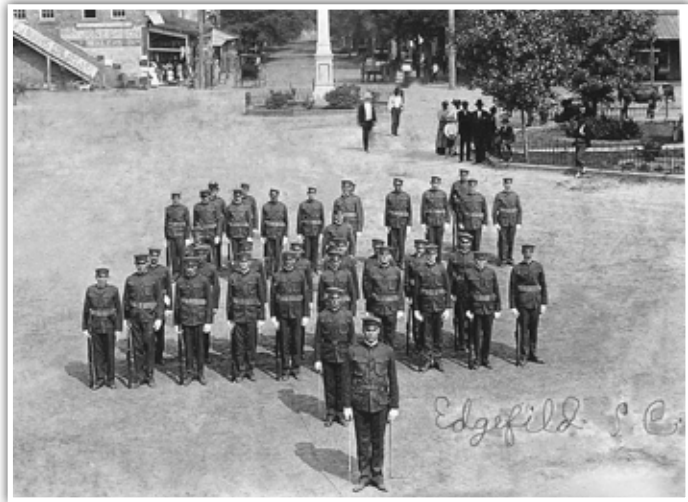
Stone became a candidate for governor and won the position by an overwhelming majority. As chief executive of South Carolina, he did nothing especially good; certainly he did nothing obviously bad. He won an ever-widening circle of friends. One of his most effective strategies was to keep a battery of stenographers busy writing letters of condolence to the relatives of every white South Carolinian who died. He was flying in the direction of the United States Senate as straight as the martin flies to his goal. He seemed predestined to win this office

⁵⁸ Simkins’s memory on this point is in error. Will Thurmond had died in 1934 and was therefore not around to be concerned with Strom’s possible re-election to the state senate in 1940.

⁵⁹ Judge Carroll Johnson “C. J.” Ramage (1874-1937).

when he boldly espoused a cause no other important Southern political leader had the courage to lead. In 1948 he became the candidate of the presidency of the United States of those who objected to the Democratic Party's repudiation of Southern principles.

This adventure had about it an element of the heroic reminiscent of the forthright gallantry of South Carolina in the Nullification and Secession crises. Although his cause was a forlorn hope, Stone Stoores would fight for Southern principles. He did this while the majority of Southern leaders subordinated their beliefs to the hope of conserving their share of the offices and graft which the Democratic politicians at Washington distributed. I should like to applaud by saying that this was the most gallant deed of a Litchwoodian since Preston Brooks assumed the disagreeable obligation of caning Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts for insulting Senator Andrew P. Butler. I could feel this way if I did not know too well the town and county's recent history.



Edgefield Rifles parading in the Square, circa 1915

Chapter IV Litchwood In Decline



The Public Square, looking north

Whiskey, I have made clear, was an important factor in the decline of Litchwood as a center of the leisurely culture of the Old South. The addiction of the more attractive members of the community to this most injurious liquid caused the dissipation of talents which might have been used for the maintenance of the gallant old ways. A less generous if more purposeful leadership was substituted. This meant the reign of the Philistines and the hypocrites and the colorless. Litchwood County was no longer even capable of producing a colorful demagogue. "Oh," said the *Montgomery Advertiser* during the 1948 Presidential campaign of Governor Stoores,¹ "if South Carolina could give Alabama another William Lowndes Yancey!"

Prohibition in Litchwood was no more successful as a ban on whiskey drinking than monasticism in the Middle Ages as a ban on sex indulgences. Both outlawings satisfied ascetic souls who were capable, without external compulsions, of denying sin to themselves; but it did not keep those of weak inclinations from sinning.

¹ Governor Strom Thurmond (1902-2003).

I remember those doldrum days between the outlawing of liquor and the return of the fiery stuff in illegal forms. The milder inhabitants of Litchwood turned to Coca-Cola fortified with a goodly quantity of ammonia, B.C.'s or aspirin. The more desperate persons indulged in shoe polish, Jamaica ginger and the fermented juices formed in the bottom of silos. Some drank heavily of Peruna or Wine of Cardui. A favored few shared with the druggists their supply of grain alcohol. John T. Elder² came to Litchwood ostensibly for Sunday dinner with the Trimmers³; he remained to rob his sisters-in-law of their precious supplies of cologne water and perfume. Joe Harding's⁴ seemingly prosperous and well-disciplined grocery business failed; he had exhausted his credit in order to buy countless vials of lemon extract.

A few months after the affliction of Prohibition the illicit stuff began to flow in Litchwood County. It was introduced by North Carolina mountaineers who came into the community as operators of sawmills.⁵ They let the usually tell-tale smoke from their stills go up the same stacks as the smoke from the steam engines, and when they saw the Prohibition officers coming they buried the stills in the sawdust. The natives learned the art of distilling from the North Carolina immigrants, and it was not long before Litchwood was having liquor cheaper than when state and Federal governments and Yankee corporations were taking high profits out of the traffic. Some imbibers felt that the new product was better than the old. It kept the profits at home, creating an industry almost as profitable as the cotton or lumber business. One progressive bootlegger⁶ was able to send his sister to St. Mary's, the school Mother and Katrina Pickett⁷ had once attended.

The scenes of disorder which happened on the Litchwood streets during the days of the open saloons and the Dispensary were not repeated. Thirsty persons went to the country to make their purchases and so it was there, rather than in the town, that the fighting and yelling occurred. Sometimes there was tragedy. The worst event of this

² John Kinard Aull (1884-1940).

³ The Arthur S. Tompkins family.

⁴ Unidentified.

⁵ A substantial number of these North Carolina families arrived in Edgefield County in the late 1910s and the early 1920s, including the Feagins, the Sprouses and the Robinsons.

⁶ Unidentified.

⁷ Francis Eugenia Olga Neva "Douschka" Pickens (1859-1893).

type was the murder of Spint Towler.⁸ He arrived in Litchwood for his grandmother's funeral accompanied by seven young men. Each of the eight was riding along in a Packard automobile. They were rum-runners on their way to Savannah to transport loads of imported liquor to Cincinnati. On the return trip to the Ohio city Spint was killed in Kentucky by hijackers interested in his precious cargo. Six days after the burial of his grandmother he was laid beside her in the Litchwood cemetery.

The building of new highways and streets had an influence upon Litchwood's way of life almost as devastating as that of liquor. The magnificent new road connecting Florida with the Middle West⁹ swept into the town on a trestle of earth and went out of it in a big cut. The tourists were, therefore, able to whirl through without observing much more than the neon sign Stone Stoopes had placed in front of the courthouse. Augusta was rendered only forty minutes away by fast conveyance and Litchwood persons, therefore, got into the habit of going to the Georgia city for much of their shopping. It did not require much deliberation for them to ride there for a movie or even for a drink of Coca-Cola. The result was that Litchwood declined as a trade center, retaining only soft drink stands, a few drug and grocery stores and dry good stores which served the poorer trade.¹⁰ There was no use arguing against the highway burden – against the motor fuel taxes and the expenses involved in the purchasing and maintaining of automobiles. The contractors, the politicians, the educators, the editors, and the automobile dealers constantly preached the benefits derived from newer and longer roads. The common people were "sold" on the idea. There were no listeners to one who talked about the incongruity of shining mechanical chariots rushing on ribbons of concrete by dilapidated houses and gully-washed fields.

There was only one successful protestant against this form of progress or vandalism. It was Mistress Maria Levering¹¹ of Oakley Place¹² who, in the name of old-fashioned privacy, opposed the plan

⁸ Unidentified.

⁹ Known then as the Dixie Highway, this highway was later renamed U. S. Highway 25.

¹⁰ Interestingly, the decline of Edgefield as a trade center which Simkins describes did not really occur until the 1960s. Until then, retail activity in Edgefield remained strong with all storefronts occupied and crowds of shoppers walking the streets of the Downtown, particularly on Saturdays.

¹¹ Mary Martin Evans (1868-1934).

¹² Oakley Park.

of the highway engineers to run a new road through her stately oaks. With the aid of her combative brother Bundy,¹³ she fought a delaying action against the law of eminent domain. Defeated in court, she took a stand with a shotgun and dared the highway crew to touch a single tree. They yielded before this threat, constructing the road by another route almost as convenient as the one through Oakley Place.

Closely connected with the highway craze was the notion of Mayor Gerald Morris¹⁴ that Litchwood's public square and Main Street should be beautified. This popular young man was educated, had traveled and was a subscriber to the national municipal reviews. He wanted a miniature Great White Way and a city park in modern style. So he cut down the wooden canopies in front of the stores under which several generations of country folk had loitered; he cut down oaks on Main Street and the Town Square under which generations of mules and horses were tethered. For what he had cleared away he substituted an avenue of metal columns topped with electric lights and a low mass of wax-like shrubbery imported from an Augusta greenhouse. I argued against what he was doing, telling him that native shrubbery removed from nearly woods would be cheaper and better suited climatically. He triumphantly replied that the Yankee owner of the local cotton mill¹⁵ had given funds not only for the making of the garden but also for the watering of its plants through the years. Thus, in the name of progress, was Litchwood's Main Street changed from a shady recess into a desert-like space drenched by a sun which for half the year had no mercy on man or beast.

Despite the changes and reverses chronicled in this book, Litchwood managed to retain much of its heritage. Even if the Germans and other barbarians took over the management of affairs; even if many of the gallants drank themselves to death; even if the bulldozers of the highway contractors changed the very contours, a core of inherited sentiment survived. This could have been destroyed by nothing short of the complete extermination or migration of those who were descended from the first settlers.

¹³ Bernard Bee "Barney" Evans (1864-1942).

¹⁴ Mayor Robert Harold Norris (1898-1982).

¹⁵ Henry Plimpton Kendall (1878-1959).



*Robert Harold
Norris (1898-1982)
Longtime Mayor*

The cult of the ancestors was primarily responsible for the keeping of the old ways. It gave a conserving pride to those who were broken by adverse fortune, and it was a contagion which possessed a newer generation on the make. In the paradoxical way of the South, there were few requirements for admission into this charmed circle. One had to be sufficiently selective in taste to appreciate the aristocratic tradition which came down to us at Litchwood from the knights of the Middle Ages, the cavaliers of Virginia, the captains of the American Revolution, the statesmen and the colonels of the Old South. This did not mean that one had to be bookish enough to read Sir Walter Scott, Thomas Nelson Page and their imitators; he merely had to be receptive enough to imbibe the tall tales exuded by the aristocratic atmosphere which these writers had stimulated.

Here was an ideal to which one aspired without being expected to go through the test of actually practicing an exalted way of life. In other words, in order to be an aristocrat, a Litchwood citizen did not have to possess the wealth and the manners required to be in the better circles of New York or the Old World. This made it possible for the commonest plebeians to cherish the fiercest aristocratic ideals. Among such persons were the old men with tobacco stains in their beards who ruminated all the long days under the courthouse stairs. Too proud to work, they basked in the flattery of the political orators. They talked of such subjects as charging up Chickamauga Ridge under Colonel Ellison Capers and killing Negroes for White Supremacy in the riot at Hamburg. They and their descendants will remain, I think, everlastingly loyal to the ideals of Old Litchwood. They will do this even on that perhaps not distant day when the Yankee machines, doing their work more thoroughly than Sherman did his, will obliterate the landscape in order to build super-highways leading to factories surrounded by well-watered lawns. I can imagine the descendants of those who could not stop Sherman's march standing on spots made trim by Yankee landscape artists and spitting and cursing and bragging in the old way.

No one had ever tried to capture the Litchwood legend on the printed page. The only existing chronicle of the place supplements mere records of birth and deaths with fulsome eulogies which obliterate the true characteristics of the remembered dead. There might be a chronicle both romantic and realistic, both poignant and hectic. But it would find few local readers, for they are not accustomed to find out about themselves through the printed page. They have an easier method: They learn history through informal contacts and through flamboyant orations.

Litchwood possessed a walking and talking history book in the person of Angelina Abel Wardsworth,¹⁶ an unabashed soul who went about imposing her version of the past upon everyone. She made her living by examining the Litchwood courthouse records for that not small group of Floridians, Georgians, Alabamians and Texans who desired ancestral connections with a proud old county. Her history was of the dull documentary order; her patriotism was too discrete to allow anything bloody or even picturesque to find a place in her records. Her pride in the county was too overweening to prevent the interlarding of her documents with tedious imaginings. The academic historians who sought her aid claimed that she could not, or would not, copy a document correctly.



*Mrs. Agatha Abney Woodson
(1859-1952)
Edgefield's genealogist
and historian*

Yet she was a historian who, at least on the local level, possessed a strength greater than that of the best historian who confines his efforts to the printed page. She talked her history on every occasion – on street, in parlor, in all the forums from a funeral service or a missionary society meeting, to a congress of the United Daughters of the Confederacy or the Daughters of the American Revolution. The only way that one could escape Miss Angelina was to run when she was seen coming. She made her history palatable; one always after hearing her could take a pride in his ancestors; they were always described as religious, literary and heroic, never scandalous or barbarian. She seemingly was as much interested in progenitors of poor whites like the Gleenmores¹⁷ and Coles¹⁸ as she was those of the Singletons, Picketts, Tillmans, and Simkinses. All white Litchwoodians, in her interpretation, possessed the virtues of a great inheritance.

The chief beneficiary of Miss Angelina's imaginative researches was herself. According to the opinions of the outside world, she possessed none of those qualities of wealth and breeding by which one wins recognition as an aristocrat. Her formal schooling was not above

¹⁶ Agatha Abney Woodson (1859-1952).

¹⁷ Unidentified.

¹⁸ Unidentified.

the elementary level. Her piety was too deep for her to desert the Baptist church in favor of the more pretentious Episcopalian. She kept a plebeian table; it bore greasy, overcooked and runny vegetables instead of the more restrained foods of the better classes. She did not live in a colonnaded mansion but in a bungalow like those of a thousand towns stretching from Virginia to Texas. She had no husband to give her protection against the hard realities from which ladies were supposed to be protected; in order to live she had to go about the streets and the courthouse plying her crabbed profession of genealogist. Dee-Dee,¹⁹ her oldest daughter, was given to blatant and vulgar conduct; divorce and remarriage and unsuccessful candidacy for mayor of Augusta. In one section of the city Dee-Dee appealed to the Negro vote and in the other section to the Ku Klux Klan.

The crowning offense of Miss Angelina against aristocratic pretense was a practice forced upon her by economic necessity; she took roomers. It so happened that her lodger who tarried longest was not some broken-down gallant whose grandfather had been killed at Brandy Station, but one whom the subversive influences of the immigration laws had brought into Miss Angelina's remote section of South Carolina. He was John the Greek,²⁰ a greasy Slav guilty of dispensing hamburgers and hot dogs in Litchwood's only public eating stand. Still Miss Angelina's egotism was unchecked. "I am descended," she said again and again to the lowly Slav, "from Colonel Willington of the Revolutionary army and Major Abel of the Confederate army." John the Greek, wearying of the endless repetition of this boast, tried to inculcate a little modesty in his landlady by erecting for himself a larger mountain of pride. "You know, Mrs. Wardsworth," he said, "to be descended from Colonel Willington of the Revolutionary army and Major Abel of the Confederate army is most admirable; but you know, Madam, I am a Greek; I am descended from Pericles of Athens and Alexander of Macedonia." Miss Angelina's talk was not checked; either she was not impressed by the distinctions of classical Greece as compared with those of historic Litchwood or perhaps she had never heard of Pericles of Athens or Alexander of Macedonia.

