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AEDANUS BURKE, NATHANAEL GREENE, ANTHONY WAYNE,
AND THE
BRITISH MERCHANTS OF CHARLESTON

George C. Rogers, Jr.

The American Revolution was not a neat, tidy struggle with the Patriots on one side and the British, Loyalists, and Tories on the other. The lines between the opposing forces continually changed. In South Carolina it seemed as though each man was for himself, changing sides as the tides of war demanded. This confusion has prevented anyone from telling the story of the Revolution in all of its complexity. Perhaps the story of the Revolution in South Carolina can never be told. Yet, if the historians would take one group at a time, telling in detail the story of each group, the history of the period might finally be pieced together.

The British merchants came and went during the Revolutionary period as the fortunes of war and business demanded. Before 1776 they had always been an integral part of the Charleston scene. After growing rich, they might remain in the province and become Carolinians, or they might return to England to establish a family there. In this pre-Revolutionary period one could not actually say that there was a British community in Charleston, distinct from the local inhabitants; there was only one community. This situation changed after the war began, because circumstances soon forced men to take sides. Some left of their own accord in 1775 and 1776, but the first sorting out was done after the passage of the act of allegiance in February 1777.¹ An oath had to be taken to support the new state or banishment would follow. During the spring and summer of 1777 a number of clergymen and government officials as well as merchants like John Tunno and John Champneys were forced into exile.²

Those who remained grew fat on the fruits of war-time commerce. As Sir Henry Clinton approached Charleston in March and April 1780, many merchants sought ways to bring their goods safely through the coming transfer of power. By signing an address of congratulation to Clinton for the capture of Charleston and to Cornwallis for the defeat of Gates at Camden, many former-Patriot merchants nimbly stepped

¹ See an "act establishing an oath of abjuration and allegiance" passed February 13, 1777, *Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, ed. Thomas Cooper, Columbia, 1836, I, 135-136.

² Josiah Smith's *Diary, 1780-1781*," annotated by Mabel L. Webber, this *Magazine*, XXXIV (1933), 198-199.

to the other side. These merchants were joined by some who had been banished in 1777 and, more importantly, by a fresh batch of merchants coming out for the first time to the colony to make their fortunes amid the heightened but risky commercial currents stirred by the war. There was much opportunity for profit between May 1780 and the evacuation of Charleston in December 1782. For two-and-a-half years these Charleston merchants imported the goods of war and exported the rice and indigo that could be seized in the colony.

After General Nathanael Greene fought the British at Eutaw Springs in September 1781, he moved his army into the lowcountry to invest the city of Charleston.³ For over a year he watched the British in the city, never leaving them much scope for maneuver. During this period of waiting Governor John Rutledge called a meeting of the legislature to assemble in January 1782 at Jacksonborough on the Edisto River. This was the time of reckoning, for the names of those in Charleston who had addressed Clinton and Cornwallis, who had petitioned for the establishment of a British militia, or who had too ardently served the British cause were marked down. Their property was to be confiscated or amerced; their persons banished.⁴

It is at this point—at the time of the Jacksonborough Assembly—that the story of Aedanus Burke impinges upon that of the British merchants. Burke was a unique figure on the Carolina landscape.⁵ He was an Irishman—some would say an eccentric Irishman—with strong views on British history. He was an ardent republican, who had fought in the continental army until 1778 when South Carolina had made him a judge.⁶ After the fall of Charleston his whereabouts are difficult to trace until he turns up to witness the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. He wrote Arthur Middleton from the battlefield:

