

RIDGEWAY

RIDGEWAY'S FIRST SETTLERS

by

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The earliest settlers of the Ridgeway area of lower Fairfield District appear to have been Scotch-Irish Presbyterians. In Doctor George Howe's HISTORY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN SOUTH CAROLINA (Columbia, 1870), he states, "In October 1799, a society on Cedar Creek petitions supplies, and prays it may be known on the minutes of Presbytery by the name of AIMWELL." However, in the old Session Book of the Aimwell Presbyterian Church in Ridgeway is the statement, "On the first Saturday in January, 1840, the semicentenary was observed and 63 dollars was subscribed for the board of publication." This places the origin of Aimwell Church as 1790.

When John Rosborough and his wife, Ann Cubit, moved to Ridgeway from Lebanon section of Fairfield in 1790, they "brought with them a fervent desire to organize a church," wrote Mrs. E. D. Goodson for the 150th anniversary of Aimwell in 1940. The first services were held in the Rosboroughs' home on the site of the present Century House in the town of Ridgeway. The first church building appears to have been erected about 1799 on land on Cedar Creek, given the previous year by Francis Robinson. The Reverend George Reed or Reid was the first pastor, and served for seven years. Mr. John Rosborough was ordained as the first elder. Following the Reverend Mr. Reed, Aimwell was served by the Reverend William G. Rosborough, who, Howe tells us, was prepared at Mount Zion College, and received under the care of Presbytery in April 1793.

The first church was burned. A second log church was built on a site near the present Bethlehem Colored Church across the street from the Crumpton House in Ridgeway, and this church was used until 1833. This marked the erection of Aimwell on the site of the present cemetery on land given the Presbyterians by Edward Gendron Palmer of Valencia. This building was erected in 1833; the fourth building was dedicated November 18, 1859. This building was described in later years by the late Eloise Davis Ruff as "white, foursquare, with a recessed porch and columns. There were two doors opening on the porch, and in the enclosed ends were concealed the steps leading up into the gallery where the colored servants sat. In the body of the church were three rows of pews. A melodian, given by Miss Sallie Means, stood near the pulpit. The choir was composed of Mrs. Henry Davis, Miss Ann Thomas, and Miss Mattie Rosborough, with Miss Sallie Means at the melodian. Behind the church, built of sturdy logs, was the session house, with a huge log fireplace," concluded "Miss Eloise" as she remembered Aimwell about the time of the Confederate War.

Early members of Aimwell and residents of lower Fairfield District were the Rosboroughs, Robinsons, Craigs, Kennedys, Hoods, Walkers, Gozas, Hunters, Campbells, Cleavelands, Boulwares, and Colemans. Some of the first settlers had come from Scotland and Ireland by way of Virginia and North Carolina, whereas others, like John Rosborough, had come directly to South Carolina

by way of Charleston from Ireland during the potato famines of the late 18th century. He had married Ann Cubit in Carolina after she came to Beaufort with her English sea captain father.

In the late 1800's about 1885 Aimwell built a frame church in the town of Ridgeway, and it was used primarily for prayer meetings for the greater convenience of the members. The church in the cemetery was eventually taken down, and given to the colored Presbyterians, and rebuilt on the Smallwood Road just south of the town limits. Like its parent white church in the town both have been brick veneered in recent years and continue to serve their respective congregations, the fourth Aimwell serving the colored people, and the fifth Aimwell serving the white congregation. In the days of the first and second churches, and the early days of Aimwell in the cemetery, the colored members were listed in the same congregation and attended the same services. Church segregation in the South is an outgrowth of the Civil War. Virtually all Southern churches had white and colored members before the War, and the Episcopal Church in South Carolina had more colored than white members.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH HUGUENOTS FROM THE LOWCOUNTRY

Edward Gendron Palmer of Saint James' Parish, Santee, Charleston District, came to Fairfield in 1824, the first of the lowcountrymen to move into this area and to exert an influence in the county out of all proportion to their numbers. Mr. Palmer had married Caroline, the daughter of Doctor James Davis, "eminent physician of his day," who lived at QUININE HILL near Columbia and who persuaded his son-in-law to migrate to the more healthful upcountry. Mr. Palmer purchased a plantation, BLOOMINGDALE, on Dutchman's Creek, several miles northwest of NEW LANDS as Ridgeway was then called. Not finding BLOOMINGDALE as healthful as he had hoped, Mr. Palmer temporarily moved into a house he owned on what is now Palmer Street in Ridgeway, while building VALENCIA.

One of the first to follow Mr. Palmer to the upcountry was Samuel Peyre Thomas of St. Stephen's Parish, Charleston District, who built VALLEY GROVE, the lands of which adjoined BLOOMINGDALE. Having received his Bachelor of Arts degree at Harvard College in 1825, S. Peyre Thomas returned to his birthplace BETAW on the Santee in St. Stephen's Parish. Here he awaited his twenty-first birthday, December 7, 1825, for the settlement of his late parents' estate. Writing his Harvard classmates from VALLEY GROVE in 1850 on the occasion of his twenty-fifth class reunion, Mr. Thomas states, "Upon becoming of age a few months after my returning home from college, I found myself in possession of ten negroes and about Two thousand Dollars. With this small property, I removed to Fairfield District and purchased a small farm and have ever since been engaged in the production of cotton." In 1834 Mr. Thomas married Jane Fears Rosborough, daughter of John Rosborough, whom he describes in another letter, now also in the Harvard Library Archives as "one of the most estimable men, and most correct in principle, that I ever knew." VALLEY GROVE was built in 1835, burned in 1841, and was described by Mr. Thomas as "very costly." The family lived in the former VALLEY GROVE kitchen for some years thereafter.