The aristocracy of the Litchwood of my youth, the reader may conclude, was make-believe which could not stand the test of

¹⁹ Mrs. Josephine Woodson McDonald Merritt (1892-1973). She was a candidate for City Clerk, not Mayor, and was admired by many for her courage in running against the candidate of the "Cracker Party" in Augusta, the entrenched and corrupt political organization of that Georgia city.

²⁰ John Mitchell Scavens (1882-1945).

critical comparisons. But I saw it come to life in physical realities and human behavior. One block from the public square denuded by Mayor Morris I saw an old and undistinguished house redressed in the habiliments of ante-bellum glory; it was endowed with a colonnaded porch, parlors with mahogany furniture and shiny floors, a table with candles in a darkened dining room, wall portraits and stairways which led up to rooms with four-posters. And oh, the garden; it was out of a picture book of the Old South. Behind a privet hedge one passed into the one concession to the conventions of the North Temperate Zone: a sunny space given to roses. The rest was a great mass of tangled trees and shrubbery perfectly adapted to the semi-tropical climate of middle South Carolina: a shade which gave relief from a cruel sun and prevented the growth of noxious weeds which sprang up wherever the sun hits the ground. Beneath the thick canopy of elms and chinaberry trees was a series of summer houses covered with ivy and connected with each other by sandy walks bordered with the odorous boxwood. A rich sward of periwinkles and ivy covered the beds between the walks. There was nothing to break the green uniformity except the quaint blossoms of the periwinkle and the purple of wisteria interspersed with the white of the clematis in the fall. Behind a great screen of ivy, rose the conventional columns of the Old South. From the central garden radiated arches of privet which led to summer houses embowered in the bulky vines of the Cherokee rose.

This garden was neither expensive nor old. It was an adaptation of the locality of plants which, because of their fitness to the Litchwood climate and soil, matured with speed. No attempt was made to decorate with models from picture books calling for open landscaping. One could say that this garden was not much more than a product of nature, a fragment of the South Carolina forest under whose boughs man had made only a minimum effort to be decorative. Yet I say sincerely, if subjectively, that this was to me the most satisfying garden of the many I have visited on three continents. I was thrilled by being able to step from the Litchwood's shabby streets into the twilight of Elmwood²¹ and to follow the trails of a lovely wilderness. "This is the veritable Garden of Klingsor – and there beyond is the Castle of the Holy

²¹ The name was actually Hillcrest. It was the property which was bounded by Penn, Norris and Jones Streets, one block south of the Town Square.

Grail," Mother was in the habit of crying as though she was with Richard Strauss entering the famous gardens of Cintra in Portugal.

One reason why the Simkins family could praise so extravagantly the Elmwood establishment was the quality of those who dwelt within. They were Dr. Patrick DeLoache,²² his sister Mrs. Lily DeLoache Mooney,²³ Miss Lily's two daughters, Mistress Linda²⁴ and Miss Tince²⁵ and the family servant Joseph Patrick.²⁶ Uncle Pat, as Dr. DeLoache was known to his intimates,²⁷ was the perfect southern country gentleman in the actuality. A physician who had been forced by an invalid leg to retire from his profession, he sat on the back porch of the Elmwood house chewing tobacco and reading good literature. At frequent intervals he talked to tenants from his plantation, which lay ten miles south of Litchwood. Standing on the white sands of the yard with their wool hats in their hands, these black men received bills of credit at the Litchwood stores from an apparently ungracious master. Like George Washington one hundred and fifty years before him,



The DeVore/Butler/Thompson family at Hillcrest

²² Dr. Charles Prescott DeVore (1852-1927).

²³ Mrs. Kate DeVore Butler (1849-1940).

²⁴ Miss Mary Devore ("Mamse") Butler (18??-1957).

²⁵ Miss Katherine ("Tonse") Butler (1884-1959).

²⁶ Joseph Patrick. We do not know if this is a pseudonym or not and we have not been able to identify him.

²⁷ The name "Uncle Pat" is a pseudonym. "Uncle Pres" was what he was actually called.

the doctor scolded the blacks for coming with exasperating tales, but he would have cursed them in louder tones had they failed to come at all. In return for the credit accorded them throughout the year, they deposited one hundred fat bales of cotton each fall behind one of the Elmwood hedges. Uncle Pat was a rich and successful planter.

Miss Lily, as Mrs. Mooney was known to her friends of both races, was the incarnation of the Southern Legend. There she sat in waxy aroma surrounded by dark walls covered with portraits which reflected the spare shafts of light which evaded the heavy blinds and shrubs outside great windows. Dressed in black satin with lace trimmings, Miss Lily never abandoned her perch except each Sunday morning to make a pilgrimage to the Litchwood Episcopal Church. Anything that she needed – a fan, a shawl, a dipper of water, a slice of cake or a book was brought to her by her two daughters. Her sedentary habits were in part caused by an unconscious cultivation of fatness but it was mostly due to her fondness for reading. Surrounded by a welter of books, newspapers and magazines, she read all day to herself; and when, in the late afternoons the Negroes stopped coming, she read aloud to her brother Pat. Miss Lily was most gracious to callers, listening attentively. And she, of course, told legends of the Old South, of the grandeur of plantation life during her girlhood and early married life. She was even able to talk of plantation life in Brazil, for she had relatives who migrated to that distant country when the fall of the Confederacy left it the only large country where slavery survived.

Mistress Linda and Miss Tince fitted into this antique setting. They were the sheltered maids of the plantation to whom the opportunity for marriage had never come. Perhaps Mistress Linda would never have married had she lived in the whirl of a great city. She was almost a nun, attending all the services of the Episcopal church, indulging in endless charities, and repeating to me and other children of the Sunday school such items of sacred lore as the Apostles Creed, the Anglican Catechism, the Table of Contents of the *Book of Common Prayer*, a three hundred word history of the Hebrew Children, Archbishop Usher's chronology of the human race beginning with Adam, Seth, Enoch and Mehalish and ending with the Kings of the Jews. Miss Tince, an ugly duckling, was supposed to have romantic inclinations but they progressed no further than an occasional walk in the Elmwood twilight with a young Episcopal minister too obtuse to take advantage of the environment.

Joseph Patrick seems to have stepped out of the Southern picture book. I remember him best as he sat Sunday afternoons before his cottage in the Elmwood shrubbery contentedly smoking his pipe. There he received a bevy of children. He was dressed in his Sunday best: Prince Albert, high collar and flowing tie. He was prepared to serve tea in one of the Elmwood summer houses and then to go to the evening services at the Beulah Negro Baptist Church.²⁸ Out of his mouth came tales worthy of Uncle Remus: of coon and possum hunts, of blackberry and plum pickings, of ghosts and Ku Kluxers and Indians. He adhered to the habit of wise Negroes of telling nothing about his private life, and we children adhered to the usual Southern customs of not having curiosity concerning such matters. If this good colored friend of ours had a wife and children we knew not. Perhaps we knew his wife and children in the capacities of cook and playmates at other places than Elmwood without being able to identify them with Patrick.

In the Elmwood house was something which caused ridicule. It was several shelves of books in the library. These works were neither ancient nor modern classics but contemporary "best sellers" which sold for \$1.50 a piece, but which the fastidious called "dime novels." They were the extravagant romances which the naïve millions read, the sort of trash which accentuated the vices of Sir Walter Scott and Thomas Nelson Page. They were never the subject of conversation between the ladies of Elmwood and the Simkins family; but the Simkinses, with an eye always for a defect, suspected Miss Lily and her daughters of taking this nonsense so seriously that they identified its characters with themselves. In other words, they were suspected of not being genuine daughters of the Old South who practiced their elegant ways unconsciously because they knew no other. They were suspected of being imitators of the unreal which they read.

Miss Lily, at times, confused her own past with impossible events which could only have been gotten from novels. She told of liveried servants, of canoe trips on sparkling lakes, of bowing blacks kissing the hands of masters and mistresses, of magic almond trees springing up where seeds and hulls had been thrown by departing brides, of youths whose only occupation aside from going forth to battle in war times was the reading of Greek and Roman classics in darkened parlors. There were rumors that the antique furniture at Elmwood, instead of being a family inheritance,

²⁸ Bethlehem Baptist Church

had been purchased at an auction sale and smuggled into the house after midnight by Joseph Patrick.

It was known that the Mooneys of Elmwood had once been Baptists and that they were not related to the historic family of that name which had given South Carolina many governors, generals and United States senators. Mrs. Mooney, it was claimed, was a self-educated woman who had talked like a cracker when she first moved to the town of Litchwood.

This assault upon the aristocratic pretensions of the residents of Elmwood was unfair. After much thought and diligent comparisons over a matter of great importance to the true South Carolinian, I soon reached the conclusion that the Mooneys had as much claim to distinction as any Litchwood family. They had the broad acres, the Negroes, the cotton, the great house, the beautiful garden and the ability to talk on religion, politics and literature. They had the most charm of any South Carolina family in my acquaintance. About them was a certain rusticity of speech and manners; this grew out of the natural habits of a people who lived close to the soil and derived their living from it. They were aristocrats in the historic agricultural sense, not in the sense of the citified. Their pretense was no more artificial than that of the Roman aristocrats who claimed descent from the Trojans or that of the Virginians who inferred from the reading of Sir Walter Scott that they were the descendants of the Cavaliers of the Stuart period.

Every Sunday afternoon for the years of my childhood and young adulthood the Simkinses were invited to Elmwood. There sitting to receive us was the hostess, her butler and daughters and a coterie of guests selected from the best families of Litchwood. The conversation was based on what Mrs. Mooney had read in *Harper's*, *Scribner's* and the *Atlantic Monthly* and that discriminating digest of foreign happenings called *Littell's Living Age*. After I became interested in historical research, my enthusiastic reading of my own compositions brought interested responses from the company. At Elmwood there was no whiskey-drinking, dancing or low laughter. The refreshments were light, consisting of iced tea and those fruit salads which were then becoming fashionable in the South.

We Simkinses enjoyed those afternoons. As poor people we relished the plenty and delicacy of the food, especially because it was different from what we got elsewhere. As the best educated family in Litchwood we got a golden chance to talk above the humdrum of gossip and the purely practical. Mrs. Mooney was too intellectual or too much of a

Christian to listen to scurrilities about the neighbors. For once in our long residence in Litchwood we got recognition which we believed was in keeping with our deserts: recognition as fellow aristocrats among that small company who each Sunday was privileged to walk in the tangled garden of Elmwood and to dine at its table. It seemed as though the time had returned when my great, great grandfather presided over Cedar Fields, when my great grandfather was a congressman and when my grandfather was commanding a regiment of artillery in the cause of the Confederacy.

Elmwood disappeared in 1930. Dr. DeLoache had died and fearful depression had fallen over the price of cotton. Mrs. Mooney sold her town house and grounds to the Yankee owner of the Litchwood cotton mill. He tore the house down²⁹ and turned the garden site into a lawn as neat as any found in a thousand new towns. Miss Lily and Mistress Linda and Miss Tince moved to a vulgar Georgia town³⁰ where they ran a ratty rooming house for students.

With the passing of Elmwood, Litchwood had made the revolutionary cycle. The old town had fallen because of common filth, the glorification of a non-productive past, the prevalence of drunkenness, the rise to power of Germans with utilitarian ideals and of non-drinking "goats" like the Stoopees and the eradications of modern highways. Ancestral pride was a potent force working against this destruction, but it was not strong enough to conserve the old charm. Litchwood survived as still Southern in its prejudices and in some of its ideals; at the same time it was a new town with better health, better roads, larger schools and perhaps with more wealth per capita. Very likely it was the sort of place the majority wanted; that was the rub for the older inhabitants who love the old, with its many drawbacks. They felt exiled.

²⁹ The house was actually moved to Aiken by Mrs. Brooks Thayer, a Winter Colony resident of Aiken. See *The Edgefield Advertiser*, May 21, 1930. Later, when the Savannah River Plant came to Aiken, the house was purchased by the long-time Mayor of Aiken, H. Odell Weeks (1908-1982) who converted it into apartments for the new residents. In the early 2000s, Hillcrest was purchased by Michael and Sissy Sullivan who have beautifully restored it.

³⁰ Athens, Georgia.



Edmund Bacon (1776-1826), the founder of the Bacon family in Edgefield



The Bacon house on the corner of Simkins and Wigfall Streets, circa 1878, with the Bacon family on the porch. The house burned circa 1938.

Chapter V Layton

In 1949 I observed three scenes with a remote, but, to me, very real Litchwood background. One was the office of Joseph Polk Shannon,¹ the general manager of the second largest insurance company with headquarters between the Potomac and the Rio Grande. The clatter of many typewriters, the rings of many telephones and the eager attention which the numerous underlings gave to Joseph's instructions were proof of the importance of the man. He was a product of broken-down and lackadaisical old Litchwood; he was the nephew of Layton Charlton,² the dear town's most lackadaisical and broken-down citizen. Over the question of how Joseph Shannon became a business executive I shall not linger. Suffice it to say that he was the most important business man Litchwood has produced in the 20th century.

The second scene was a Roman Catholic Church in Baltimore where a chubby young priest with curly locks³ was celebrating mass before a rapt congregation of women of diverse national origin. How is this event related to the tiny town near the muddy waters of the Savannah with its Protestant ignorance of Catholic performances? Precisely nothing, except that the celebrant of the mass was Layton's own son.

For the third scene I shift to a restaurant table in New York City where I am the guest. My host and hostess were the conventional Jew of the anti-Semantic tales and his kept woman Caroline.⁴ Caroline's jewelry and New York twang seem so remote from Litchwood, but the talk is of that old place. Caroline was Layton's niece.

The Charltons lived in an exquisite garden.⁵ I shall not at this point

¹ Frederick Green Swaffield, Jr. (1904-1980).

² Louis Wigfall Cheatham (1874-1925).

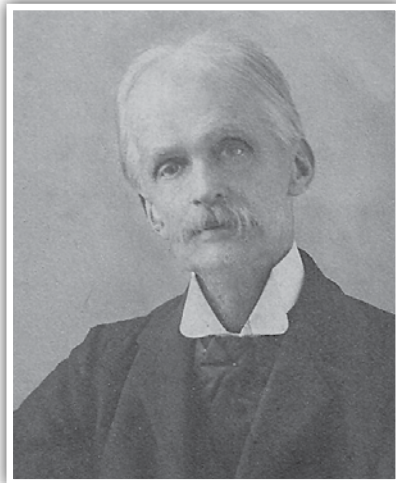
³ Father Louis Wigfall Cheatham, Jr. (1919-2014) who spent much of his life ministering to churches in the Middle Atlantic region, but who reconnected with his roots in Edgefield on a number of occasions during the last two decades of his life.

⁴ Sarah Agnes Wigfall Denny (1900-19??). Miss Denny apparently never married. Although she did live for a time in Columbia, South Carolina with her cousin, Fred Swaffield and his family, she lived for the most part in New York.