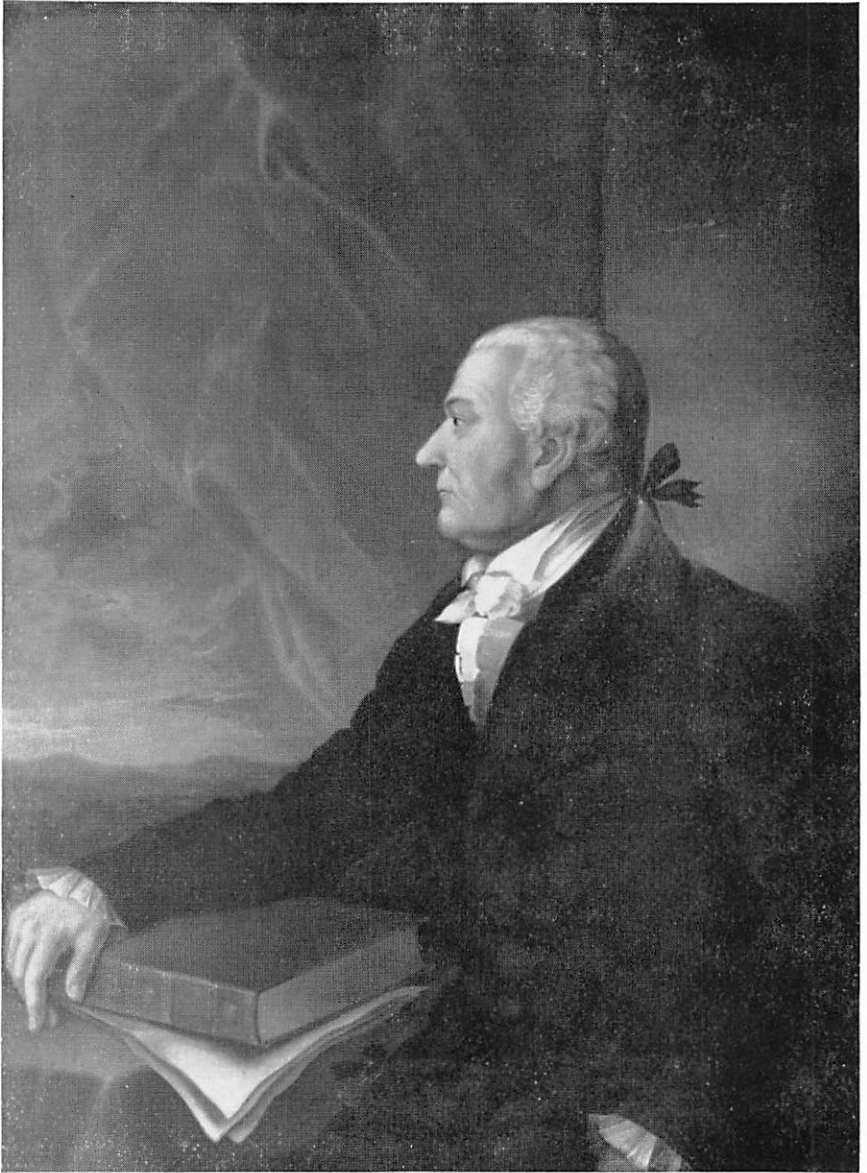
To see these very men who had once reduced us to their power, & treated us with cruelty and insult, I was prompted by a Love of Revenge natural to the mind of man and in my opinion, a very justifiable and useful senti-

³ Greene actually withdrew his army to the High Hills of the Santee after the Battle of Eutaw Springs but returned it to the lowcountry in December. Theodore Thayer, *Nathanael Greene, Strategist of the American Revolution*, New York, 1960, pp. 381-382, 387.

⁴ "Josiah Smith's Diary, 1780-1781," annotated by Mabel L. Webber, this *Magazine*, XXXIV (1933), 194-199.

⁵ The portrait of Burke is a large one which hangs in the Hibernian Hall, Charleston, S. C. It is an oil by Charles Fraser, a copy of a life portrait my James Earle. The Hibernian Society, which has given permission to have it reproduced here, paid \$100 for it in 1828.

⁶ Robert Lee Meriwether, "Aedanus Burke," *DAB*.



Courtesy the Hibernian Society, Charleston.

AEDANUS BURKE

ment in a publick war. But when I beheld them reduced from their former power & Consequence to their present miserable melancholy plight, I for a moment forgot their insolence, their depredations and cruelty to those unfortunate men who had from time to time fallen in their power. They marched thro' both Armies in a Slow pace, and to the Sound of Musick, not Military Marches, but of certain Airs, which had in them so peculiar a strain of melancholy, and which together with the appearance before me excited sentiments far different from those I expected to enjoy. One must be something more or less than man not to be Serious on this occasion. I detest the British Army, and despise from my Soul the mass of unfeeling men which compose its Officers, But their pride, insolence and insults, their conduct in general in their hour of success, compared with their present situation in which all ranks of them discover a condescension and humility bordering on that of a Spaniel; this, I say, is a good Lesson, & is one instance of the inconstancy of fortune, & of the strange Vicissitudes in the Affairs of this World.⁷

Burke, expecting to be full of revenge, found himself unable to be vindictive. In the quiet of his study he found rational and historical reasons to back up the natural change in feelings that occurred in him on the field of victory. A new nation could not be built upon a welter of diverse, bitter groups. And he also knew from his study of English history that the Restoration, after the bloody days of Cromwell, had succeeded to the extent that the victors had been forgiving. When he took his seat in the Jacksonborough Assembly, these were the thoughts that were uppermost in his mind.

