

DANIEL GREENE STINSON

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.

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 soldiers. Stinson had assisted many veterans in filling out their pension applications and, possessing a retentive mind, had been of great assistance to Draper.

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'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. 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 which stemmed from a shortage of money as well as the fact that upcountry men 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 3 miles to the "other side of Rocky Creek" to study with Robert Boyd. He learned his letters the first day and was reading in about 3 months. After 3 months the next year he could read the Bible. The next year he went 6 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. The next year, at the age of 18, Stinson taught school for 9 months. The next year he went to New Providence Academy in Mecklenburg County, N. C. under the Rev. James Wallis and spent 2 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. He had inherited a negro man from his father and bought several more to provide labor for his plantation.

The Yorkville Enquirer in 1871 said of him: "The religious art of Daniel Greene Stinson was very strict for he was raised Covenanter. Morally he was exemplary. Though raised in a still house he abstained from liquor. . . . He was a great talker, fond of company and seldom forgot a name, a face, or a date."

The above characteristics helped Stinson to become more than just a farmer. In an agricultural area there are not many opportunities to become a "public man" but Stinson was known as such far beyond his corner of Chester District. At Dr. Lyman Draper's request he enumerated the offices he held in a short autobiography. First, in January of 1819 Stinson became post master at Cedar Shoals, Chester District, sharing the office (always a political appointment in those days) with John G. Walker.

In 1824 Stinson was appointed to the office of magistrate and remained at that post 20 years. He said that in his first two years he married about 100 couples. Stinson was "conservative" in sending very few cases to a higher level court. From sources other than Stinson, it was said that unless a man were an utter reprobate, Stinson preferred to counsel or to shame him into becoming a better citizen. In 1845 the law changed to allow only one magistrate to a "beat" (area covered by a local militia company). Stinson graciously stepped aside in favor of R. H. Fudge.

His neighbors called on Stinson for advice and assistance in many ways. Stinson said he administered his first estate in 1822 and, altogether, administered around thirty estates. "I had the care of about twenty widows." He also had the guardianship of 20 to 30 orphans, "some of whom I educated." Stinson added, "Some of the estates were large and complicated; hence, I was kept in the Court of Equity for more than fifteen years."

Everyone in the neighborhood asked him to draw up their wills. A great many persons on moving from this country to the West, and northwest and leaving legacies here employed me as attorney to collect and forward proceeds to them." He frequently arbitrated disputes among neighbors. Many of the disputes were over land boundaries. Stinson's 20 years as a public surveyor stood him in good stead in that regard.

Esther Gaston Stinson died in 1854 while her husband was attending a meeting in Buffalo, New York. A telegram was sent to him but he did not receive it and only found out about his wife's death when he met a friend after arriving at the Kingsbury train depot.

There were 8 children, 2 sons and 6 daughters. The first son died when he was 2. The other died while a senior at Franklin University in Athens, Georgia (now the University of Georgia). Stinson's second wife was "Mrs. Henkle, the daughter of Mr. Turner and Margaret Morgan".

In the third volume of *Women in the American Revolution* by Mrs. Elizabeth Ellet, published in 1849, she wrote: "In later years the Revolutionary pensioners of the neighborhood came to him as the magistrate, to get their papers drawn up;

this brought them every six months to his house, and he not only extended liberal hospitality to the more destitute, but when they were no longer able to come to him, visited them and did their writing without charge. . . . with unwearied assiduity he collected reliable accounts from various sources, with manuscript records of the day, comparing them with care, visiting aged persons in his vicinity and writing to those at a distance—and sent me from time to time the results of his patriotic labors. To his generous exertions I am indebted for the entire materials of the Southern sketches from "Katharine Steel" to "Jane White—eleven in number—enabling me to present a graphic picture of the war in that region. . . ."

The subjects of the other nine sketches of Chester District women that Mrs. Ellet wrote about included [see list of 15 names of women from South Carolina]

The Civil War bankrupted Stinson. Even though he managed to retain a few acres of land he was too old and feeble to work a farm. He and his wife moved to Rock Hill to the home of their son-in-law, Maj. T. C. Beckham. His obituary stated that he was "exceedingly fond of children, kind to the sick, white or black. Many sleepless nights he spent going from one negro house to another watching the symptoms of disease and seeing that medicines were properly administered."