

# Merchant took turn toward law

■ Robert Clendenen, amiable son of a merchant, grant,

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distinguished himself in politics.

From the 1750s until the American Revolution, most of the settlers in this area were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians who migrated from older Scotch-Irish settlements of Pennsylvania and western Virginia. A few Scotch-Irish came directly from northern Ireland.

Newcomers from the north of Ireland continued to come after the Revolution. The postwar immigrants tended to be single men hoping to make their fortunes. Some started as peddlers with packs on their backs, and a few like Robert Latta of Yorkville became prosperous merchants.

Some had learned the skill of weaving in Ireland and continued to weave in America.

The Clendenens of York District fit the pattern well. Irish-born Thomas Clendenen was a hard-working weaver of bedspreads. His son, Robert (1784-1830), had few educational advantages but used his quick intelligence, sound judgment and amiable personality to advance in life.

Robert Clendenen learned the trade of merchant by clerking in a store in North Carolina. Then he set up a store of his own in Union, S.C.

By the time he was 27, Clendenen had acquired enough money to switch careers. He wished to practice law, and at that time it was common to apprentice with a practicing lawyer. Clendenen studied with a Mr. Hooker, a Yorkville lawyer.



## Nearby history

LOUISE PETTUS

Next, Clendenen studied with Judge William Smith, a native of Lancaster's Waxhaws who practiced law in Yorkville before becoming a state judge and later a U.S. senator. Clendenen passed the bar in Charleston on Jan. 11, 1813.

About this time, either before or after his bar examination, Clendenen and Smith quarreled. No one knew the cause of the split, but they never reconciled their differences.

Clendenen practiced law in Yorkville and was immensely successful financially. In five years, he began buying land and from 1818 to 1827 purchased 2,147 acres in York district and sufficient slave labor to run the plantation. Clendenen's estate inventory showed 44 slaves.

Clendenen was York District's senator in Columbia from 1816 until 1829, and he served on numerous committees. He was also active in the state militia and once, in 1826, was candidate for brigadier general of the militia.

In 1819 Clendenen married Mary Ellen Myers, the oldest daughter of Col. David Myers, a wealthy man. The Clendenens had five children, four daughters and a son. Only two daughters, Nancy McNiece and Mary Elizabeth, survived to adulthood.

Because Robert Clendenen was distinguished enough to be one of the state's best lawyers, he merited an account in John Belton O'Neill's "Biographic Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina," published in 1859.

O'Neill described Clendenen's person as "... inclined to be portly, his face, round and florid, and his eyes intensely black."

In his style of oratory, O'Neill said Clendenen "had more care for ideas than for words."

O'Neill thought Clendenen's basis for success in life "was his integrity and stability of character."

As for political skill, Clendenen was "prudent and conservative."

As a lawyer, Clendenen was "cool, sagacious, and scrupulously exact."

O'Neill praised Clendenen as a "kind and indulgent protector of the younger members of the Bar."

Clendenen expanded his practice of law to include Union, Chester, Fairfield and Lancaster.

He loved to ride the circuit, "more to enjoy the conversation of his associates than for profit."

O'Neill found that Clendenen's great flaw (the only one mentioned) was being too "convivial."

Dr. Maurice Moore of Yorkville, who knew Clendenen personally, wrote more specifically, saying that Clendenen died early, "... his constitution worn out by his own abuse of it. How fatal has been the allurements of the liquor fiend to many of our prominent men."

Clendenen died in 1830 at age 46 and was buried in the graveyard of Bethesda Presbyterian Church. Some years later, his widow married Dr. Hemmingway of Yorkville and moved to Mississippi.

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