By these thoughts he was moved to oppose actively the Jacksonborough program that was pushed through the Assembly by Governor Rutledge. It was the vindictiveness of the victors that he could not stomach — the putting down by each man of the names of his own enemies to swell the list of those whose property was to be confiscated or amerced. He did not object to the banishment of the Tory leaders, but those who were to remain should be forgiven. To do otherwise would be to create a faction that might work mischief in the future. Burke failed, however, in his opposition; the program was passed.⁸

During the spring of 1782 Burke withdrew with his law books to the plantation of Colonel William Skirving, keeping in touch neverthe-

⁷ The abbreviations of "with" and "which" have been written out. Burke to Middleton, October 16, 1781, from "Camp before York," "Correspondence of Hon. Arthur Middleton, Signer of the Declaration of Independence," annotated by Joseph W. Barnwell, this *Magazine*, XXVI (1925), 187.

⁸ Burke's views are revealed in his letters to Arthur Middleton, November 18, 1781; January 25, March 15, May 14, July 6, 1782, *ibid.*, pp. 188-206.

less with the headquarters of General Greene and with the new governor John Mathews.⁹ He used every excuse for not opening the state courts, for he knew under the circumstances that if the courts were open he might become as famous as the hanging Judge Jeffreys. He coveted no such reputation.

In the fall as the evacuation of Charleston became a certainty General Greene negotiated with General Alexander Leslie concerning the surrender of the town. Those British merchants who had come out to Charleston during the occupation and who had naturally not been listed by the Jacksonborough Assembly, as they were neither Loyalists nor Tories, negotiated separately. They asked if they might remain in Charleston after the British troops departed in order to clear up their business and collect debts due them. It was ironic that the new group of British merchants might stay, but that the group that had been long resident had to depart.¹⁰ Such was the confusion of groups in Charleston as General Leslie evacuated the city on December 14, and the army of General Greene marched into the city.

The chaos of 1783 in South Carolina was far greater than that of 1865. Society during years of peace tends to become rigid and stratified — with each person knowing his place. Society, when hit by war, and especially by revolution, crumbles into thousands of individuals, each becoming an island unto himself. Aedanus Burke wrote two pamphlets in 1783 addressed to the freemen of South Carolina. Both pamphlets contained the same theme: that, in putting this society back together again, care should be taken that there be no unsightly seams, no scars to divide this group from that, so that ultimately there would be one harmonious democratic-republican society.¹¹ For this over-arching

⁹ Burke to Middleton, May 14, 1782, *ibid.*, p. 197.

¹⁰ George C. Rogers, Jr., *Evolution of a Federalist: William Loughton Smith of Charleston (1758-1812)*, Columbia, 1962, pp. 99-101.

¹¹ Cassius [Aedanus Burke], *An address to the Freemen of the State of South-Carolina. Containing Political Observations on the following Subjects, viz. I. On the Citizens making a temporary Submission to the British Army, After the reduction of Charlestown in 1780. II. On Governor Rutledge's Proclamation of the 27th of September, 1781. III. On the Mode of Conducting the Election, for the Assembly at Jacksonborough. IV On the Exclusion Act, which cuts off the Citizens from the Rights of Election. V. On the Confiscation Act. VI. On the Amercement Act. VII. The Conclusion, with Remarks to prove the Necessity of an Amnesty, or Act of Oblivion*, Philadelphia, 1783. Cassius [Aedanus Burke], *Considerations on the Society or Order of Cincinnati; lately instituted by the Major-Generals, Brigadier-Generals, and Other Officers of the American Army. Proving that it creates a Race of Hereditary Patricians, or Nobility . . .*, Philadelphia, 1783.

reason he opposed the Jacksonborough program for it had marked out some for punishment, men who henceforth, having a grievance, would be set apart from the new society. He also by the end of the year opposed the formation of the Society of the Cincinnati, warning that it would divide the people into an hereditary aristocracy and the commonalty. It is in this context that he also began to oppose the easy terms which permitted those recent arrivals among the British merchants to remain in Charleston and to become citizens of the new state. 1783 saw a new influx of this breed. It was this last group with their fresh capitals who soon had many Carolinians in debt to them. As a creditor group they too were marked off from society. And, as they pressed for the reopening of the courts, Burke was as reluctant to let them pursue his fellow Carolinians, as he had been in 1782 to let the courts be used for the settling of personal vendettas.