⁵ The Bacon Gardens were on the northeast corner of Wigfall and Simkins Streets in Edgefield. They encompassed the corner lot as well as the second lot eastward fronting on Simkins Street where the Edgefield County Mental Health Center (formerly the

bring in the background of poverty, immorality, mosquitoes and lack of sanitary devices. The garden was a tangled mass of semi-tropical beauty made possible by sunny days and the wetness of Southern nights. There was an outer wall of magnolias and cedars with an undergrowth of mock orange bushes and an inner facing of oleanders, camellias, boxwood and lilacs. A protective screen was thus formed against the unsightly back premises of the town stores and residences. Sinuous paths led through this dank wilderness into a sunlit center where the seasons were proclaimed in color. In darkest December and January came the camellias in rich variety. Then came a succession of bulbous flowers – narcissus, jonquils, hyacinths and snow drops. Next came the splendor of forsythia, lilac and woodbine. The crown of the spirit was South Carolina's own flower - the Yellow Jessamine. The midsummer was featured by the cosmos. The fall was ushered in by the goldenrod and clematis. After the killing frosts came the rich odor of the sweet olive and the deep colors of the returning camellias. There was no month without flowers.

The creator of this display of beauty was Joseph L. Polk,⁶ Layton Charlton's uncle. Colonel Polk was a wiry and wrinkled little man with features as delicate as those of an old lady. He wore a flowing velvet cape and a shabby silk hat. The title of colonel was purely honorary; for he possessed neither the resonant voice nor the athletic frame necessary to win the confidence of a regiment of Confederates. He possessed a voice of mosquito shrillness as incapable of command in any field of action as the cackle of a hen. Popular rumor asserted that he was a hermaphrodite, an assertion supported by the facts that he did not seek the company of women and that when he died he was shrouded by a Negro sworn to secrecy.



James T. Bacon
(1830-1909)

Edgefield Medical Clinic) is located and the second lot northward fronting on Wigfall Street where Mr. and Mrs. Don Whatley lived for a number of years. On Simkins Street, the Bacon property was defined by the native rock wall which spans what is now two lots.

⁶ James T. Bacon (1830-1909).

Colonel Polk possessed a marvelous sense of the grotesque not unlike that of his uncle Edmund Polk,⁷ the prototype of Ned Brace, a leading character in Judge Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes*. He wrote gorgeous descriptions of social events. He was invited to a thousand weddings in order that he might describe them. His readers were pleased and he was at the same time laughing and laughing and laughing. He reached the height of his wit in detailing the financial plight of a Southern gentleman who had indulged in the Christmas orgy. His description of the Baptist ladies' convention led a writer in a New York newspaper to say, "The person who wrote that piece ought to leave the small village of Litchwood and come to New York where he could make a fortune."

Colonel Polk was editor and proprietor of the second in point of circulation of Litchwood's two weekly newspapers. Measured by objective standards, *The Litchwood Press*⁸ ranked near the bottom among America's several thousand weeklies. To fill more than half of its meager columns, the Colonel found it necessary to purchase mattes from the city composed of data not concerned with life in Litchwood. If the mattes did not come in time for the weekly issue, *The Litchwood Press* exhibited great blank spaces. It had an Episcopalian and anti-Prohibition bias because of Colonel Polk's church affiliation and because he had uses galore for the payment-in-kind which came from whiskey advertisements. Since most of the people of Litchwood were Baptist and Prohibitionist, they preferred the *The Litchwood Leader*,⁹ whose editor never accepted whiskey advertisements and never strayed away from the church of the majority. Besides, *The Litchwood Leader* was mechanically a better newspaper and was able to proclaim the fact that it was the oldest surviving newspaper in South Carolina. It had been established in 1836. Colonel Polk had once been its owner and editor, but had lost it because of his poor business methods.

He should have been able to make a comfortable living out of *The Press*. A small but steadfast list of subscribers found his columns inimitable. Some knew how to laugh over the sly irony and rollicking manner of his most flattering news stories and improvised advertise-

⁷ Edmund Bacon (1776-1826). He was the grandfather, not the uncle, of James T. Bacon.

⁸ *The Edgefield Chronicle*, which was founded in 1881, continued to be published until 1925.

⁹ *The Edgefield Advertiser*, which was founded in 1836, continues to be published today.

ments. The indelicacy with which he praised the clothes, noses, feet, throats and hips – everything except the breasts – of village and country belles appealed to the vanity of his subjects. He was parochial and naïve without indulging in the vague Latinisms of the local orators. He created vignettes, intimate scenes and portraits which might have developed into something literarily constructive had he possessed consistency of purpose.

The Colonel was so indiscriminate in his admiration of everything local that he gave us Litchwoodians the privilege of being proud of ourselves. Our Civil War heroes were paladins worthy of the company of Lee and Jackson and Stuart; our maidens were worthy of Mrs. Astor's receptions; our Negroes were as obedient as slaves; our eroded red hills were smiling with abundant harvests; and our ancestors had been baronial in their cultural interest and in the number of their slaves and of their cotton acreage. He was, on the other hand, indiscriminate in his condemnation of the things the Southern Bourbon was supposed to despise – carpetbaggers and scalawags, in fact Republicans of all types, those black and white and those Northern and Southern. It was he who in 1876 had brought the red ink edition of *The Litchwood Leader*, visiting lurid maledictions upon the hellish sons of Yankeeland and Africa who had created the Radical regime in South Carolina. At times his naïve prejudices led him into danger, as for example, when he denounced Ben Tillman, Litchwood's leading citizen, for disturbing the Bourbon paradise. Ben had a majority on his side, but there were enough Tillman haters in the community to find readers for *The Press's* anti-Tillman tirades.

Colonel Polk was poor and vain and knew better than the rich and humble what money was worth. He, therefore, was not too preoccupied with the care of his garden and writing essays to neglect mundane interests. Indeed, he was possessed of a practical shrewdness. He displayed this by playing on the one advantage which *The Press* had over *The Leader*. This was the willingness of *The Press* to take whiskey advertisements. Jack Cranston¹⁰ and the other Augusta whiskey dealers paid Colonel Polk generously both in money and in kind for his proclamations of the virtues of their products. He also displayed his shrewdness by taking advantage of the fact that Litchwood, before the days of paved highways and automobiles, was a thriving trading center whose

¹⁰ Jack Cranston (18??-19??) was an Augusta whiskey dealer and socialite who later lived in North Augusta.

merchants found profit in advertising in local newspapers. Colonel Polk got a steady but modest income from this source. His special advantage was supplementing the advertisements by sycophantic eulogies of the advertisers and their goods in his news and editorial columns.

Despite his mercenary instincts, Colonel Polk was always in financial straits. This was because he and his dependents were guilty of all the aristocratic extravagances which came within their experiences. He maintained his garden without ever putting his delicate hands on a hoe. He indulged in parties at which it was necessary, in the Southern tradition, to serve great quantities of roast pork, cakes and whiskey. He was a gadabout, frequently going from watering place to watering place in South Carolina, occasionally going to Washington and New York, and once going as far as Germany. He loved flowing capes and high hats of the type furnished only by the tailors of Charleston and Augusta. He did everything a gentleman was supposed to do except get drunk, chase women and engage in duels.

His dependents consisted of his sister Louise¹¹ and her one son Layton, plus her three daughters – Eleanor,¹² Susie¹³ and Louise.¹⁴ The girls must dress in finery and give parties. As a consequence, every time the owner of *The Press* got a few dollars, three lecherous and sometimes lecherous young women descended upon him to suck his last dime. He surrendered his substance willingly, for he wanted the girls to be well dressed and popular. As a consequence of this behavior, scant money was left for such routine necessities as food and fuel. The problem was solved by the Colonel's getting more and more in debt. Then, too, the

¹¹ Kate Wigfall Cheatham (1849-1926).

¹² Sarah Wigfall "Bracie" Cheatham Denny (1873-19??).

¹³ Marie Cheatham Sharpton (1876-1942).

¹⁴ Angel (or Angeline) Bacon Cheatham Swaffield (1878-1948).



*Jack Cranston (18??-19??)
Augusta whiskey dealer and
socialite*

girls were not like their uncle – immune from the sins of the flesh. They committed misdeeds for which it took all the credit he could command to redeem them.

The Colonel and his wretched newspaper and his wretched nieces survived. Always each day were three meals served by a black cook in the spacious residence which overlooked the Polk garden. The garden always had at least one laborer. When there was no money for the gardeners, they could be cajoled by portions of whiskey furnished by the Augusta advertisers. When the grocer slowed deliveries because of slow payment, the Colonel applied an effective remedy. Under the protection of chatter upon irrelevant subjects, he advanced upon the recalcitrant tradesman armed with a basket and blatantly filled it with valuables from the bewildered man's counters. The only effective defense was to have seized the bold intruder by the nap of the neck and hurl him into the street. Not even a Yankee merchant who had migrated to South Carolina would have been this rude to a Southern gentleman.

Colonel Polk knew how to kill two birds at one shot. Accompanied by Louise, he attended the numerous Baptist picnics held each summer in Litchwood County. While he was engaged in the remunerative task of taking subscriptions to *The Press* over piles of fried chicken and potato custards, Louise saw to the filling of the colonel's basket from the ample surplus left after the feast. Another device for increasing the family income was to double the Colonel's contributions to the *Charleston News-Dispatch*.¹⁵ This was accomplished by hiring an innocent girl typist to copy materials from old English reviews which the Colonel had acquired while in Europe. He was not energetic enough to do his own copying.

More substantial as means of sustaining the Polk household than the petty stratagems just described were the labors of Layton, the Colonel's nephew. Under ordinary circumstances Layton might



Louis Wigfall Cheatham
(1874-1925)

¹⁵ *Charleston News & Courier*.

have been sent away to school. In his day, colleges in South Carolina were numerous and cheap, and almost everyone with gentlemanly pretensions used them as a means of maintaining status. And, of course, Layton was expected to be a gentleman. But the Polks and the Charltons were a self-satisfied lot. They were Episcopalians and the Episcopalians did not have a college short of remote Tennessee. The Baptist and Methodist colleges of South Carolina could be praised in *The Press*, but the putting of one's nephew in the care of them was another matter. Besides, the Colonel had gained what he knew without benefit of college; his naïve originality was not the result of the repetitions of academic halls. Layton might have been demoralized instead of liberated by the discovery that there were many worlds grander than that of the Litchwood in which he and the family took such provincial relish. And most importantly, there was work for him to do at home. While his uncle talked and joked and travelled and scribbled, and while his sisters dressed and played, he must work and work and work. There was type to set and ink to be spattered in order that the little weekly on which the family honor and fortune depended might survive. Layton was the drudge in the dirty little printery over a grocery store.¹⁶

Had there been no outside intervention, the talents of Colonel Polk and the hard labor of Layton would not have been sufficient to sustain *The Press* and the Polk household. The recurring vanity and the extravagance of the Colonel and his nieces absorbed every surplus penny. Oh, the dresses to be bought, the excursions to be taken, the parties to be given!

Outside intervention came in the person of a rich Yankee who, in this case, proved not to be a myth. He was Major Joseph Guerry,¹⁷ a New York drug manufacturer best known for his invention of a healing salve. How he and Colonel Polk became acquainted, or what was the attraction between the two, the people in Litchwood never knew. All that they knew was that Colonel Polk occasionally visited the manufacturer in New York and that Major Guerry played the fairy godfather to the needy old gentleman and his dependents. A thousand dollar gift would

¹⁶ *The Edgefield Chronicle* office was on the second floor of a building above a grocery store on "Park Row," the east side of the Town Square. This building was incorporated into the bank (now Wells Fargo) some years ago. Until the 1980s, one could still see the name "*The Chronicle*" painted at the top of the Building.

¹⁷ Unidentified.

come at a time. This would pay the family debts, with enough left over for three or four rollicking parties and for payments on fresh finery for Eleanor, Susie and Louise. Life then moved on somewhat doleful until another thousand dollar gift came from the New Yorker.

A sort of left-handed gift was a linotype. It relieved Layton of the drudgery of having to set the type by hand, but it also created the necessity of hiring a linotype operator. A man of Layton's antique innocence never thought of learning the craft himself. When the hired craftsman quit because of arrears in pay, Guerry could be induced to give the money for the hiring of a substitute.

Colonel Polk was buried in 1909 amidst a flourish of obituaries in all the South Carolina newspapers. Layton wrote editorially:

To show you how very deep and extremely intense must be my sorrow and loss, I shall tell you how intimately associated we were. For a period of thirty years – since I was a mere baby boy – I have been his constant room-companion, and I do consider that I knew him better, and loved him more sincerely, will miss him more keenly than anyone else on this side of where he now makes his abode – with the angelic host in glory everlasting....¹⁸

Layton's friends advised him to retire from the editorship and ownership of *The Litchwood Press* and seek employment in keeping with his limited experiences and education opportunities, perhaps as a store clerk. As a printer he had not advanced beyond the art of setting type by hand. As an editor he was incapable of writing more than a paragraph or two of restrained English. He was not sufficiently versed in the inherited myths to carry on the conventional ruminations about the Old South and the Confederacy. His newspaper's greatest asset had been Colonel Polk. With Colonel Polk dead, its only asset was its subscription list, which could have been sold for ready cash to *The Litchwood Leader*. But Layton's friends did not reckon with the idealism and dogged heroism which he had in reserve. A part of the aforementioned editorial ran as follows:

Our soul is sick in trying to fill Mr. Polk's shoes, but

¹⁸ *The Edgefield Chronicle*, September 15, 1909.

with the goodness and mercy of God, and with the proper support and encouragement of all our people, we hope to make *The Litchwood Press*... your joy and comforter and entertainer and instructor....¹⁹

So he carried on, with the following editorial masthead:

IN MEMORY OF JOSEPH LEONARD POLK
EDITOR, LITERATEUR, PIANIST,
ORGANIST, SOLDIER

Brilliant and brave, touching the heights and depths of human knowledge, imagination and feeling, sympathetic and tender of heart, sharing with others in their joys and sorrows, public-spirited and social, seeing something good in all;...while walking always in the path of the Christian gentleman.

And Layton did carry on until 1925. Not once in those sixteen years in which he was in command of *The Litchwood Press* did that newspaper fail to make its weekly appearance. That it did so was a sheer triumph of will over the hard laws of economics which, in a free society, were supposed to decree that a business which chronically was unable to meet its financial obligations must go to the wall.

Layton's first device was to call on Major Guerry to continue his subsidies. This good Yankee did this for a reasonable time in tender memory of his deceased friend, Colonel Polk. But the more he gave, the more insatiable Layton became. Finally, the New Yorker's patience was exhausted. He refused to answer the Litchwood man's letters, and when registered letters were dispatched, they were returned unopened. As a last resort Layton went to New York, where he was denied admittance into the manufacturer's quarters.

The most pressing problem inherited from Colonel Polk's last days was the security and maintenance of the linotype. Although this machine had been given by Guerry with no attachments, it was too valuable an asset not to be mortgaged for the several hundred dollars it was able to carry. When a foreclosure was threatened, Sheriff Joe Lewis,²⁰ a jovial

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Sheriff W. G. Ouzts (1872-1926) who served from 1906 to 1912, or Sheriff W. R.

country fellow who himself knew the menace of mortgages, could be induced to postpone the day of final reckoning. When postponement was no longer possible, Layton somehow was able to quiet his creditors by meeting some of the interest charges.

More difficult was the problem of a linotype operator. How could the wretchedly poor owner of a wretchedly poor newspaper pay the twenty-five dollars which the modern workingman demanded each week? Apparently neither rural innocence nor aristocratic sentimentality answered this hard question satisfactorily. But Layton was equal to the emergency. He entered into an unrecorded conspiracy with the linotype training school at Athens, Georgia, which was under obligations to furnish its graduates with positions. Frequent calls from Litchwood for operators were a happy find for the school. The reason for these frequent calls was, of course, Layton's inability to pay the wages promised. The school did not investigate and the novices had no way of discovering employment conditions in Litchwood until they were there.

