

A glimpse of 19th-century life

■ Daniel Greene Stinson's story shows man, the times.

■ *First of two parts.*

Daniel Greene Stinson (1794-1879) of Chester County led a life worthy of examination. In many ways his experiences illustrate the times in which he lived; in other ways he displayed an unusual force of character not typical of any age.



Nearby history

LOUISE
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First, Stinson told Draper of his ancestry. Robert Stevenson, his paternal grandfather, had brought his wife and children from County Antrim, Ireland, in 1772. They had traveled to Chester County as a part of a Presbyterian colony of the Rev. William Martin, a group that is frequently referred to as Covenanters.

Stinson wrote a short autobiography in 1871 for Lyman Draper, a University of Wisconsin historian who was writing a history of the battle of Kings Mountain and who corresponded with numerous descendants of Revolutionary War soldiers. Stinson had assisted many veterans in filling out their pension applications and, possessing a retentive mind, had been of great assistance to Draper.

Stinson's father, William Stevenson (Stinson is a corruption of Stevenson), fought in the battle of Kings Mountain. William Stevenson's first wife died in 1788, leaving six children. Daniel Stinson's mother was Stevenson's second wife, Elizabeth Wylie, who emigrated from County Antrim in 1787 with her brother, Richard Wylie, and his wife, Sallie.

Stinson wrote: "My father kept a public house, operated two stills, owned a mill, kept a wagon on the road to Charleston, sold rum and whiskey and some merchandise, in exchange for which he took deer skins, venison, ham, bacon, butter, lard, tobacco and indigo." This illustrates the extensive use of barter that stemmed from a shortage of money as well as the fact that upcountrymen were planting two crops — tobacco and indigo — that we normally associate with the Lowcountry of South Carolina.

Stinson continued with an anecdote that illustrates the frontiersmen's seemingly huge capacity for alcohol: "He (Stinson's father) came home from Charleston on one occasion, two days before Christmas, with a hogshead of rum — the still running every day. Nevertheless, on Christmas morning he did not have a dram for himself, it all having been sold."

There were no public schools in the early 1800s in upcountry South Carolina. Parents paid tuition either to a "field school" teacher or sent the child to an academy (a school that taught Latin and Greek). Stinson began when he was 8, walked three miles to the "other side of Rocky Creek" to study with Robert Boyd. Stinson learned his letters the first day and was

reading in about three months. After three months the next year he could read the Bible. The next year he went six months and learned to write. He learned arithmetic from a boarder at his father's home.

When he was 11 Stinson became a plowman and occasionally went to school after the crops were laid by. When he was 16 a military school was set up at Mount Dearborn (north of present-day Great Falls) and he went there for two years. At the age of 18, Stinson taught school for nine months. The next year he went to New Providence Academy in Mecklenburg County, N.C. under the Rev. James Wallis and spent two years there.

Stinson came back to Chester County and joined a cousin in the mercantile business. He intended to go back to school but the business boomed and they decided to build a second store. He went into business for himself and bought cotton. Unfortunately, he bought in the fall at 30 cents a pound and could only get 12 cents in the spring. "This swept away everything I had made, leaving about where I started, four years before."

In spite of his economic plight and his original intention of completing his schooling, in 1819 Stinson married Esther Gaston. Having failed at business he decided to try agriculture and bought some land from a neighbor. Stinson had inherited a male slave from his father and bought several more to provide labor for his plantation.

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