One suspects Burke of having had a conspiracy view of history. Burke, as his letters and pamphlets written during the post-war decade reveal, saw three groups—those who had suffered confiscation and amercement, those who formed the new Society of the Cincinnati, and the returning British merchants. He saw these three groups merging into one conservative coalition to subvert the rights and privileges of the rank and file, those who had actually fought and won the war.

This is the background for an analysis of a pamphlet which was written in 1785 and published in 1786. The pamphlet was entitled: *A Few Salutory Hints, Pointing out the Policy and Consequences of admitting British Subjects to Engross our trade and become our Citizens. Addressed to those who either risked or lost their all in bringing about the Revolution.*¹² The burden of the argument contained in this short pamphlet is as follows: With the evacuation of Charleston the city was split into two factions, one contending to keep the British merchants, the other to ship them off. After that matter was decided, the British sent forth "shoals" or rather planted in Carolina "a standing army of merchants, factors, clerks, agents, and emissaries, who out-manoeuve, undersell, and frighten away the French and Dutch who came here, monopolized our trade, speculated on our necessities, and holding out every object of temptation, plunged us into a debt which their depredations a little before, and our wants and distresses joined to their subtilty now, seduced us to con-

¹² Evans lists two editions of this pamphlet, one printed in Charleston by Burd and Haswell in 1786 (Evans No. 19644) and one re-printed in New York by S. Kollock, corner of Wall and Water Streets in 1786 (Evans No. 19645). Charles Evans, *American Bibliography*, Chicago, 1912, VII (1786-1789), 25.

tract."¹³ They raked in the circulating coin, shipped it off, and when crops failed sold the Carolinians out.

The author then addressed the British merchants directly: "Is it true, that your meetings in this city, are not so much social parties, as conspiracies against the government, as far as your power goes? Can you deny, that you are not more merchants, than members and heads of a British faction, to sow discontent and promote the views of your ministry?"¹⁴ This threat seemed greater than any posed by Clinton or Cornwallis, for "there is a much surer way for the British regaining influence in America, than by fleets and armies. It is only employing a few millions in linens, woolens, silks, and haberdashery, feasting men in power, and tampering with men without, and by holding out every object to tempt and corrupt, involve in debt all orders of men, from the wealthy rice planter to the wagoner."¹⁵ The author felt that there was no need to struggle against the inevitable. "Mingling together of British and Americans in the present generation, will be like a mixture of oil and water; agitation will seemingly incorporate them, but after standing for a while, the fatter and richer part will get uppermost."¹⁶

In my book *Evolution of a Federalist* I used this pamphlet as proof that the British merchants had managed to survive the Revolutionary struggle, to reappear as a group in Charleston.¹⁷ At the time of the writing of my book I thought that Aedanus Burke might have been the author of this pamphlet, but I had no proof as it had been published anonymously. It is so recorded in the bibliographies of eighteenth-century works.¹⁸ However, during the summer of 1963, while working in the papers of General Nathanael Greene in the William L. Clements Library of the University of Michigan, I came across the following letter written by Burke to Greene, and dated November 27, 1785:

I have to tell you that I am the author of the *Salutary Hints*, except the whole of the 5th page, and part of the 6th down to the break: which truly and honestly belongs to you. I observe there is one whole sentence in page 4th every word of which is yours, and in the order you wrote it; and I must further do you justice; your judicious forceable observations on the subject enlarged and filed my mind so that in some sense you ought to father the whole of it, only that I have not done that justice to the subject which you well could bestow on it, if you took the trouble, and I speak

¹³ A *Few Salutary Hints* . . . , New York, Re-printed, 1786, p. 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁷ Rogers, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-111.