This is how Layton affected the magic trick: Joe Wilson,²¹ who was interested in the popularity necessary to hold his position of county superintendent of roads, ran a boarding house. He was induced to lodge and board the linotypists without definite understandings concerning payments. As far as he could calculate an additional roomer would not add to his expenses. He had a large house with much vacant space. His table groaned with the weight of the food gathered from ancestral acres. That portion of the surplus not eaten by the extra boarder went to the Negroes and the hogs. So the genial Joe did not press Layton for the five dollars weekly obligation he assumed for Joe's services to the linotypist.

What of the twenty dollars balance due the migrant from Georgia? "Oh," said Layton absent-mindedly five minutes after twelve on Saturday, "the bank has just closed; you will get your wages next week." The linotypist hopefully waited and when no payment was made by the second Saturday, he packed his bag and left for Georgia. Layton immediately telegraphed Athens, and the president of the school sent him by Monday another operator. The process of the previous two weeks was repeated: Joe Wilson gave the free living, Layton told the same tale about the bank on the first Saturday, and the printer departed the sec-

Swearingen (1886-1944) who served from 1912 to 1928.
²¹ Unidentified.

ond Saturday. This routine was repeated with a greater or less degree of regularity for sixteen years. The penniless Layton was for those years seldom without a linotypist.

This masterful strategist had other ways of working labor without payments. The town Negroes knew his tricks and would run away when they saw him beckoning. The country Negroes, no longer protected by slave masters against the tyranny of other white men, did not know how not to obey the assertive newspaper man. He was in the habit of getting hold of two or three at a time and keeping them at hard labor for two or three hours cleaning up his printery and chopping the weeds in Colonel Polk's garden. The only compensation perhaps was a stale watermelon left as a partial payment for a subscription to the newspaper.

Special victims of Layton's form of involuntary servitude were the three sons of the Simkins family's washerwoman. While their mule was tethered to a tree, and while the Simkins family wash was subject to the perils of rain, dust and wind, the Callison boys labored for three hours at a time at Layton's chores. When they looked up expectantly for pay, they were reminded of the close friendship between the Simkins and Polk family. When a scolding from Mother did not make Layton quit this chicanery, she saved the situation by having the boys take a route which avoided the searching eyes of the publisher.



*Kate Wigfall Cheatham
(1849-1926) half sister
of James T. Bacon
and mother of Wigfall
Cheatham*

After Judson Johnson,²² the Simkins family servant, battled all day with the Polk flowers, he was told that he was working out his subscription to *The Litchwood Press*. The fact that Judson could not read apparently made no difference to either him or Layton.

In pursuing the art of keeping ahead of bankruptcy Layton had a resourceful collaborator in his mother, Louise Polk Charlton.²³ Like her dead brother Colonel Polk, Miss Louise knew how to envelop her predatory deeds and social aggressions in a barrage of disarming merriment. Everyone liked her cheerful sourness even though it was felt necessary

²² Addison Childs (c.1861-1943).

²³ Kate Wigfall Cheatham (1849-1926).

to keep hands in the pockets while she was within arm's length. This persistent comedian was able to do what no one else to my knowledge has been able to do anywhere in the United States: purchase postage stamps at the post office on credit.

She was possessed of a vengeful humor not handicapped by Southern conceits and reserves, being most amusing when deflating the illustrious dead. She said that Arthur Simkins, the first of the name in Litchwood, had long stringy hair and a leathery face, looking more like an elf out the Grimm's than a landed aristocrat. The portrait of this first Simkins, done in primitive American, confirmed this impression. Miss Louise said the second Arthur Simkins, the editor of *The Litchwood Leader* during the Civil War, killed himself by putting his mouth under the open faucet of a keg of brandy. She reported that Frederick A. Pickett,²⁴ the Secession governor, was, after death, only mourned audibly by a Negress. Montgomery L. Broughton,²⁵ the Litchwood general who commanded troops at the First Manassas, was so drunk when he went on tour as the first railroad commissioner of South Carolina, he wrote in his reports that the South Carolina railroads were double-tracked. Captain John Smith,²⁶ the most boastful orator among the Confederate veterans, had hid under his mother's bed when the draft posse came his way. And so on and on went Miss Louise's tongue, making the Litchwood past, so glorified in her family newspaper, into an unheroic comedy.

"My God, Joe," cried Miss Louise as she and Colonel Polk entered the mansion on Fifty-Ninth Street, New York, of Colonel William A. Dulany,²⁷ "there's Ma's clock." She had let the cat out of the bag; she had told the Litchwood man's wife who was their hostess that the antiques with which his hostess was surrounded were not heirlooms from her husband's family but vulgar purchases from the Polk family. Miss Louise explained away her false step, but she had much to tell the Litchwood cronies when she returned home. She had discovered, she said, that Dulany, a rich lawyer, was falsely claiming that his household furnishings were inherited; that he was making this claim before his genuinely aristocratic wife²⁸ who was the daughter of "Gentleman John"

²⁴ Francis W. Pickens (1805-1869).

²⁵ Milledge Luke Bonham (1813-1890).

²⁶ Unidentified.

²⁷ Colonel John Rutledge Abney (1850-1927).

²⁸ Mary Lloyd Pendleton Abney (1852-1929). Both Mrs. Abney and her mother Alice Key Pendleton had been Vice Regents for Ohio for the Mount Vernon Ladies Associ-

Middleton of Ohio²⁹ and the granddaughter of Francis Scott Key.³⁰ Dulany's library, added Miss Louise, was loaded with French and English genealogical works designed to prove that their possessor was descended from the nobility and royalty of the Middle Ages.³¹ He was so proud of the fact his name was in the New York *Social Register* that he acquired every one of the annuals of that organization for the twenty-odd years it listed him. His success in marriage and in his profession gave Miss Louise a background for an explanation of Colonel Dulany's mean origin. His father,³² she affirmed, had in 1861 killed a mountain wagoner in order to capture the whiskey hidden beneath the load of apples. This hijacker of a father might have gone to the gallows had not the Civil War offered him the alternative of being absorbed into the army.³³



Col. John Rutledge Abney
(1850-1927) Native of Edgefield, prominent New York attorney

One of Miss Louise's means of adding to the family larder was to praise a farmer's produce in the columns of the family newspaper. This flattery was used against both Negroes and whites. It always resulted in gifts. "Happy New Year, Sam Taylor,³⁴" she wrote on January 7, 1909. "May the 'possum crop be plentiful this year, and may your supply of 'possum and 'taters never run low!" "John Jones,³⁵ a respected colored man of the Jennings Ridge section of our county," she recorded a week later "possesses chickens worthy of the feast of an African prince." Both

ation.

²⁹ Senator George Hunt "Gentleman George" Pendleton (1825-1889) was the United States Senator from Ohio from 1879 to 1885.

³⁰ Francis Scott Key (1779-1843), the author of our national anthem.

³¹ In his will Mr. Abney left his considerable library to the Edgefield Library, now the Tompkins Library. Although Mr. and Mrs. Abney had lived for many years in New York City where Mr. Abney was a leading lawyer for the cotton industry, they wanted to be buried in Willowbrook Cemetery in Edgefield and were so interred.

³² James Madison Abney (1827-1889).

³³ We have not been able to find anything to substantiate this allegation.

³⁴ Unidentified.

³⁵ Unidentified.

Sam and John came forward with a fat ‘possum and a fat hen. But Miss Louise would not, in the interest of fairness and mercy, let the matter rest. The next week she praised Sam’s turkeys and John’s rabbits, and they came running with ample baskets. And she continued on and on in ruthless literary pursuit of other commodities with the evident intention of eating up all Sam and John had if they were fools enough to continue to bite at the bait.

After a week of religious revival services at the Litchwood Baptist Church, Miss Louise and Layton editorially declared that the columns of *The Litchwood Press* would never again be soiled with liquor advertisements. Their reward was a gift from the local chapter of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. It was the largest and most delicious chocolate cake ever baked in Litchwood. The pledge against the notorious advertisements, however, was broken within three weeks after the cake had been eaten. Layton had grown thirsty and Miss Louise needed some filthy lucre.

When cajolery did not work, Miss Louise resorted to direct theft. She would snap such trifles as cans of salmon and loaves of bread from shops. While she stood guard a Negro would be ordered to rob a neighbor’s orchard. A young man with the \$1.55 in his pocket necessary to pay his railroad fare back to Columbia on the 8:10 a.m. train retired for the night as a guest in Miss Louise’s house. At 2 a.m. he awoke to observe his hostess rifling his pockets. The obligations of a guest meant that he could do nothing except sheepishly bury his head in the pillow and pretend he had not seen what he had seen. Rendered penniless, the young man could not make his expected departure.³⁶

Highly amusing to those of us who were close watchers was Miss Louise’s conduct at the Christmas bazaars of the Episcopal Church held in her ample halls. All the ladies of the church, as well as some among the Baptists, had assembled baskets of cold viands and sweets to be devoured by the hundred-odd who were willing to pay fifty cents each for the privilege. Miss Louise’s chance came when guests retired to the front parlors, leaving almost as much behind as they had eaten Throw-

³⁶ John Curran Hartley Feltham (1909-1988) told the story that, as a high school student, he worked part time in Lynch’s Drug Store on the Town Square. One of his jobs was to follow Mrs. Cheatham when she came into the store and watch to see what items she dropped into her purse. Dr. Lynch would just add the price of the items she shoplifted to Mrs. Cheatham’s monthly bill.

ing open a window, the resourceful lady flung into the open mouth of a guano sack held by a colored confederate whole and half hams, chickens and cakes to the number of at least a dozen separate articles. For a week or two the Charlton household feasted.

An achievement nearer the miraculous than his newspaper tactics was the method by which Layton Charlton kept his nephew from coming into the world as a bastard. Susie,³⁷ the giddiest among the Charlton sisters, was known to be pregnant. By the act of what male this condition came about, only God knew. Susie had been almost promiscuous, so the rumors ran. The Charlton family hit upon the bright idea of bringing paternity charges against a young physician named John Leonard Shannon³⁸ and then presenting him with a marriage proposal of the shotgun style. When Dr. Shannon heard of this conspiracy, he ran and ran, not stopping until he got to Mexico,³⁹ where according to his kin, he became a prosperous practitioner of his profession.

Layton and Shannon’s would-be bride went in pursuit and returned two days later with a precious document. It was a certificate of holy matrimony between Susan Polk Charlton and John Leonard Shannon duly signed by the Reverend Dr. Raymond L. Barnwell, Rector of Holy Trinity, Augusta.⁴⁰ What had happened, so Litchwood gossips believed, was that Layton had pretended to Dr. Barnwell that he was Shannon and as a consequence went through the mockery of having himself declared the husband of his sister through the rites of the *Book of Common Prayer*. This was before either Georgia or South Carolina required state registration or supervision of marriages. Thus was John Leonard Shannon⁴¹ born under the bond of matrimony. “A pretty and touching scene,” *The Litchwood Press* was able to write on January 1, 1903, “was that on Sunday afternoon last, in the parlor of the old Polk home, when Bishop Ellison Capers baptized little John

³⁷ Marie Cheatham Sharpton (1876-1942).

³⁸ Dr. George T. Sharpton (1877-19??) was a dentist, not a doctor. That George T. Sharpton was alleged to be the father is confirmed in the baptismal record at Trinity Episcopal Church.

³⁹ Sharpton apparently moved not to Mexico, but to Greenwood, South Carolina. See *The Edgefield Advertiser*, October 26, 1904.

⁴⁰ Unidentified.

⁴¹ James T. Sharpton (1902-19??). The name James T. Sharpton is from his mother’s obituary; Trinity Church baptismal record shows James Bacon Sharpton.

Leonard Shannon, receiving him regenerate into the congregation of Christ's flock."

In 1914 Layton became possessed of a great hope. It was that of remunerative public office at the hands of Richard I. Manning, then engaged in the task of defeating Cole L. Blease for the governorship of South Carolina. In return for Manning's promise of an appointment to office, articles in *The Litchwood Press* praised that Episcopalian banker and aristocrat to the utmost and hurled against Manning's demagogic opponent slanderous accusations. During the height of the canvass there appeared in *The Press* an anonymous communication from "two dirty Bleaseites" predicting that the selfish aristocrat and money-lender whose cause Layton was espousing would not give him a paying position. The letter, written by me and my brother-in-law Flint,⁴² was inspired by no less a person than Layton's mother. The realistic Miss Louise felt that Manning was too selfish to be a money friend to the obscure little Litchwood publisher. But Layton could not take advice and had his little share in effecting Manning's hard-won election.



Clint T. Graydon
(1890-1962)

Simkins's brother-in-law

The new governor gave Layton a position which caused the publisher to rejoice. The rejoicing was because of a trait in Layton's character of which not even "the two dirty Bleaseites" were aware. This debt-evading poor man put personal vanity above love of money. Manning had made him a member of the governor's staff, a position which carried not a penny of compensation; but, oh, the honors: the title of lieutenant colonel and the privilege (or expense) of wearing a uniform and riding a horse with the governor of South Carolina at Woodrow Wilson's Second Inauguration.

The two Bleaseites called on Miss Louise to hear her reaction. She had phrased an editorial for *The Press* declining the office and denouncing Manning for his supposed treachery; she had then suppressed this pronouncement and ended by signing a mortgage on Colonel Polk's house and garden. This was in order that Lieutenant

⁴² Clint Tompkins Graydon (1890-1962).

Colonel Charlton might have the uniform and the trip to Washington. The two Bleaseites suggested that Layton buy a khaki uniform; it was cheaper than other kinds, and its wearer might be mistaken for an officer of the United States Army and thereby receive some of the adulation which, in the war years, was being bestowed upon the leaders of the American fighting men. To the surprise of his friends, Layton appeared in a white uniform with red facing and gold epaulettes. If he had not been so small in stature, the whole business might have ended by his arrest for impersonating Lohengrin or some other emissary of the Kaiser.



*Lieutenant Colonel
Wigfall Cheatham of Governor
Manning's staff in his
new uniform*

Layton's trip to Washington enabled him to do that which he had never before been able to do: get married.⁴³ Often before in South Carolina he had tried to get a wife, but all the young ladies to whom he proposed were too well aware of his dismal surroundings to accept his offer.⁴⁴ The titles of colonel, politician and editor had their effect in an area where conditions at Litchwood were unknown. A school ma'am was caught in a trap of poverty from which there could be no redemption this side of heaven. Mary Lou⁴⁵ was plain and homely

⁴³ According to June Rainsford Butler Henderson (1895-1993), Wigfall Cheatham met his future wife when she and her sisters came to Edgefield to visit their aunt, Mrs. David St. Pierre DuBose, who lived in a house across from the Catholic Church on the corner of Buncombe and Simkins Streets. Mr. DuBose is believed to have been a native of Ridge Spring, but Mrs. DuBose was a native of Maryland.

⁴⁴ The perspective of Mrs. Henderson was somewhat different. She believed that Wigfall Cheatham never intended to get married; as one of somewhat homosexual tendencies, he had often flirted with the girls of Edgefield, but had probably never even kissed one, and certainly never intended to get married. When his future wife visited Edgefield, there was a dance and after a long and fun-filled evening, Wigfall said to her jokingly, "We should be married." Rather than laugh at the proposal as all of the Edgefield girls would have done, she immediately accepted and Wigfall was trapped. Having asked her, and with her having accepted his proposal, he was obliged to go through with it. So married they became. Much to the surprise of most Edgefieldians, the bride soon thereafter became pregnant and in 1919 gave birth to Louis Wigfall Cheatham, Jr. Several more children followed.

