

## **BERRYMAN HICKS WITHERS / WEATHERS**

Berryman Hicks Withers / Weathers (in our family the surname was used interchangeably) (1818-1875), the subject of this sketch came from a long line of English ancestry. In the latter part of the eighteenth century the branch of the Withers family to which Berryman belonged settled in Southwest Virginia. Early in the nineteenth century Berryman's father moved to Lincoln County, North Carolina. There Berryman was born on February 19, 1818, it would seem that the venture to North Carolina was not a financial success, for Berryman began to support himself when he was very young.

There was in Lincoln County at the time, a body of workers who we would today call Contractors and Builders. Berryman did jobs for these men and clearly showed ability and good business sense, for in 1836 the head of the Company for which Berryman was working took him into South Carolina to work on building projects just under way in that state. Letters from the early 1840's tell of Berryman being made a manager on the South Carolina projects.

The Company found work in Fairfield District, South Carolina and were successful there and in adjoining districts for several years. Berryman was a good writer, and his comments tell not only of his own experiences but gives some insight into the conditions of the districts in which he worked. On March 28, 1841, he wrote to his brother Michael in Virginia that times had been hard and business poor and that they had about decided to return to North Carolina when there was a turn in the tide. He writes, "Just as our last

job was about finished, there came a gentleman wanting us to build him a large house ... we made a calculation and engaged the job at \$ 3,000, we to find all the materials and board ourselves. We expect to do the best business we have ever done. The building is for a boarding house at the independent institution established lately by the Universalists, five miles northwest of Buckhead P.O. When this work is done, we have the promise of contracts for two more houses at this same place, worth \$ 1,500 apiece, and the people of the settlement warranted us work for five years to come."

Almost immediately after his arrival in Fairfield District, Berryman joined the Cool Branch Baptist Church. He attended the services regularly and attained prominence in the affairs of the community. He was a leader in the "singings" which seem to have been the chief diversion of the people. He writes, "I have invitations from all the neighbors to have night singing in their homes."

In several letters to his family both in North Carolina and Virginia the young builder disclaimed any intention of marrying. Indeed he openly wrote that he doubted if he would ever take such a step. However, in a March 19, 1846 letter he writes to his brother Michael in Abingdon, VA that he is to be married on April 30, 1846 to Miss Susan Meador, who is "in possession of good character, industry, and economy to a superlative degree – also of noble disposition." He writes further that "Susan has a good piece of land and two very likely young Negroes ... and a very good house which we finished working on last fall." In the last sentence we perhaps have an explanation of Berryman's changed views concerning matrimony.

Propinquity had done its work.

Berryman adds in another letter that Susan's sister Elizabeth has the same amount of property and that he has been asked to manage the two estates. By this time he had accrued a little property of his own, and he announces: "After this year I will turn my entire attention to farming." This he did. His remaining years were spent in looking after his farming interests in the Cool Branch section of Fairfield County, South Carolina.

Susan Meador and Berryman Withers were married on April 30, 1846 and on April 6, 1847 John Samuel Mobley Feaster Withers, my grandfather was born. In later years at the age of 19 my grandfather dropped the family names Mobley Feaster from his name and in records of the time he is listed as John Samuel Withers.

The Meador's are said to have been a long-lived family; in his statistics Wills, in speaking of the longevity of the people, says, "Job Meador, who came to the settlement with the Mobleys, died in October 1822 at the advanced age of 101 years." Although Susan belonged to this long-lived family, she herself died as a young mother prior to the 1850 census.

Berryman Withers is known to have married Susan's older sister Elizabeth and she is listed in the Withers household in the 1850 census with child John age 3 and child Michael age 10/12 with we take to be 10 months old.

Elizabeth Meador dies prior to 1862 and on July 31, 1862 Berryman married a third time to Mrs. M.A. Coleman Crosby. Berryman Withers is buried in the Crosby Family cemetery in Fairfield County, South Carolina.

A friend wrote of Berryman Withers, "He had a thirst for knowledge and a taste for good books, and he became a well-informed man noted for his intelligences, sound judgment, and high integrity." Because he possessed those qualities, it is reported that he wrote many wills for the people and became the executor of several estates. It is said that no will of his was ever broken. Apparently lawsuits were most prevalent in South Carolina during the period and a number of copies of wills witnessed by Berryman Withers exist today. In a letter dated April 23, 1842, Berryman writes, "There has been a woeful amount of lawsuits lately among the big fellows. Last week Court convened in the borough with 1200 cases on the docket, all for large amounts."

Berryman Withers was a self-educated man and, feeling keenly the inadequacy of his own education, he determined that his son should be well educated. He, therefore, when the boy was very young, employed Scotch and English tutors. Some of the neighbors who wished their sons to have equal opportunity, arranged with Mr. Withers to establish a small school, which all boys in the community might attend. To this school there came the Lyleses, the Mobleys, the Feasters, the Crosbys and others. Since the tutors were always classical scholars, John Samuel Withers received a fine classical education and was prepared to enter South Carolina College just as the Civil War forced the College to close its doors.

Letters from the later days of the Civil War exist in the Meador Family that indicate that John Samuel Withers served in the Company B of Gills Battalion of the Chester County Volunteers. Dates on the letter would indicate that John Samuel Withers was 17 years of age at the beginning of

his service. Following the war at the age of nineteen, in the year 1866, John Samuel Withers married Margaret Mary Walker, daughter of Joshua H. Walker of Chester, South Carolina. The family of John and Mary Withers lived in the Joshua Walker home on Pinckney Street in the town of Chester, South Carolina. Berryman Withers lived to see the birth of five of his grandchildren including the South Carolina author of early children's reading books, Sarah Withers (1873-1955)

In old age, Joshua Walker persuaded his son-in-law to move to Chester and take charge of his plantations. John Samuel Withers and Margaret Mary Withers lived in Chester for the remainder of their lives and they are buried with a number of their children in Evergreen Cemetery in Chester. The family of John Samuel Withers and Margaret Mary Withers numbered seven daughters and one son. The son was my father Harry Hicks Withers born on May 12, 1878 in the city of Chester, South Carolina. Harry Hicks Withers married Mary Grey Neil of Winnsboro, South Carolina on July 19, 1916. To them were born a daughter, Mary Grey Withers born July 11, 1918 and a son, John S. Withers born December 17, 1920. The great grandchildren of Berryman Hicks Withers are proud of their Chester and Fairfield County ancestry and their Southern heritage.

Mary Grey Withers

7/11/1918