In the meantime, Mr. Thomas' plantation had been greatly enlarged by his wife's inheritance through her late father's death of lands adjoining VALLEY GROVE. Mr. Thomas then determined to build on this former Rosborough land, nearer Ridgeway, on the Longtown-Camden Road. Here he had commenced the building of MAGNOLIA less than a mile east of the village of Ridgeway when he died on June 28, 1854. MAGNOLIA was completed by his widow and sons and remained the family home until it was sold to settle the estate of his daughter, Anne (Mrs. Charles E. Thomas). Another house now occupies the site below St. Stephen's Church.

Through the influence of Messrs. Palmer and Thomas in lower Fairfield District, David Gaillard, Samuel DuBose, and Theodore DuBose of St. John's Parish also moved to Fairfield in this period, all of these settling near Winnsboro. With the opportunity of entering their sons at Mount Zion Institute, several lowcountry widows — Mrs. Isabella Peyre Porcher, Mrs. Sarah Palmer Couturier, and Mrs. Mary Gaillard, among others — also moved to Fairfield at this time. Through marriage and family connections General John Bratton and Mr. Isaac Dwight were also attracted to the county.

In the summer of 1835 John Peyre Thomas, M.D., elder brother of Samuel Peyre Thomas, travelled through Fairfield, visiting most of these lowcountry settlers of the upper country. Continuing to Greenville District, where he spent the summer with his wife, the former Harriet Jane Couturier, Dr. Thomas suffered the cruel blow of her death soon after the birth of their sixth child in Greenville. Dr. Thomas returned to Fairfield and determined to settle here, purchasing several tracts of land to make up MOUNT HOPE PLANTATION, most of which had been owned by the Kennedys and Rosboroughs.

The next year Dr. Thomas married his late wife's sister, Charlotte Henrietta Couturier, and brought her to MOUNT HOPE where their country plantation home was under construction.

RAILROAD AND TELEGRAPH THROUGH RIDGEWAY IN 1850's

Confederate Headquarters,
February 17-19, 1865

Ridgeway takes its name from the ridge which bisects this lower area of Fairfield County between the Broad and Wateree Rivers. When the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad, of which Mr. Edward G. Palmer of Ridgeway was the first president, was completed in 1850, the new railroad followed the ridge north of Columbia toward Winnsboro. Ridgeway drains east of the railroad into the Wateree River, and west of the railroad into the waters of the Broad River. Ridgeway, at an elevation of six hundred and twenty-five feet above sea level, is the highest point on the Southern Railway between Augusta, Georgia, and Charlotte, North Carolina.

The semaphore and telegraph lines marked the next great development through the county. The first telegraph line was run in 1854 and 1855, the wires being stretched from tree to tree. However, Ridgeway did not become a telegraph office until the latter part of the War, when the Confederate gov

ernment established better provision for rapid communication. And the fact that Ridgeway had a telegraph office accounts for its "greatest and darkest days in history."

General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, commanding general of the Military Division of the West, Confederate States of America, established his headquarters at Ridgeway Friday, February 17, 1865, in the Coleman house, just across the street from the telegraph office. General Beauregard had evacuated Columbia that morning in advance of General Sherman's Union Army approaching the capital city across Broad River. General Beauregard maintained his headquarters at Ridgeway until Sunday, February 19, when it was ascertained that Sherman would advance north rather than toward Charleston or Wilmington through Camden.

General Beauregard with his staff travelled from Columbia to Ridgeway by way of the "Common Road," which roughly paralleled the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad. After General Beauregard set up his headquarters in the BRICK HOUSE (now known as the CENTURY HOUSE), the first telegram that he sent from Ridgeway was to General Robert E. Lee in Richmond as follows: "Ridgeway, S. C., February 17, 1865, 9:30 P. M.

"Enemy having forced crossing of Saluda and Broad Rivers above Columbia, city had to be evacuated this morning. My forces are retiring to this place (Ridgeway). Everything possible shall be done to retard enemy's advance, but I cannot separate cavalry and infantry without fear of disaster, owing to the small number of latter, only 3,000 effectives. Moreover, having no supply trains, troops must move along railroads." Signed "G. T. Beauregard."

The next day, Saturday, Colonel Otey ordered 15,000 rations to be transported from Chesterville (now Chester) to Ridgeway. Lieutenant General Wade Hampton, chief of cavalry, remained near Columbia in an effort to delay Sherman's march north, and to offer such rear guard action for General Beauregard as might be feasible and possible. The popular South Carolina cavalryman, Wade Hampton, had been promoted only a few days before this to the rank of Lieutenant General by special order of President Jefferson Davis. General Hampton sent to General Beauregard at Ridgeway on February 18 a most important message, which, if put into action, might have altered the fast close of the War. This was General Hampton's famous plan of attack to bottle up Sherman's army between the swamps of the Wateree River and the banks of the Broad River, and with reinforcements from General Lee in Virginia to destroy the Union Army in Fairfield County. Beauregard did not consider his army strong enough to attempt such action, and did not execute Hampton's plans. There were only minor skirmishes between the armies after Sherman entered South Carolina, and his scorched earth policy was carried through with little hindrance.