⁴⁵ Margaretta Elizabeth Wellmore (1883-1974).

and lacking in the gay graces of the many South Carolina belles with whom Layton had been associated; she was Northern, respectable, and not stricken by poverty. Layton assumed that she had wealth. He, too, was fooled.

Here was a woman of normal honesty, thrift and pride upon whom was thrust the strange role of being the wife of the trickiest and most improvident man a reckless Southern town had produced. In the background was a quarrelsome and suspicious mother-in-law. The greatest cause of Louise's complaints was the fact that Mary Lou was a Roman Catholic with a priest-inspired mission to bring as many sons and daughters of Rome into the world as was humanly possible. Poverty and debts notwithstanding, little Charltons kept coming into the world – one the first year, twins the second year, and one the third year, priests and nuns to be. Miss Louise stormed against the increase, but there were smiles from Mary Lou and smiles from Layton. Colonel Charlton had developed into a happy father.

In her zeal to present her church with woman's richest jewels, Mary Lou was not frustrated by the adverse circumstances of her existence. She was the good wife, happy in her love for Layton, and too unimaginative to see in him the faults others saw. She pretended not to hear the maledictions which Miss Louise visited upon her Yankee ways and outlandish church. She dressed in decent but inexpensive clothes and did not wish her husband to provide her with any beverage stronger than coffee. Out of her savings as a teacher and out of the small contributions her Baltimore kin were able to give, she was able to buy nourishing food for her children and to pay the modest number of colored help she felt the need of.

Oh, how surprised were the Simkins' washerwoman's sons and Judson Johnson when a member of the Charlton family offered them actual silver in return for their labors. This honest and simple Northerner did not understand the slave tradition and had, therefore, never heard of not paying honest money for hard work. Having been educated in a progressive community, she knew how to keep her children from possible death through Litchwood fevers; she provided them



*Margaretta Elizabeth
Wellmore Cheatham
(1883-1974), Wigfall
Cheatham's new wife*

with the various inoculations, with mosquito netting, and with clean milk and clean water. Layton possessed a good wife – one better perhaps than he deserved. He responded to her goodness by himself being a good husband and father. For behind his hard exterior lay a rich vein of sentiment which responded to the charms and comforts of hearth and home. He was satisfied with Mary Lou and his growing family. There was no chasing after other women, either white or black.

Mary Lou might have saved her family by abandoning the Polk house and garden to the mortgagees and then renting a cottage and supporting her family through employment as a stenographer or a teacher. Since these changes were impossible because of her children, the economic circumstances of the Charlton household steadily worsened. Layton gave up the more spectacular indulgences of the bachelor days, such as giving parties, going to dances, and making excursions to distant towns. But he deteriorated in personal habits; he substituted mysterious powders and extracts for the more wholesome indulgences of the times before Prohibition banished whiskey. His habit of disappearing from social gatherings excited the curiosity of his friends until the two aforementioned Bleasites followed him to the backdoor of the town drug store. Indeed, his financial difficulties were becoming such as to justify his resort to drugs. His credit with the newsprint merchants was exhausted, and he was unable to get the necessary supply of this commodity for the conduct of his business except on a C.O.D. basis. Then two disasters happened at the same time. The sheriff carted off the mortgaged linotype machine, and no more graduates of the Athens linotype school could be induced to come to Litchwood.

These circumstances should have spelled the end of *The Litchwood Press*, but the heroic Layton continued his business as though he were unconquerable. Each Wednesday afternoon leading citizens of Litchwood could be seen scurrying away from their businesses with the publisher in hot pursuit. Each time he succeeded in catching up with one of them and borrowing the \$7.85 necessary to get the weekly supply of news print out of the express office. Once Layton borrowed from a Negro and at another time from the express agent. The absence of a linotype operator and a linotype machine was met by the setting of type by hand. Kindly old Willie Provar,⁴⁶ who had

⁴⁶William R. Covar (1868-1941).

done this work in earlier years, graciously volunteered his services. The difficulty here was that, with the passage of time, so many of the letters were lost or worn out that a uniform setting was impossible. *The Litchwood Press* began exhibiting an exciting variety of lettering: old English here, boldface there, and a mixture of Gothic, French elziver and Clarendon in the next paragraph. Yet there was no sacrifice of clarity.

So successful was Layton in overcoming difficulties which seemed insoluble that his newspaper business gave promise of not ending until he died. Certainly he knew how to forestall bankruptcy, and the dreadfully serious manner in which he went about his grotesque procedures precluded him and his newspaper from being laughed out of existence by his fellow journalists. But his Baltimore in-laws consulted with each other over the hardships of their kinswoman in Litchwood and quite sensibly resolved that the Charlton family should move to the Maryland city. There Mary Lou's kin could give the family shelter, and perhaps Layton could find employment. After some hesitation, he acquiesced in the decision, penning the following farewell editorial:

And now my time of release of *The Press* has come. Having quit bachelordom a few years ago, and finding a bonny Baltimorean bride, and with added responsibilities, I cannot hesitate longer to possibly better my financial status, when now I have the chance and opportunity. Of necessity, business matters have the precedence over old, sentimental home things.... It is a grievous and regrettable leave-taking to tear away from the old familiar haunts....⁴⁷

The sale of Colonel Polk's house and garden did no more than satisfy the mortgages, and the few hundred dollars realized from the sale of *The Press's* subscription to *The Litchwood Leader* were used to satisfy a part of Layton's floating debts.

Layton knew that his wife and her relatives had his interests at heart when they urged the move, and, as a good husband and father, he graciously acquiesced in the decision. He even cherished the fatuous notion that he, probably the most antiquated editor and printer left in all Amer-

ica, might become a successful journalist in a big city, even a member of the staff of the *Baltimore Sun*! In his farewell editorial he held out the following hope to his fellow townsmen:

If the time comes when I shall encompass and swing things in Baltimore and possibly Washington, I shall expect to "be seeing you," I trust that you will not be compelled to wait long for such a day to arrive.⁴⁸

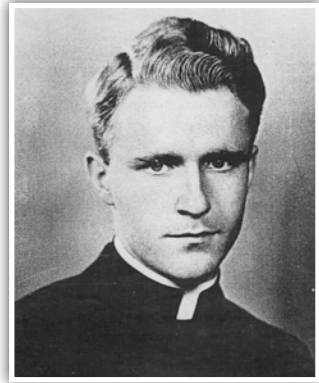
The move away from Litchwood was too much for Layton. Litchwood had reason to regard him as something of a nuisance, but his farewell editorial caused many tears to flow from the eyes of his fellow townsmen. He could not live without the old town. My sister saw him eat a handful of aspirin tablets when he stopped off in Columbia on his way north. In Baltimore kind in-laws gave him good food and a warm bed, and his good wife and sweet children gave him welcoming smiles. But Layton was done for. "The severing of ties," *The Litchwood Leader* declared, "caused much heaviness of heart among friends left behind, and his own heart was unspeakably sad, if not cursed over the turning of his back upon home, friends and loved ones... sudden uprooting... the unutterable disappointment" Layton caught pneumonia and was dead within a month after his departure from home.

He was buried in Baltimore far away from kith and kin in a strange Roman Catholic cemetery. While he lay unconscious in the grip of death, a priest stealthily poured the holy water of baptism on his head. The Catholic-hating ghost of Miss Louise should have risen to smite this soul-stealer. The people of Litchwood were indignant over the baptism and over the place of burial. "It would have been altogether fitting," politely commented *The Litchwood Leader*, "to have his body repose under the sod of Litchwood . . . instead of in the cemetery of a great city whose masses know him not and cared not for him."

The people of Litchwood would not have cherished his memory over the long years or constantly placed flowers over his resting place. His good widow did both these things. Ten years after Layton's death I stopped in Baltimore to see for myself how well preserved was his grave and to place some flowers upon it as a sort of compensation on the part of Litchwood for the aspects of mutual neglect involved in the

⁴⁷ *The Edgefield Chronicle*, April 25, 1925.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*



*Father Louis Wigfall
Cheatham, Jr.
(1919-2014)*

situation. Mary Lou made compensation for not letting Litchwood have the body by offering to pay Layton's debts out of the modest insurance stipend. To this display of perfect honesty, Litchwood responded with a gallant gesture. Layton's creditors (his debts were numerous but not large) refused to accept a single penny.

The Litchwood Polks had run their course. Their careers had been checkered because they were victims of their environment. They were white men and inheritors of the Southern conceits about class; therefore, they felt they should live like the cotton nabobs of the Old South – spend money, give parties, buy fine clothes and employ servants. Their tragedy or their crime was that they were too undisciplined and too insubordinate to realize that they possessed neither the education nor the wealth with which to exercise their ambitions. Perhaps they should have been born in a society sufficiently aristocratic and well disciplined to teach them what they could not do. They possessed talents – even a perverse sort of genius. Except for these qualities, they and their newspaper could not have survived for so many years. These talents in a more wholesome environment would have led to constructive achievements. This is indicated by the fate of their progeny. There is Joseph Polk Shannon who now exhibits the family talents as the vice president of the insurance company. There is Layton, Jr., into whose clean face look the worshipful Catholic women of Baltimore. And there is Caroline presiding over the well appointed New York dinner as the mistress of a Jew.

Chapter VI The Niggers

Mother came from a city where racial prejudice was obvious but not noisy. Charleston had had no lynchings or race riots in two generations. There the color line was sharply drawn but Negro policemen and white teachers of Negroes survived as relics of Reconstruction. The Carolina metropolis tolerated colored aristocracy, persons who maintained an autonomous Episcopal church and were the descendants of Negroes who had never been slaves and who had themselves owned slaves. About the city's enforcement of the Southern pattern of race distinctions was a tactfulness which forestalled Northern resentment. Mother, though Southern to the bottom of her soul, got a human satisfaction out of the fact that the abolition of slavery had freed the Negroes of terrible hardships: the obligation of laboring in the rice bogs in order that the Vander Horsts and their kind might live in big houses and ride in carriages.

In Litchwood, on the other hand, racial injustice, while perhaps in ultimate effects no worse than that of Charleston, was more noisy. There were memories of the Ellenton and Hamburg riots and other bloody intimidations by the Red Shirts of the Reconstruction period. Ben Tillman, with his nationally-known denunciations of Negro rights, was still vocal and powerful. White men of Litchwood boasted of their misdeeds against Negroes. Mother told the Simkins children what these white men did.

Old Joe Smith¹ was usually a silent and industrious black who possessed a neat cottage on the edge of town. Ray Combs,² a Confederate veteran of evil reputation, wanted Joe's horse and buggy. Because the Negro would not sell, the white man was angry. One Saturday afternoon Joe, half drunk, met Ray on the narrow bridge leading from the town to the Negro's home. "Old man," said the white man to the Negro, "will you let me have that pony of yours?" "Not a God-damned hair of hers, you red-faced bastard," replied Joe in drunken anger. Ray whipped out a pistol and the almost innocent Joe fell dead under the bridge with a bullet in his heart. In response to a few murmurs from Litchwood upper classes, there was an indifferent investigation of the crime. There was no trial. It was understood by all inhabitants of the place that the law of race made permissible the killing of a Negro who had insulted a white

¹ Unidentified.

² Unidentified.

man. No preacher, certainly not Dr. Bentz,³ uttered so much as a word of condemnation of Ray Combs.

Andy Clark⁴ was the half-witted errand boy in the service of the Litchwood cotton mill. One Thursday afternoon in August 1911 Mrs. Raymond Jones,⁵ the wife of a machinist, was taking her siesta in a back room of her house in the lonesome pines a half mile from the cotton mill. Suddenly Andy's face, enveloped in a half idiotic smile, appeared at Mrs. Jones door. Andy had a small piece of paper in his hand. Awakened by the unexpected apparition, the white woman, in hysterics ran into the streets. "A nigger is after me," she shouted. Actually the Negro had fled into the deep woods. An angry crowd of white men surrounded him. He was riddled with bullets and his body hanged from the limb of an oak tree. On the dead man's chest was placed the following note: "Negro rapist." The note found in Andy's hand was not considered relevant. It read: "Dear Mr. Jones, Please come to the mill today to mend the old boiler. John E. Edge, Superintendent."

Eddie Thompson⁶ was a suave black who conducted Litchwood's most popular barber shop. He was deferential to white men of all classes. The white elite of Litchwood patronized Eddie's establishment. Joe and Tom Long⁷ were white brothers who ran a rival barber shop. Their rough familiarity with their customers was not, in the opinion of many white men, sufficient compensation for their whiskey-laden breath and the untidiness of their shop. Eddie made more money than they. They would reckon with the black man. They entered his shop while no one was listening and softly demanded that he move to the Negro section of Augusta where prospective Negro customers were supposed to be richer than the white customers of Litchwood.

When this ruse proved ineffective, a note was thrust into Eddie's hands. It read: "Nigger, if you don't leave Litchwood we will cut your throat. Straight hair is for white barbers, kinky hair for nigger barbers." The Negro complained to his white customers; they expressed mild apprehension over his possible fate. Then Eddie, frightened more and

³ Dr. Charles E. Burts (1867-1939) who served the Edgefield Village Baptist Church from 1903 to 1911.

⁴ Unidentified.

⁵ Unidentified.

⁶ Interestingly, in the 1950s & 1960s, Jim Thompson was a black barber in the Macedonia neighborhood who attracted the business of the white elite of Edgefield. Could Eddie Thompson have been his father?

⁷ Unidentified.

more by the growing intensity of the Long's threats, appealed to Sheriff Lewis.⁸ The Sheriff was sympathetic. But he was up for reelection. Negroes had no votes, and the enfranchised relatives and friends of the Longs were numerous. Lewis gave no protection. One December night as Eddie was going home from work, two pistols were pushed in his face. He recognized familiar voices: "Eddie, barbering is for white folks; don't let the sun rise on you again in Litchwood." Eddie ran and ran all night. A few days later his family departed. About where he went there was not much curiosity. Eddie's customers were thereafter served at the Long barber shop.

John Hill⁹ was a jovial colored boy who through the hot September days picked cotton along with two white girls in a sunny field near thick woods. The girls were the Rives sisters, Mary and Jane.¹⁰ There was much laughter and a playful tossing back and forth of green cotton bolls. Boy had met girl. From time to time there was silence as each girl took turns in retiring to the woods with the black boy. He carried with him the largest bag of cotton. There were whispers and then loud talk about the frightful scandal of white girls lying with a Negro boy. Mary and Jane, embarrassed, escaped from their shame by conveniently crying, "Rape." Relatives gathered and cried in unison, "Rape." John Hill ran into the deep woods. A mob with blood hounds surrounded him. He was given an axe and told to climb a tree and cut off enough limbs for him to be seen easily. From a distance one hundred bullets pierced his body at once. The newspapers, in a great outburst of perfunctory indignation, moralized against not letting the law take its certain course to the death house. No one dared say out loud – as Mother and other Litchwoodians whispered – that it was not a case of rape but merely one of cohabitation.