¹⁸ Evans, *op. cit.*, VII, 25.

without meaning any compliment. The production is hasty; and the pains it cost me to write it, was a trifle, compared with the difficulty I had to get it printed: so much afraid was every creature of offending the British. It put me in mind of a conspiracy whenever I spoke of it to any one— However as to myself, I would rather they should think me capable of working them mischief, than to have their friendship, which is brittle as their glass-ware.¹⁹

This, therefore, is proof that Aedanus Burke was the author, with an assist from General Greene.

General Nathanael Greene was having troubles with his creditors in 1785. He had used his own name in 1782 to shore up the credit of John Banks in order to secure a continuing supply of food and clothing for his near mutinous troops. Banks had gone bankrupt, and Greene was pressed for payments.²⁰ Greene had also overextended his credit in order to purchase slaves for the plantations in Georgia and South Carolina that those states had granted him for his services.²¹ Greene's personal fortune was at stake, and his principal creditors were British merchants. In the light of these problems it was natural for Greene to have poured out his own feelings concerning British creditors and their agents to such a receptive listener as Burke. Therefore, as Burke indicated in the above letter, some of the words in the pamphlet can be attributed to Greene.

This Greene-Burke relationship is paralleled by a similar story involving Burke and General Anthony Wayne, who had restored Georgia in somewhat the same manner as Greene had restored South Carolina. Wayne had been granted lands in Georgia by the grateful state.²² Wayne, as had Greene, borrowed money in order to purchase slaves to work his plantations. James and Edmund Penman and Adam Tunno, all three returning British merchants, had supplied funds temporarily on the prospect that Wayne would secure a large loan in Holland.²³ When the Dutch loan fell through, Wayne was at the mercy of his creditors who pressed hard. Wayne, being less cautious and more blustering than Greene, wrote and said things that made the Penmans and Tunno less willing to soften their demands. Burke, as a friend of Wayne, tried to find some form of accommodation. He suggested in a letter to Wayne of November 10, 1787,

¹⁹ Burke to Greene, November 27, 1785, Greene Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan (hereinafter WLCL).

²⁰ See Thayer, *op. cit.*, pp. 413f.

²¹ South Carolina gave Greene the plantations that had belonged to Governor Thomas Boone on the Edisto River; Georgia gave him Mulberry Grove. *Ibid.*, pp. 393, 400, 422.

²² Randolph C. Downes, "Anthony Wayne," *DAB*.

²³ For the Penmans and Tunno see Rogers, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

that he might bring his Georgia Negroes into South Carolina and sell them. As the South Carolina legislature had forbidden the importation of slaves, even from neighboring states, Wayne would have to petition the legislature, but Burke thought that such a petition would succeed.²⁴ But in the letter he goes on to discuss the plight of Wayne:

It impresses me with sincere sorrow to see you enthralled without my aid of helping you; my imagination cannot but carry me back to the many scenes and different grounds where your valor and zeal gained you glory in chastizing the insolence and defeating the schemes of a party, whose commercial arts are likely to affect what they could not by dint of arms—that six short years should see the same man fighting victoriously for the freedom of his country, triumphing in the downfall of its enemy, and behold him sinking under affliction, or peeping thro' the grates of his prison on the return of peace thro' the means of that enemy, this I say is a singular revolution in the wheel of fortune.²⁵

Anthony Wayne and John McQueen, who had been Wayne's agent in Europe, both tried to get Burke to write another pamphlet attacking the rapaciousness of the British creditors.²⁶ Burke did take up his pen to write another pamphlet, but this time he did not complete his work as the following letter to Wayne written on November 21, 1788, would indicate:

You must know that as soon as I rose the day after my arrival, I went to work on the subject you proposed, and made progress in it. But on looking over what I had done, however reconciled I was to your injunctions, I felt insuperall reluctance to have my name go abroad as author of a publication on a subject which had already divided, and would still divide wider, the people both in your and our state. It struck me that it would be stepping out at the head [of] a partizan Corp, whose aim (in the opinion of the other powerful party, the Creditors) was to level law and justice and civil contracts with the dust. You well know, this would be the most mild construction of theirs—and would inevitably bring down on my head the evacuations and filth of a thousand Yahoos at least. Had McQueen, not known of it, or you had not mentioned it to him, upon my word it would have given me pleasure to promote, or be instrumental in promoting a measure, that may save many a worthy Whig from ruin. But McQ. would

²⁴ "An ordinance to impose a penalty on any person who shall import into this state any Negroes, contrary to the instalment act," March 28, 1787, *Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, ed. David J. McCord, 1840, VII, 430.

