

10-21-99

Scots-Irish family became prominent

Scots-Irish immigrants were, by far, the largest ethnic group to settle in this area prior to the Revolution. And, even though the great tide of settlers coming directly from the north of Ireland slackened after the war, they still sought out the Presbyterian communities in York, Lancaster and Chester counties of South Carolina.

In 1823 James Boyd and Esther Rogers Magill left the town of Broughshave, County Antrim, and settled on Fishing Creek in Chester County.

Louise Pettus



NEARBY HISTORY

James Boyd Magill, a poet and a scholar, promptly opened a school in what is now Richburg. Two sons were also to become poets and scholars. Thomas Rogers Magill, born in 1826, and James R. Magill, two years younger, were educated in their father's academy.

In his early 20s, T.R. Magill

served as postmaster in Lancaster. Then he and his brother opened a general merchandise establishment in Lancaster.

In 1851, T.R. married Elizabeth Ann Heath, daughter of Moses Chappel and Mary Morrow Heath. Moses Heath owned a large plantation and was a local magistrate.

His sons were to become prominent in merchandising, banking, real estate development, railroads and the stock market.

Six of Elizabeth's brothers served in the Civil War and two were killed in action.

T.R. built a store at a place called Cureton not far from the present Andrew Jackson State Park. His home was in Lancaster District and his store was in Union County, N.C. With two brothers-in-law - A.W. and B.D. Heath - as partners, the business flourished.

But the guns of war interrupted. T.R. Magill enlisted in Co. H, 4th S.C. Cavalry. He served four years, and was not wounded, but exposure left him permanently weakened.

In 1871, he sold out at Cureton and moved with Elizabeth and their two children to Charlotte, where he went into a retail and wholesale grocery business on South College Street. The firm was known as Magill, Heath and Scott Company.

T.R. became a founder of Charlotte's ARP church, an alderman and a trustee of Erskine College. He was described as "a good mixer and a sincere lover of his kindred." All of his adult life he wrote poetry and corresponded with other poets, including Oliver Wendell Holmes.

T.R. had a book of poetry published, titled "The Poems of T.R. Magill." Frequently, his poems were printed in newspapers such as the Charlotte Chronicle and the Lancaster Ledger. Often, the poems were printed under the nom de plume, "Old Faneuil."

The poems tended to have local settings or were written about the life experiences of Magill. A number dealt with the Civil War. He wrote poems upon the deaths of his wife and his daughter.

One would have had to have

known Lancaster County well to pick out the references in a poem he called "Tank's Own Bard." The Bard was the eminent physician, Dr. Richard Evans Wylie. Tank was a community in the county not far from Lynches River ("Let hill and dale and blooming vale from Lynch's Creek to Indian Line..."). The Indian Line was the line dividing the Catawba Indian Land from state land.

T.R.'s brother James Boyd Magill also wrote poetry but is best known for his political career.

He started as a merchant in Lancaster County but after moving to Stoneboro, near Heath Springs, became a collector for U.S. Internal Revenue, then a postmaster, and then was elected to the S.C. House from Kershaw County. After one term, he was elected a state senator from Kershaw County.

James Magill died in 1907. His brother T.R. had died four years before, in 1903.

Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop University. Her column appears Saturdays.