William Stratton¹¹ was a mulatto farmer who was the half-brother and neighbor of two rich white farmers. We used to see William riding into town each Saturday afternoon as well dressed as any country gentleman. He was familiar with no one – white or black; and because of his frugality he enjoyed the undivided respect of the community. He was not a white man's nigger but one of those Negroes who, because of his independence and self-respect, the white South generally left alone.

⁸ Sheriff W. G. Ouzts (1872-1926) who served from 1906 to 1912, or Sheriff W. R. Swearingen (1886-1944) who served from 1912 to 1928.

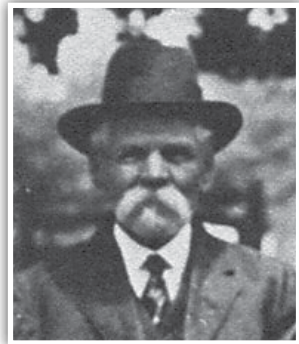
⁹ Unidentified.

¹⁰ Unidentified.

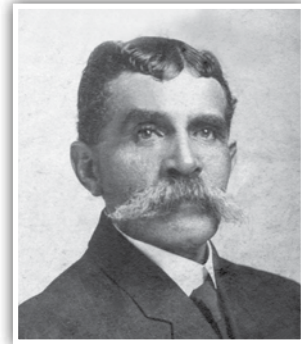
¹¹ Milton Strother (1859-1941).

One Saturday afternoon, however, we noted that he did not make his appearance in the town. He, it was discovered, had been sentenced to exile by the aroused public of the community.

After a fair warning by a committee of citizens not to do so, he had attended the state convention of the Republican Party. For a long time it had been the established policy of the rulers of Litchwood that there be absolutely no political activities on the part of the local blacks with the exception of the two ballots cast by Rome¹² and Allison Simkins¹³ who, during the Reconstruction, had represented the County in the Legislature. William was met on his return from the Republican convention and told to depart on the same train as he had arrived. Vainly did he exhibit a contrite heart before his persecutors. He left.



Paris Simkins
(1854-1935)



Andrew Simkins
(1851-1930)

The mulatto first cousins of "Mac" Simkins

Where he went we did not know. His farm grew up in weeds and bushes. After a tedious correspondence with his persecutors, extending over three years, they relented. He was allowed to return home on his solemn promise that he would never again engage in any agitation more mundane than that of a religious nature. He kept his promise, rebuilt his farm, and was allowed to spend the remainder of his days in peace and prosperity.

¹² Paris Simkins (1851-1930).

¹³ Andrew Simkins (1854-1935).

Mother, as a lady with an urban background, protested against such manifestations of injustice. But she was in no sense a liberal or a radical. She was entirely ignorant of the literature emerging perennially from Northern centers concerning the manner in which the blacks were treated in the South. Had she read the literature she would not have liked it. Indeed, she was a prejudiced Southerner, cherishing bitter memories of how the North had treated her family and section in the war and in Reconstruction. She accepted the Southern caste system without question and in her relation towards blacks maintained the conventional code in repressive if not inhumane manner. All colored people were required to enter her back door. As had been the custom of her slave-holding ancestors, she called all colored people exclusively by their first names; frequently she had no knowledge of their surnames of her colored acquaintances which freedom was supposed to have endowed them. Even Booker T. Washington was known simply as "Booker." Negroes were required to call her "Miss Sallie"; for them to have called her "Mrs. Simkins" would have been notice that they were assuming conceits learned from Yankee schoolmarm. She told all Negroes when a certain white child turned fourteen. This was a signal that the race equalities tolerated in childhood must be supplanted by conventions of caste. The first of these was the putting of Miss and Mr. before a name.

"Have you got any real religion?" Mother jokingly asked a colored Litchwoodian who had become a successful preacher in the North. "Miss Sallie," replied Taylor Glover¹⁴ tellingly, "I worked for you five years and had I not been a real Christian I would not have had the patience to stay with you five days."

Mother was exasperating toward a race which was itself exasperating. By experience she knew that Negroes generally were thievish, mendacious, inefficient and slovenly, and that it was therefore the better part of wisdom to treat them as irresponsible. Without joining other Southern whites in the sweeping assertion: "All coons look alike to me," she made no patient study of individual differences among the blacks. Ostentatiously did she keep the pantry locked even in the face of the servant whose honesty had been tested by experience. If any article great or small disappeared from house or yard, it was the Everlasting Nigger on the place who was suspected. Mother engaged in wordy criticisms of her colored help; in denunciation of the blacks to their faces and in endless conversations with her white neighbors over their foibles. "Miss

¹⁴ Unidentified.

Sallie,” was the saying in Nigger Town, “is the fussiest lady among a fussy set of white folks.”

How contacts were maintained under such conditions is difficult to explain. It was due in part to a cynical tolerance on Mother’s part of a race believed to be unable to do better. The Negro in her opinion was the everlasting delinquent. He was raved against for his crimes, but was never thrown in jail and he was seldom discharged. He was the indispensable part of the domestic economy of a society with a slave and aristocratic psychology. Our family was poor but it preferred to dispense with some necessities of civilized existence in order to have black hands in the kitchen and yard. White servants – even foreigners and mountaineers – were impossible as substitutes. They would not submit to the low wages Southern whites were able to pay, running off to seek the unlimited social and economic advantages which America offered all mankind except the blacks. The Southern tradition prevented white persons from acting in a menial role.

Mother was forever cured of the fantasy of a white servant with Fanny Lake,¹⁵ a North Carolina mountaineer. Fanny returned Mother’s scoldings word-for-word and then left. Had she stayed in Miss Sallie’s employ, the white community would have accused Mother of cruelty as it did Ben Tillman. This was because the famous Litchwood farmer denounced his white tenants when their women folk refused to chop cotton and pitch hay. He returned to tenants who had wives and daughters who would work in the fields.

The Negro compensated for his many faults by submitting to the tyranny of insolent mistresses and masters; he returned violent denunciations with only sulky murmurs. In all my long Litchwood experiences I never heard of a local cook who, letting patience go, cut her mistress to death with a kitchen knife. This patience, Mother thought, was Christian. The bondage of the soul to the white man’s religion led to the bondage of the body to the white man’s will. This was the reason why Mother believed more Litchwood Negroes would enter heaven than Litchwood whites.

That the Litchwood Negroes loved Miss Sallie was attested by the number of black callers she had on Saturdays. They came to the back steps. The men stood in the yard, hats in hands, exchanging personal reminiscences with the missus for at least half an hour at the time. The

¹⁵ Unidentified.

women were invited into the back bedroom where, sitting in low chairs, they carried on a lively conversation for an hour or two with Miss Sallie. They were interested in her affairs and she in theirs. When she tired of what her black callers said, as sometimes was inevitably the case, she felt as much obligated to pretend the interest in what they said as she did toward uninteresting white callers. She knew her black callers intimately, listening to their problems and complaints. She did this more to the satisfaction of her lively curiosity than to give in return the gratuitous advice of the social worker.

Gifts were exchanged between Miss Sallie and her colored guests. Every month or so Miss Riverscomb,¹⁶ a Philadelphia lady, sent Mother a package of second hand finery. Third-handed it was passed on to grateful blacks; they prized clothes that were worn and fine rather than new and plain. In exchange, came gifts gathered from fields and forest – a dozen eggs encased in cotton seed hulls, a live possum or hen, a dressed rabbit or guinea fowl, a bucket of blackberries or cowpeas, a gallon of muscadine wine or a jug of persimmon beer. It was a part of the etiquette of the South to believe that any product prepared by black hands was good. This was despite the fact that the persimmon beer often turned out to be sour and the hen too tough to be baked.

When I was a new-born baby lying in a crib, a strange Negro requested the privilege of spending a few moments in the presence of Colonel John C. Simkins’ grandson. He had been my grandfather’s bodyguard. After he left, a twenty dollar gold piece was found clutched in the infant’s hand. The money was not kept as a memento because it was needed by a poor family, but the sentiment of the gift was long cherished.

Every time a member of the Simkins family went to Columbia or Augusta his duty was to return with a bundle of gifts for a variety of Negroes. There must be a half pint flask of whiskey for Judson Johnson¹⁷; four yards of calico for Mum Edna,¹⁸ the cook; a red bandana for Mauma Sanga,¹⁹ the daughter of an African princess; a ten cents store

¹⁶ Unidentified.

¹⁷ Addison Childs (c.1861-1943).

¹⁸ Unidentified.

¹⁹ Mauma Sanga (1805-1910), a former slave of the Pickens family, was a native of James Island near Charleston. She had been purchased by Francis Pickens in 1830 and brought to Edgefield where she lived to the age of more than 100. She became the wife of Uncle Harper, the Pickens’s butler. Miss Sally wrote a very interesting piece on Mauma Sanga for *The Charleston News & Courier* in 1910.

ring for the washerwoman; and a toy for the washerwoman's grandchild. When the ex-slaves of the Picketts²⁰ died, Mother and at least one of the Simkins children were obligated to attend the funeral. It was by no means uncommon for Mother to visit Negro cabins when there was childbirth or sickness. An interesting story can be told concerning her habit of sending waiters of food to sick Negroes.

One August day Miss Sallie heard that Jack,²¹ the town mailman, was ill in a cabin half a mile beyond our house. Around the cabin was a field of tall weeds drenched with a heavy rain of late summer. Mother prepared a generous waiter and felt that it was the Christian duty of the Reverend Charles Martin Bettersworth,²² a Litchwood-born Episcopal minister who was visiting in our home, to deliver the supper. The Reverend Mr. Bettersworth did not think so. He came from a class of Litchwood people who had never had close contact with the blacks; and no special Christian obligation towards such people had been impressed upon him at the Middle Western Theological School he attended. Besides, he was a dainty youth who did not relish the idea of having his broadcloth suit drenched by the soggy weeds of that Litchwood farm which he had escaped into things spiritual and esthetic. But he knew that Miss Sallie was implacable. He went through the wet weeds with the waiter held high and dry. Jack, the town mailman, was fed. That the Reverend Mr. Bettersworth's expensive raiment was drenched did not impress Mother.

The best illustration of Miss Sallie's paradoxical attitude toward the blacks was the case of Judson Johnson,²³ a black man in her service for thirty years. Not a single day did she not speak of Judson's vices. He was a trifler. He allowed his clay lands to become so gully-washed that Mr. Elder,²⁴ a merchant, did not think it worthwhile to foreclose the mortgage he held upon them. The skeleton-like look of Judson's mule

²⁰ Pickenses

²¹ Unidentified.

²² Rev. Herbert Boyce Satcher (1890-1966).

²³ Addison Childs (c.1850-1943) had been born a slave at Edgewood, the Pickens plantation. Simkins states that he was 82 years old at the time of his death "five years after Mother's death" who died in 1938. If, then, he was 82 when he died in 1943, he would have been born in 1861. However, the census records of 1910 and 1940 both show him to have been born in about 1850. When we see in the history of Simmon Ridge Baptist Church that Addison Chiles [sic] is listed as one of the founding members of the church in 1867, we are much inclined to believe that he was, in fact, born around 1850 and was in his nineties when he died in 1943.

²⁴ Unidentified.

was proof of slow starvation and the everlasting sore spot upon the animal's back was proof of careless cruelty. Judson was a thief. His normal gift to his mistress of a dozen eggs had been taken from Miss Sallie's own hen house. The seasonal gifts to her of vegetables did not come from Judson's weed-choked garden but had been snatched as he passed by the garden of another Negro. Judson was a laggard. He chose the time when Miss Sallie had several guests for supper not to make an appearance. Hour after hour did Miss Sallie's children wait for his wagon to convey them to the Glade Springs²⁵ picnic. When he did arrive it was so late that we joined a festivity declining with the decline of the day. Judson was slovenly. It was his habit to place the dish pan on the back of the kitchen stove. This made the water constantly simmer – and progressively grow dirtier. Judson was foolish. It was necessary for Miss Sallie to stand over him with a mouthful of admonitions to prevent him from allowing the biscuits to burn. She was the cook; his long experience in her kitchen did not make him into more than a cook's helper. His constructive energies did not extend beyond the frying of a chicken and the mixing of a pan of biscuits.

Judson's failings were partly Mother's fault. If, as we have seen, she thought the Episcopal minister a dullard, she, to be sure, thought the black man in whom she was most interested an arch-fool. She took no stock in that minimum of self-reliance in which all men, including Judson, are supposed to be endowed. She constantly railed against him because of his faults. Judson was patient, possessing to the utmost that degree the Christian humility which Mother thought would outweigh the sins of many Litchwood Negroes on the day of final Judgement. "Miss Sallie," Judson was in the habit of saying, "is the most quarrelsome lady in old Litchwood, but she's mighty good, as good as gold." He was faithful unto death, even after death. After Mother was gone, it was he who kept the weeds from her grave and put holly upon it at Christmas and flowers upon it in spring.

Miss Sallie, in a devious but real way, was faithful toward him. She collected old clothes for him from friends and relatives far and wide – even high collars, high hats and long coats for religious ceremonials. He was the main subject of conversation with which she entertained her guests. On these occasions his virtues were often emphasized and his vices were interpreted semi-humorlessly. He was kept supplied with that moderate amount of whiskey which both he and Mother thought

²⁵ Center Springs

good for his health. Through her influence he was given the only political office consonant with his status of a colored servant and gentleman. This was porter in the State House in Columbia during the sessions of the legislature. Her zeal for his welfare once almost resulted in a tragic mistake. During a chafing dish party she passed out to him what she thought was a glass of whiskey. Just as he was taking the portion to his lips, an observant guest knocked it from his hand. It was wood alcohol intended for the lamp under the dish.

Each July after the woods had become too greatly infested with insects for camping, the Simkins family did something which would stretch the sense of tolerance of a New York Jew or Southern Liberal for the middle of the twentieth century. We slept in a Nigger house. Miss Sallie and the children were loaded into Judson's wagon to make the three mile journey to his farm. We went to stay for a week and therefore carried victuals and cooking utensils. We slept in the double bed and on the floor of the big room to the right of the dog-trot which divided Judson's cottage into two rooms. We lay on mattresses of corn shucks, fought with real or imaginary bugs, gazed at the wallpapering of discarded newspapers, drank branch water and ate hoe cake. We enjoyed the experience, catching a few catfish and minnows in Log Creek, helping Judson till his uninspiring acres, and visiting in the homes of our black neighbors. The townspeople, with little or no curiosity concerning what went on in Nigger houses, thought Miss Sallie eccentric; but they never accused her of social heresy. Throughout their long lives it never occurred to either Judson or her that white and colored persons could practice social relations other than on a basis of superior and inferior.

Five years after Mother's death the Simkins children heard that Judson was dying. We found him, aged eighty-two, lying on a couch in his cabin on the outskirts of Litchwood. The old generation was dead – Miss Sallie, the deacons of Jennings Ridge Church,²⁶ Judson's wife Jenny and his only child Will. The only grandchild²⁷ had been murdered and the body thrown into an abandoned well without so much as a notice of the tragedy appearing in the newspapers. Friends had emigrated from the boll weevil and agricultural depression into the war industries of the North and the West.

One person was left, a gorgeous hussy, a yellow gal from Augusta

²⁶ Simmons Ridge Baptist Church which was located three miles north of Edgefield on the Center Springs Road, once part of Edgewood Plantation.