²⁵ Burke to Wayne, November 10, 1787, Greene Papers, WLCL.

²⁶ John McQueen's father had been a Charleston merchant, trading with the Indians. Rogers, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-21.

be the first to tell who it was; and if you forbid him, he might as well hold a live-coal of fire in his mouth, as keep that or any other secret.²⁷

As Burke was at that very moment in November 1788 in the midst of a campaign to win a seat in the new national House of Representatives, he was more cautious than usual. Perhaps he also realized that his style was now unmistakable. Anonymity would be impossible.

Burke, however, did not give up the fight. He was the principal opponent of the ratification of the Constitution in South Carolina, and once a member of Congress he was a critic of the Hamiltonian program. Burke saw looming up behind both the Constitution and the program of Alexander Hamilton the gray eminences of the British merchants.²⁸

From the story of Aedanus Burke and his pamphlets, of Nathanael Greene and Anthony Wayne, it is apparent that the British merchants came through the Revolution as a group still active in South Carolina affairs. After the Revolution, they were, however, a distinct group—no longer easily blending with their Carolina counterparts. There is a great measure of truth in Burke's suspicions—that this group used its influence to support the ratification of the Constitution and the program of Alexander Hamilton. Burke fought on against the Hamiltonians and lived to see the victory of Jefferson in 1800. Burke died in 1802, but by his will he left a brace of pistols to Aaron Burr,²⁹ the vice president of the United States.

²⁷ Burke to Wayne, November 21, 1788, Greene Papers, WLCL.

²⁸ See Aedanus Burke to John Lamb, June 23, 1788, quoted in Rogers, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-157.

²⁹ Will of Aedanus Burke, Charleston County, XXVIII, Book A (1800-1807), pp. 285-287.

WASHINGTON ALLSTON: EXPATRIATE SOUTH CAROLINIAN

JOHN R. WELSH *

In the Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina is a copy of Washington Allston's *Monaldi: A Tale*, published at Boston in 1841, in which in a meticulous and precise handwriting is inscribed, "To Robert F. W. Allston, with the affectionate regards of the author." The author, who neglected to sign his name, was South Carolina born Washington Allston, a prominent early nineteenth-century painter and writer. Allston's influence in both the English and American romantic movements was substantial, though today scant attention is paid him and little is known about him, even by scholars of American arts and history.

Washington Allston was born November 5, 1779, in the Carolina lowcountry, probably at Brookgreen Plantation on the Waccamaw River, according to family tradition.¹ His birth date is definite; his father, William Allston, recorded it in the family Bible,² but neglected to mention the name of his plantation or the place of birth. His failure to do so has allowed the rise of varying speculations as to Allston's birth place. Edgar P. Richardson, Allston's only modern biographer, accepts family tradition and states that Allston was born at "Brook Green Domain on the Waccamaw River."³

It would indeed be gratifyingly romantic to state, as his biographers Flagg and Richardson do, that Allston was descended from a baronial English family and that his ancestor John Allston was a follower of the Duke of Monmouth who fled to Carolina after the unsuccessful rebellion of 1685.⁴ Baronial family or no, the first Allston in Carolina was John Alston, who came from London in 1682 as an apprentice to James Jones, a Charleston merchant, eventually became a merchant himself, married Mrs. Elizabeth Harris, a widow, and with her was the progenitor of the

* Dr. Welsh is a Professor of English at the University of South Carolina.

¹ See Susan Lowndes Allston, *Brookgreen, Waccamaw in the Carolina Low Country*, Charleston, 1935, p. 19; and *Rice Planter and Sportsman: The Recollections of J. Motte Alston, 1821-1909*, ed. Arney R. Childs, Columbia, 1953, p. 105.

² Allston, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

³ *Washington Allston: A Study of the Romantic Artist in America*, Chicago, 1948, p. 10. Allston's place of birth could have been the plantation of his mother's family, in view of the fact his father may have been away in service when Washington was born.

⁴ *Ibid.*; and Jared B. Flagg, *The Life and Letters of Washington Allston*, New York, 1892, p. 1.