

SPRINGFIELD AND ITS CARVING IN VALLEY OF SANTEE DAM LAKE

One Hundred and Twelve Year Old House Overlooks Fertile Fields
At Border Of Berkeley And Orangeburg Counties

By F. M. Kirk

Eutawville, September 28. - Special: When Joseph Palmer built his mansion at Springfield Plantation in 1817 he built for posterity. He constructed his house of hand-sewn black cypress which defied the elements. The building today is in as good condition as it was a century ago.

Construction of the house was under way about the time that stockholders were sadly realizing that the old Santee-Cooper canal was a financial failure, and none dreamed that a second Santee-Cooper Canal would be projected.

The old canal, completed in 1800 probably helped Joseph Palmer. It gave him an opportunity to lease slaves, during an agricultural depression, on the construction work. The second canal, if materialized, will flood the fertile fields, still cultivated by his descendants. It will necessitate the destruction of the magnificent mansion he built.

Springfield is now the home of the widow of the last male owner, Edmund G. Palmer (grand-son of the builder), and of her son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas S. McGuinness. It is located in upper St. John's Parish, Berkeley County, six miles east of Eutaw Springs. The plantation has never passed out of the hands of the Palmer family.

Family Name Changed

Thomas Palmer, who spelled his name Pamor, the English emigrant, left three sons: Joseph, David and John, and a daughter, Elizabeth. John is the ancestor of the Springfield line.

John Palmer, who made a fortune out of turpentine on his plantation, Gravel Hill, in St. Stephen's Parish, commanded in his will that his sons forever spell their names "Palmer" rather than "Pamor".

The last will and testament of "Turpentine John", as he was known, has been rigidly carried out by his descendants in the spelling of the name. In this section, however, the pronunciation of the original spelling has been retained.

It was Turpentine John's son, Captain John Palmer, who purchased the tract now known as Springfield, some time probably before the Revolution, from Isaac Couturier and Thomas Palmer, the latter being the captain's brother.

Captain John Palmer, apparently, never lived at Springfield. He settled Richmond Plantation, St. Stephen's Parish, in 1769 and lived there until his death in 1817. Though his chief interests centered in St. Stephen's Parish, his journal, now at Springfield, has many interesting entries regarding his activities on his "lands in St. John's Parish. As late as 1783 he mentions "planting indigo at Springfield". Many planters were beginning to forsake indigo about that time.

Finest Carving In County

Isaac Coururier and Thomas Palmer apparently secured the lands they sold to Captain Palmer by royal grants considerably before the Revolution. Captain Palmer and his son, Joseph, to whom the plantation was willed, constantly added to their holdings, as a number of old plats at Springfield indicate. Some of these tracts so added date back to grants made in the early years of the eighteenth century.

There is no record when the earlier house was built or when it was taken down; for apparently, there was an earlier residence on the place. Joseph Palmer was living at Springfield when he commenced construction on the present house. It is said by some that Joseph Palmer was born there in 1776.

No house in Berkeley County, and few anywhere, can boast the elaborate and beautiful carving that adorns the interior of Springfield. Hand carved by slaves with tools still in possession of the family, the ornateness and intricacy of the designs present an unrivaled picture of beauty, in her account of the Palmer reunion held there last December, Miss Flora B. Surles aptly describes the woodwork as "giving one the impression of something made of lace rather than of wood."

The two front entrance rooms, serving as drawing room and dining have high mantels elaborately decorated to the ceiling. The cornices above doors and windows and the wainscoating and frieze carry out the same design. Other rooms have simpler decorations. The rooms are large and well proportioned. A small wing on either side of the main body of the house, gives the building excellent proportions.

Founder Of Pineville

Captain John Palmer, father of Joseph the builder, was an active partisan during the Revolution and served as an aide to General Marion. In 1794, he was one of the founders of the village of Pineville which soon became the summer home of all planters in the community. He took an active part in the

affairs of the parish and wrote an historical sketch of St. Stephen's Parish for Ramsey's History of South Carolina, which was published in Charleston in 1803.

The captain's father, "Turpentine John" of Gravel Hill, and his uncle Joseph, of Webdo, were both too far advanced in years to take active parts in the Revolutionary struggle. Both, however, were ardent Whigs and earned the hatred of the Tories during that bitter partisan period.

Both were seized by their enemies and carried to Biggin Church, which was then a British post. There the two brothers were thrust into the dark and clammy confines of the Colleton family vault. Not so much as a blanket was given them to keep off the chill air of their gloomy prison.

When they were eventually liberated from their dungeon the brothers were so weakened that it took them two days to reach Gravel Hill, only ten miles away. Such was their condition, and such their fear of further imprisonment that each took turns carrying the other on his back.

Executor For Many

Joseph Palmer, I, of Springfield, was outstanding in his community for the regard and affection in which he was held by his neighbors. "Few persons", says Professor Federick A. Porcher, "have ever had so many trusts confided to them as executors; and none has ever discharged them more assiduously or more faithfully."

He seems to have been impulsive at times in speech and action. On one occasion a minister preached a political sermon in the lower parish which gave offense to all St. John's. So offended was Joseph Palmer with the sermon that he declared that the clergyman should never enter his house. (Famed though it was for its hospitality).

Not long after, while Mr. Palmer was away from home, the political parson drove up to Springfield and asked for a night's lodging. The mistress of the house, fearful of the scene to follow, bade him welcome, and nervously awaited the return of her husband.

It was night when Joseph Palmer returned, but Mrs. Palmer met him before he entered the house to warn him of the unwelcomed guest.

"Damn him", cried Mr. Palmer. "Is he here?" Then he strode into the drawing room to greet the minister with every courtesy hospitality demanded. Never did the minister realize the relief to his hostess of that warm welcome.

Springfield today retains the charm of former years. The dwelling is located in the midst of a yard filled with moss-draped trees. The house has been kept in perfect repair, and all lands are extensively cultivated. Historic Rocks Church (Church of the Epiphany) is located about a mile north-east of the house, and is surrounded on all sides by the plantation lands.