²⁷ Addison Childs (1924-19??)

who had married the murdered grandson. Lula Belle²⁸ assumed the care of her aged grandfather-in-law. Neighbors kindly offered the couple the hospitality of their homes but Lula Belle found it inexpedient to accept this favor. Her lascivious beauty made her fear rape at the hands of any competent male who lived in the same cabin with her, so she refueged in a dilapidated hut away from other humans. There she was faithful to Judson unto death. He died the day after the Simkinses had visited him. It was exactly two hours before the old man would have been enveloped by the spirit of progress. The undertaker had scarcely moved his body before his cabin was ripped apart to make way for a paved highway. The construction of this device not only marked the end of Judson but also the decline and even the partial extinction of Litchwood as a trading center. It was a means of by-passing the old town by the county's chief artery of commerce.

The Simkins children returned to Edgefield for the burial. It was a modernized affair. In place of the pine coffin and two-horse wagon of the traditional Negro funeral, was an automobile hearse, a shiny coffin made in a factory and a very professional-looking undertaker attired in unctuous black. It was the sort of funeral Judson would have liked, and we knew that funds had been provided to pay for it. A man most improvident in worldly matters, Judson had been careful about paying regularly the dues of the Jennings Ridge Burial Aid Society.²⁹

Among those who assembled for the last rites at the Jennings Ridge Baptist Church were few who had known Judson personally. The funeral preacher was a young man whose education in a theological seminary was no substitute for his supreme ignorance of the subject of his address. What he said was spacious bombast as appropriate to a Negro bishop of Harlem as it was to our family servant and friend who lay before the orator. "Let's not let Uncle Judson go to the grave without anyone remembering what he was like," I whispered to Boysie Evans,³⁰ one of the colored old-timers who knew as much about the deceased as I did. Boysie and I spoke to the funeral congregation, telling the facts about a simple life and moralizing over the virtues of the old-time dark-ey. Boysie, whose discourse unadorned with the irrelevances of an alien education, spoke better than did I. But I did pretty well. As I was leaving the church, a black woman of years said, "Miss Sallie would have cried

²⁸ Gussie Childs (c.1919-19??).

²⁹ In 1895 Addison was founding president of the Simmon Ridge Benevolent Society, an organization created to aid with burial expenses.

³⁰ Unidentified.

had she been here.” Exasperation against exasperation was not always necessary to produce effective cooperation between Mother and her black servants. This is proved by the case of Nude,³¹ a Negress who served Mother for many years. Nude wore clothes aplenty – was the model citizen of Niggertown, proof par excellence that it was possible for a black face to have a whiter character than any white neighbor. She was virtuous, living in a state of fidelity to her carpenter husband. Her cottage was small in size and home-made in appearance, but it always gleamed with paint and was fronted with bright flowers and white curb stones. Her immaculate and stinkless self proved beyond doubt that a black person had no congenital odor. The eminence of her honesty was demonstrated by that fact that she was trusted with the treasuries of half a dozen ladies aid societies. She maintained an air of comfort and even opulence on a small income which would have produced despair among broken-down aristocrats and rags among undistinguished whites. She calmed Miss Sallie by the serenity of her disposition and by the precision in which she executed the household chores. There was no quarreling with her. Mother helped her secure the position of a teacher of the Jennings Ridge School, salary \$40 a month. It was to help one who had previously earned only \$15 as a domestic servant. Nude made a good teacher, despite the fact she possessed only six years’ schooling.

One August afternoon in 1929 Mother and I were driving rapidly along the dusty road three miles beyond Jennings Ridge Church. We had returned to Litchwood to spend the winter and were seeking Linda, a former cook, for re-employment. Suddenly a mule-drawn buggy came in sight. It was Linda and her two little nieces. As soon as my open-topped automobile stopped beside the buggy, the two children climbed upon the left running board and did something which is not supposed to have ever been tolerated in the South except by two Yankees of infamy; John Brown and Eleanor Roosevelt. The two Negro children kissed a white person square in the mouth. Miss Sallie was pleased. No academic rationalizations or emotional inhibitions applied to the incident. The deed was executed and received without thought. Mother had sent the children the very garments in which they were dressed, and these simple creatures returned the gift with a simple expression of gratitude. They were human and Mother was human.

“Where are you going all dressed up?” Miss Sallie asked Linda as soon as the kissing was over. “I am going to Great Neck, Long Island

³¹ Unidentified.

to work for Mrs. Joseph Wilson at \$60 a month plus board and room, and here I have my railroad ticket sent to me free.” “We wish you the best of luck with your Yankee friends,” said Mother, “and if you need a certificate of good character, have your new mistress write me.” Both Mother and I knew that Linda possessed the qualities of mind and character necessary for success in an exacting Northern environment. She, we knew, was naturally intelligent and energetic, if not schooled in the Northern sense.

As we expected, Linda proved to be a satisfactory servant in Great Neck, and Mrs. Wilson kept all the promises she had made. There was the \$60 a month, good food, a bright and comfortable room and none of the exasperating license in speech which the Southern mistresses visit upon the unfortunate colored race. But Linda stayed only two months in Great Neck. “Mrs. Wilson,” she wrote Mother, “is true to her word in money matters and in the room she gives me. But I don’t like the town. As I stand by the window, I see no black faces; there is no church I can attend. I am lonesome, so lonesome. And I must work and work – mind the baby, do the washing, the cleaning, and the cooking. I am on duty all the time. I don’t like the Yankee food. Oh, Miss Sallie, I longed to be fussed at by you.” At the end of the second month Linda was back in Litchwood, wages \$15 a month with Miss Sallie indulging in the usual barrage of complaints.

Mother’s heart poured out in sympathy for Sadie Lee³², the handsome colored Mistress of Colonel Theodore Holmes,³³ the brother of the deceased Mrs. Pickett.³⁴ The Colonel drank and gambled as usual, even though his sister was dead and there was no Longwood pantry from which he could steal provisions. The farm Mrs. Pickett left him was so poorly tilled that it did not produce enough to support his growing brood of yellow girls. Sadie and the girls were therefore forced to seek employment in white homes the same as ordinary Negro women who had no connections with land-owning families. Doubtless they would have fared better had they been slaves. Sadie continued to complain to Mother: “What can a Nigger do with such a white man?” If she had done what some white wives did: quit a worthless mate, there would have been severe whippings on the Holmes farm. Sadie was forced to continue to accept the Colonel’s bed without the benefit of board. And quadroon girls kept on being born.

³² Ann Simpo (18??-19??)

³³ Colonel John Theodore H. Holcombe (1837-1907).

³⁴ Lucy Petway Holcombe Pickens (1832-1899).

As in the case of most race relations, there were, in this family, compensations for misfortunes and brutalities. Sadie was as handsome as any mulatto of New Orleans and Colonel Holmes was as handsome as any officer under Lee; hence their daughters were perhaps prettier than both parents. With almond eyes and glowing skins, they resembled Japanese girls of the romantic prints of the time. It was a common remark they were the loveliest girls in Litchwood. The Longwood household, without calling them kinfolk, received them in half-caste fashion. After Sadie and Colonel Holmes died, their children followed their white kinswomen to Washington. There the descendants of Hannah Holmes Pickett and Colonel Holmes frequently exchanged visits, and there the white physician³⁵ who had married Hannah Singleton³⁶ ministered tenderly to the physical needs of the colored Holmeses without charging a penny.



Colonel John Theodore Holcombe (1834-1907), Lucy Pickett's brother

In after years one of the Pickett descendants and I visited a humble home in Litchwood's Nigger Town. It was the household of one of the Holmes girls. In the most conspicuous place in the little parlor was an enlarged crayon portrait of Colonel Holmes. The old reprobate, who had no honors in life and who was scarcely remembered by a single white relative, was being honored in death by his colored kin. Such is Negro loyalty.

Without having read one of the many treatises by anthropologists and sociologists claiming the innate equality of all races, Mother and I firmly believed that on the average Negroes were as clever as whites. Our conclusion was based on common-sense observation. We knew as many blacks possessed of the craftiness necessary to cheat whites as we did whites possessed of the same quality in respect to blacks. Negroes were

³⁵ Dr. Jeter Carroll "Brad" Bradley (1890-1984).

³⁶ Lucy Sheppard Bradley (1906-2000).

more capable than whites of covering their sins through lying because they were better informed concerning the activities of the opposite race. In fact, craftiness and dissimulation were, next to humility, their principal weapons in their struggle for survival against the oppressions of the master race. It seemed as though the main object in a Negro's life was to run away from obligations to his white bosses. A crop was often left in the fields in August in order that a black tenant might move to town where there was more money and more fun. How often did cooks fail to appear on Monday mornings; God only knew where they had gone. But wherever they had gone, one was certain that they had bettered themselves. It was impossible for a white caller to find a black man at home; the clever rascal was hiding from a possible bill collector or a possible recruiter of labor. It was an adage in Litchwood that a Negro in full possession of his faculties could almost always swindle even the most exacting merchant.

A pegged-legged Negro appeared on the streets of the town displaying what he claimed was a certified check on a Richmond bank for \$1,200. This stranger explained that the payment was compensation for the loss of his leg in a railroad accident. The deposit was accepted by the Bank of Litchwood³⁷ with the intention of cashing it as soon as it was verified. The Litchwood merchants got the news of the big deposit and immediately began unloading on its beneficiary a variety of small articles more or less worthless. He was sold watches, rings, perfumes, shoes, hats, shirts, suits of clothes and bottles of medicine. Who was cheated? Not the peg-legged stranger. He moved on with his purchases, and then the news came from Richmond that his check was worthless.

Proof to Mother and me that a black could be the most intelligent of persons was the case of Joseph Addison Johnston,³⁸ grandson of Judson Johnston, whose nickname of Tugar had been corrupted to Tuga. Tuga was in the habit of calling John Lester,³⁹ a half-witted relative of mine, by the opprobrious name of Monk. When Monk, in an idiotic rage because of this affront to the dignity of the white race, seized a deadly weapon, the impish black would climb to the loft of the Simkins outhouse. From that vantage he emitted such a shower of tobacco juice in the face of his assailant that the hapless white, in undignified haste, retired from the assault.

³⁷ Bank of Edgefield.

³⁸ ??? Childs

³⁹ Unidentified.

Tuga and I went blackberry picking together. I worked hard while he flirted in the briar patch with the nigger girls. He did the selling and usually returned with only enough money to cover the price of half the berries I thought I had picked. He told a tall tale of how the contents of my bucket had shrunk under the hot July sun. Mother ran him out of our yard because his thefts were so deftly done that she could not pin the proof of the evil upon him.

This clever lad disappeared from Litchwood for ten years. On a certain April day in 1929 he came back wearing a bearskin coat after serving as a policeman in Philadelphia. "Mr. Francis," he explained, "I am not going to wear my coat on the streets of Litchwood today; the white folks might mistake a biggity Yankee nigger for a bear and shoot me." As though to escape from one trap to another set by the whites, he announced calmly: "I am going to make some easy money running a still; I've got Mr. Joe Smith⁴⁰ down at Ellenton in Aiken County as a partner." I expostulated: "The white man will make the money running a still and the nigger will be left behind to face the Federal officers with their pistols and handcuffs and with their convincing proofs of guilt." Tuga went ahead with his plan, getting more than his fair share of the high but dangerous profits of a still deep in the Aiken swamps. He ran faster than Mr. Joe Smith when the officers came. The still was smashed but the event did not cause the crafty black boy any serious concern. He had saved enough money to quit the dangerous whiskey business. He bought a cotton farm, married a yellow girl and joined the famous Shaw's Creek Baptist Church. The last time I heard of him he was as prosperous a farmer as it was possible for a colored man in Aiken County to be.

A different kind of cleverness was shown by Will Blanton,⁴¹ a mulatto boy, resourceful but worthless. A cheap and worn suit which gave me the appearance of a scarecrow was on Will's comely figure restored to the symmetry it had possessed when exhibited on a manikin in the shop window. This youth's specialty was the display of his personal attractions as a means of extracting the last dime from his friends among the colored girls of Litchwood. About all he would do for me and Miss Sallie was to act as a valet, brushing clothes, assisting with gloves and coats, and setting tables. His clothes were too immaculate to be soiled by as much labor as hoeing a row of vegetables.

⁴⁰ Unidentified.

⁴¹ Unidentified.

One summer day, perfect in a refurbished suit of mine, Will drove to town behind a feeble old horse belonging to his father. Tommie Hightower,⁴² a yeoman farmer and church member with more than a fair share of prejudice against indolent black boys in fine clothes, jerked Will out of the buggy and literally beat his fine clothes off him.

While I was living in Charleston, Will visited me in my rooms at the Old Citadel. He had made his way from Columbia on the night Pullman as the unauthorized guest of the porter. My contribution to his support was to allow him to bring my meals from the boarding house across the street from the Old Citadel in order that Will might privately share them with me. In a Charleston boarding house there was no room either in the kitchen or in the dining room for a stray nigger.

One afternoon Will came running to my rooms, his usually perfect raiment reduced to tatters. He had been assaulted by a girl acquaintance to whom he would not give his love in exchange for her money.

There was no wisdom in Will going back to Litchwood. Neither the whites of that place nor his black kin would tolerate a black boy too fastidious to do hard work. And the colored damsels there knew his parasitical ways. I advised him to go to Washington. He became a red cap in the Union Station in that city. For several years on my journeys north I saw him in that occupation. Then he disappeared and I have never since been able to trace him through the other Washington red caps.

The sewing woman of Litchwood was Mitty,⁴³ the mulatto wife of Bill Ransom,⁴⁴ the white law clerk of the town. The couple had been married during the Reconstruction period when such unions were legally permissible. Mitty and Bill enjoyed a special status in the community. She was a valuable aid to mothers' ambitions for their daughters to look well at church suppers and dances. He was a writer of briefs and a searcher of records for lawyers who were less informed or lazier than he. Their usefulness to the community is one reason the prejudice against mixed marriage did not lead to the breaking up of their home. The other reason was that during my childhood the feeling against such persons was not as great as it would be today – certainly not as great as

⁴² Unidentified.

⁴³ Katie "Kitty" Ramey (1846-1929) who was reputedly married to William D. "Bill" Ramey on the steps of the Edgefield County Courthouse in 1872.

⁴⁴ William D. "Bill" Ramey (1840-1912), the son of a prominent antebellum planter and owner of Pottersville, who became a Republican and Trial Justice during Reconstruction.



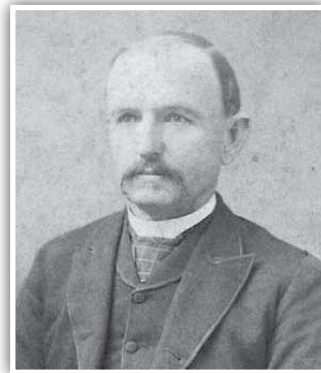
Katie "Kitty" Ramey
(1846-1929)

it was in Virginia in 1947 when the English girl who wished to marry a colored ex-soldier was ejected from that state.

Mitty and Bill lived as quietly and as happily as any Litchwood couple. They had a comfortable house in which they reared half a dozen octoroon children. One of their sons became a prosperous house painter and small contractor in Augusta. He expressed his benevolent interest in the town of his birth by taking into his home white girls from Litchwood who had been caught in the toils of the Augusta underworld. Joseph, a grandson, passed into the white race and established himself in New York City as an expert public accountant.

Dark rumors were current after the First World War that the vigilantes were planning to break up the Ransom home.⁴⁵ Litchwood was the home of Ben Tillman, America's most famous anti-miscegenist. Mitty and Bill were not disturbed. But Litchwood was not as kind to them in death as Lancaster, Pennsylvania, had been to old Thad Stevens and his colored housekeeper. Bill and Mitty had to be buried in different cemeteries.

I was long intrigued by doubt concerning whether or not "reactionary, Negro-baiting" Litchwood was less liberal socially toward the subject race than communities of the upper South which had been in the habit of proclaiming their liberalism towards the blacks. In Virginia where I was a teacher I heard much talk about improving race relations; yet there, the suggestion of a biracial audience to hear Negro Spirituals provoked the burning of a cross, and the presence of a single Negro woman in the town's Episcopal Church made the senior warden reach for his smelling salts. In the Litchwood of my day, on the other hand, a third of the congregation in the Episcopal Church was colored. These Negroes, it is true, hitched their horses a block away



William D. "Bill" Ramey
(1840-1912), circa 1880.

⁴⁵ Bill Ramey had died in 1912 so he was not alive during World War I.

from the church, sat on the back seats and took the communion last. But they were there. The white folks knew them personally and swapped yarns with them during the loitering periods in front of the church door. The minister even recognized the equality of man before the altar of God by passing to his colored parishioners the communion cup from which the whites had already drunk and then drinking after them what was left in the holy vessel. When I, aged twelve, went to the altar in 1911 to be confirmed, one person knelt beside me: a colored man six and one half feet tall.⁴⁶

In the Litchwood of my day sexual intimacies between white men and colored women were less prevalent than under slavery – at least that is what I was told. There were in the county at least two hundred colored persons by the name of Simkins – of every color from pure African to octoroons. The darker ones got their name from their ancestors having been slaves on the Cedar Fields Plantation. The lighter ones had known fathers of the same complexion as they. The white Simkinses could therefore be comforted that the miscegenation responsible for their existence took place before Lee's surrender. They came from talented blood: that of the bachelor Arthur Simkins who, before drinking himself to death in 1863, had edited the Litchwood Leader.⁴⁷ Rome Simkins,⁴⁸ one of the descendants of the editor, looked so much like Father that my little nephew⁴⁹ could not be kept from running up to him and calling, "Grandfather."

It was generally asserted among the white boys of Litchwood – and of the whole South – that every Negro girl could be had for a price. A common chant was:

White girl wears the trimming drawers,
Yellow girl wears the plain,
Nigger girl wears no drawers at all,
But she gets there all the same.

Often did nigger girls raise their skirts before adolescent white youths and then run. Always were they chased and sometimes they were caught. There were shady spots unencumbered by briars to which the blackberry pickers of the opposite sex and opposite race retired. The piles of cotton resulting from a morning's labor made

⁴⁶ Braidwood Lester "Braidy" Holmes (1890-1966).

⁴⁷ *The Edgefield Advertiser*.

⁴⁸ Paris Simkins (1851-1930).

⁴⁹ Augustus Tompkins "Gus" Graydon (1916-2007).

comfortable bedding for white boy and black girl when placed in the cool shade of a September or October afternoon.

Never did white youths pass black girls on side streets without the black girl being asked for an engagement. Sometimes the boys were merely engaged in sardonic teasing of the opposite sex, not meaning to carry out their invitations. Some Negro girls repulsed these advances angrily, crying, "You white sons of bitches, run after your own girls." Under the prevailing code of race etiquette, there was in such cases no basis for the righteous indignation which, under more moral circumstances, would have resulted in sound thrashings for the black girls. Often enough the black girls accepted the advances and boy and girl retired to one of the numerous thickets on the outskirts of Litchwood. A "date" with a nigger girl meant immediate sexual intercourse without so much as a single previous kiss or courteous fondling.

The most attractive of Litchwood's numerous colored hussies was Lisa Sims,⁵⁰ a well-shaped creature with the whitest of ivories set against a skin of velvet blackness. She possessed a Greek, not an African profile. She welcomed with a winsome smile all the young whites of her neighborhood to the pleasures of her bed. Her fee was moderate even for those days, only fifty cents. Her mulatto daughter, to whom she gave the lovely name Melissa,⁵¹ grew into the loveliest of Litchwood maidens. The child's father, so Lisa told Melissa, was the banker of the town.⁵² If this were true, it was an ironic compliment for Banker Edward Shanks; for the beauty of the bastard Melissa was in sharp contrast with the ugliness of the four legitimate daughters of Shanks by his white wife. The banker would not accept the compliment. When Melissa met him on the streets and called him "Daddy," he retorted, "Yellow bitch" and slapped the child to the ground.⁵³

⁵⁰ Unidentified.

⁵¹ Frances Dunton (1911-1976).

⁵² One rumor was that the father was Wallace Caldwell "Rusty" Tompkins (1881-1951), a wealthy banker in Edgefield. Another rumor was that the father was Joseph Gordon "Joe" Holland (1884-1955), who was not a banker, but had been a professional baseball player and later the longtime postmaster of Edgefield from 1924 to 1955. Mr. Tompkins had no children by his white wife; Mr. Holland had three daughters by his white wife who may have fit Simkins's description. A niece also lived with them.

⁵³ John Curran Hartley Feltham (1909-1988) told of eating lunch during the 1930s at the Tea Room which was located in the old Gary and Evans law office on the corner of Buncombe and Jeter Streets where the Edgefield History Park is now located. Mr. Wallace C. "Rusty" Tompkins (1881-1951) was eating alone at a table. When he finished his lunch, he left a quarter on the table as a tip. The waitress, Frances

The lonesomeness colored in history as far as my acquaintance runs was the man previously mentioned as resembling Father. Rome Simkins⁵⁴ had grown up during Reconstruction period when a colored man of talents and good white ancestors could aspire to be a gentleman. He could become a lawyer, a judge or a major or a colonel in the Negro militia. Rome looked the part of the Southern gentleman – the unpretentious and plain one, not the ostentatious fellow of romance – and through his ability at oratorical expression proved he had the right type of education. His talents had been rewarded by his admission to the bar and by his election to the state legislature. Then came the overthrow of the Reconstruction regime. The price Rome had to pay for not being sent into exile with the carpetbaggers was utter retirement from public activities. He could no longer practice law or be a candidate for the legislature. For the sake of what he had once been, he was allowed to cast one of the three or four Republican ballots left in Litchwood County.



*Paris Simkins house
No longer standing - demolished 2000*

Dunton, picked up the quarter, turned to the assembled patrons in the restaurant and announced, "This is the only thing that my father has ever given me!"

⁵⁴ Paris Simkins (1851-1930).

Rome did nothing for the remaining fifty years of his life. He did not have to work because he husbanded carefully the modest competence he had acquired when there were political pickings of colored men. He had no friends; he considered himself above all the blacks and all the whites considered him beneath them. A barrier grew between him and his own children because they, becoming artisans, accepted without thought the status conventional to their kind in post-Reconstruction society. He walked the streets of Litchwood endlessly with no other apparent purpose than to get the mail. He was the one person among both the whites and the blacks to whom the Simkins children never spoke. His house, a purely Southern structure sitting high on brick pillars amidst tall oaks, was the one Litchfield structure we never entered. He had a wife, but we never saw her.

The most successful of Litchwood's colored people was George Johnson,⁵⁵ the son of the county's most prosperous Negro farmer. George became a dentist. He enjoyed the largest income of any person of his caste in Greenland,⁵⁶ the city of the middle south where he practiced his profession. In fact, he was that community's most distinguished colored citizen; he was a leader in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and in other organizations designed to promote race equality. "Quite a radical," was the characterization of him by one of the few white citizens of Greenland who had enough curiosity to know about Negro activities.

A shrewd white reprobate from Litchwood knew George better than did this white man of Greenland. Lucius Youngblood,⁵⁷ in fact, knew George better than George knew himself. He knew that the dentist was "a Litchwood nigger" with an innate respect for inherited concepts of race before which stood as nothing the colored man's radical professions. Lucius had never done George a single favor when George was an ambitious colored youth about Litchwood; in fact Lucius followed the usual Southern habit of scarcely knowing that such an ambitious colored person as George existed. Was it not realistic for a person belonging to a good family with broad acres to till and great rooms to clean to forget a young Negro who was not going to be a good field hand or a good servant?

By the time Lucius landed in Greenland, he was a poor man in trouble. He had a swollen jaw and no money with which to pay for relief. The

⁵⁵ Unidentified.

⁵⁶ Greenwood, South Carolina.

⁵⁷ Unidentified.

broken-down aristocrat would invoke the instincts of class and caste to demand a favor when there was no rational grounds on which to base his petition. He knew he could get the favor.

Lucius Youngblood walked into Dr. Johnson's office with a confident expectation of getting what he wanted comparable to that with which a good husband enters his dining room to partake of the meal he paid for. The fact that Lucius could not and would not pay for George's services made no difference to the white man. At first Lucius was disconcerted by appearances unlike anything he had ever seen in Litchwood's Nigger Town. He was in a Negro office building, a place with all modern appointments. George possessed everything the prosperous dentist was supposed to have, the most modern instruments and the secretary-nurse with the proper professional jargon. The master himself was the pretentious dentist, immaculate in white and bulging with health and self-esteem. But Lucius did not lose courage. "George," he said with a mixture of authority and kindness, "I want your help." George looked up astonished, and then without effort on his part the present melted into the past. The president of the local chapter of the N.A.A.C.P. became the Litchwood Nigger. "Oh, Mr. Lucius," cried George. There was an old fashioned lovefest. The office full of colored patients was forgotten. For a moment the haughty dentist became a slave. Lucius got his treatment free of cost, and George felt honored to have been able to serve a gentleman of Litchwood.

The most exceptional of Litchwood's characters was Salina,⁵⁸ a woman who in the first decades of the twentieth century was as perfect a slave as any of her ancestors had been in the first decades of the nineteenth century. She was the servant of Mistress Maria Levering,⁵⁹ the lady which we have already called attention to as living in the colonnaded mansion behind the oaks. Salina was not cruelly treated by the white lady. She was given a room next to that of her mistress and she always appeared dressed in immaculate aprons and dresses. Yet she received no wages, was not allowed to associate with other colored persons or to leave the premises without Mistress Maria's consent; and she was kept constantly at work during all her waking hours. She had to trim lamps and draw water from the deep well in the yard; her mistress was too stingy to install electricity or plumbing.

⁵⁸ Sillah (Last name unknown) (18??-19??).

⁵⁹ Mary Martin Evans (1868-1934).

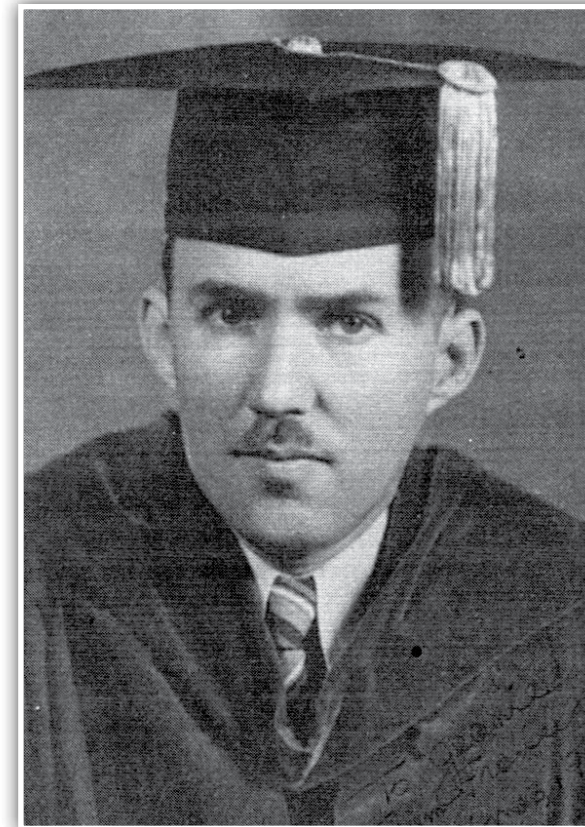
She was compelled to gather kindling wood from the oak grove and trim it in the yard; her mistress was too stingy to buy coal.

Both Salina and Mistress Maria were devout Christians. Through faith the bondage of the soul was a means of making more secure the bondage of the body. Mistress Maria used the Bible as the instrument of enslavement. Salina, on a stool before the Great Book open on the white woman's lap, softly said, "Thanks Jesus," as Mistress Maria comfortably seated in a great chair, improvised as follows:

The Lord sayeth, Salina the servant, obey thine Mistress. The Lord sayeth thou should work diligently, gathering fragments in the grove, drawing water from the well and replenishing thine Mistress's vessels, as the beloved Ruth didst in the days of old. The Lord commandest that thou showest respect for the woman thou serveth through wearing clean raiment and obeying the words from thine mistress's mouth. Listen not, sayeth the Lord, to the gospel as expounded by thy brother in black because his mouth is contaminated by the pagan teachings of Africa. Thou must go forth each day to the Litchwood post office, looking not to the right or to the left, and bring back safely those missives which thy mistress's kin hath sent her. Filthy lucre is condemned by the Lord Jesus and its possession is not worthy of a true follower of the Blessed Master. Oh, be thou ever obedient so that thou mayest inherit eternal life.

Editor's End Note

Simkins's autobiography goes on for seven more chapters. These chapters are entitled "University of South Carolina," "Columbia University," "From Brazil to Georgia," "Teacher Education," "The Ideal & the Real in Virginia," "Teacher and Scholar," and "The Second World War." While these chapters provide a most interesting account of his rich experiences through the balance of his life, they tell a story which will appeal to a different audience. For this reason, we decided to limit our publication at this time to those chapters which deal with his formative years in Edgefield. We hope that that the reader has enjoyed and been enriched by these memoirs of this most remarkable Edgefield man, Francis Butler Simkins.



Francis Butler Simkins, circa 1926



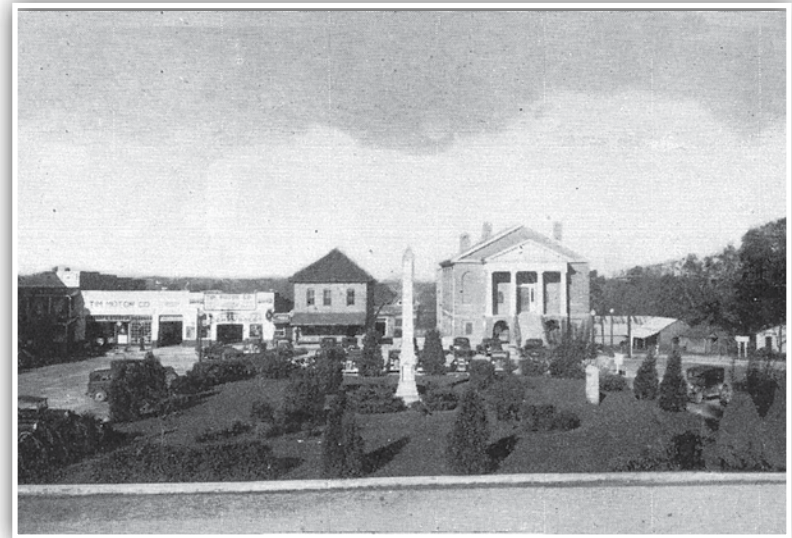
Trinity Church, circa 1900, before the steeple was added



Public Square, circa 1919. Note the electrical power lines which have now been installed.



Main Street, circa 1915



Public Square, circa 1935. Note the landscaping which has been installed by Mayor Harold Norris, compliments of "the Yankee owner of the local cotton mill."



Historian of the South