

## A CAROLINA HILL FAMILY

### Three Generations of Edgefield's Sons

by Richard Fischer

*Rich wants readers to know he would like to correspond with any of you interested in the families mentioned in this article and will gladly accept additional documentation. His address: Richard K. Fischer, 19 Hazelwood Circle, Ephrata, PA 17522*

The Hill family came to Edgefield District in the same way and for the same reasons as so many other pioneer families. They came down the "Wagon Road" from Virginia and North Carolina looking for cheap, tillable land. They suffered, yet the family bonds were strong and they were ever thankful to their Maker for all things. They sought like-tempered families with whom to worship in small, country churches around the District. The Hill family differed little from their contemporaries, having so recently removed the yoke of British bondage and this family left its mark in the struggle for American independence.

William Hill of Virginia married Susannah Smither, daughter of Thomas and Susannah Singleton Smither, in Caroline County, VA about 1736. They raised at least ten children in Caroline County, nine sons and one daughter. Some have speculated of two other possible sons, but records do not bear this out. William moved his family to the Yadkin River valley of North Carolina in the area known today as Surry and Stokes Counties and they prospered there. The time was about 1762 and the seeds of revolution were already being sown. In 1775, North Carolina was already forming a government body through whom to air their grievances against the British Parliament. William Hill, Sr. was elected as a delegate from Surry County to the Provincial Congress of North Carolina at Hillsborough. This body initiated actions that set the wheels in motion toward armed conflict with Britain. William Hill's signature was amongst those of the other patriots on documents that would condemn him for treason if he was captured. The Provincial Congress sent delegates to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia to create the independence agenda and to write the instrument of its declaration and thus our nation was led to war.

William Hill was not a soldier of the line due to his age but he watched sons ride out to join the cause. William Hill, Jr., who married Hannaniah Elizabeth Halbert, was commissioned a lieutenant in the Salisbury District and a member of the Committee of Safety for that district. His stirring speeches to the Whig patriots made him a marked man by the Tories. As regimental chaplain, he gave the benediction to the troops prior to the engagement against the army of Cornwallis at Guilford Courthouse. Robert Hill, who married Martha Halbert, rose through the ranks of North Carolina troops to become a Captain. Uel Hill married twice, Misses Hartsfield and Duvall, was a Major during the revolution, and like his brother William was a Baptist minister after the war. Daniel Hill, husband of Martha Hickman, served with General Nathanael Greene in his Carolina campaign. Joel Hill, who married Ann Watson, served part of his service under his brother, Captain Robert Hill. Joshua Hill, husband of Nancy Wyatt Collier was listed as a revolutionary pension applicant in S. C. Brothers Thomas (wife-Susannah Mosely), Jesse (wives - Mary Pittman, Elizabeth \_\_\_\_\_), and James (wife - Mary \_\_\_\_\_) may have served as well but incomplete records may not confirm this and they may not have applied for pensions. Elizabeth Hill, like two of her brothers, married a Halbert. William Halbert was a declared Whig and served as a lieutenant in the Henry County militia. Tradition has that there may have been sons John and Green Hill but they were not mentioned in William Hill, Sr.'s will drawn in 1777 and the return made in 1787. They may have been claimed by the revolution but we will probably never know. Both names appear in the next generation several times which may lend support to the tradition.

William Hill, Sr., of Surry, N C has been researched by many individuals for most of this century and yet his lineage remains controversial. Tradition, dating back to published lines in 1928 has his line of descent from Sion Hill, Jr. of Surry County, VA., Sion Hill, Sr. of Surry County, VA and Robert Hill of Isle of Wight County, VA who is first recorded there in 1642. No documentary evidence has surfaced to support this, but circumstantial details have given it some weight. Recently, documents found in the Alabama archives purport to say that William was the son of William Hill of Maryland who moved to Middlesex County, VA And whose family was documented in the parish records of Christ Church. These records do not, however, show a son named William.

Four of William's children made their homes in South Carolina. Elizabeth and her husband William Halbert settled in Anderson County. Uel Hill eventually settled there to be near his sister. Joshua Hill made his home and established a law practice in Abbeville, South Carolina, becoming a judge and fathering a



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United States senator. Jesse went a bit further south and settled in Edgefield District. We do not know what brought him to Edgefield but the fact that he stayed the rest of his life attests to the fact that he liked what he saw. He remained close to his brothers and sister in the state.

The first record of Jesse Hill in the District would seem to indicate his "newly arrived" status. Deed Book 12, September 3, 1795: John Burt to Jesse Hill for good will and in consideration of five shillings, sold two mares and working tools. Although the deed was titled Bill of Sale, in the oath it was called a Deed of Gift. The land would come later when in 1799 (Deed Book 17, page 548) Samuel Mays sold to Jesse Hill for the consideration of 93 pounds sterling, "all that Plantation or tract of land containing two hundred fifty acres more or less situate in Edgefield County on the waters of Stephen's Creek." Jesse bought additional land from Zacus Purcel in 1800. That same year he sold a parcel to Robert Brooks.

By this time we believe that Jesse had two daughters: Sarah (Sally) who married Thomas Garrett and Susannah who married William Coursey, and that he is married to his second wife, Mary Pittman (William and Elizabeth Pittman lived in the District and may have been her parents). Jesse and Mary had three sons: John, William P. and Joel Hill. William P. Hill was married to Susan Crews and later Martha \_\_\_ and he made his home in Greenwood. His was a well-known Baptist minister and founder of a Bible Society which he began in his home. He placed ads appealing to the faithful in the Edgefield Advertiser. He was partly raised by his uncle, Uel which may account for his tutelage in the ministry. Joel Hill married first Frances Carpenter and second Emily Martin. He eventually left the District and settled in Yalobusha County, Mississippi as did a number of former residents of Edgefield. John Hill was to become one of Edgefield's leading citizens and leaders. Jesse wrote his will in 1818 and it was probated in Edgefield in 1820. The executor was Thomas Garrett, his son-in-law, due to the young age of his three sons. The twenty pages of the estate papers spoke of his success as a planter.

John Hill made his mark in Edgefield in a number of ways. The Revolution had left the young country critical of the role of its citizen militia after so many accounts of their failure as a fighting unit. Militias sprang up everywhere and they received regular training. They served the additional role of providing protection against renegade Indians and in several wars, such as as the Mexican and Seminole Wars, were called up as entire units. Names such as The Edgefield Guards, The Edgefield Hussars, and Shaw's Creek Beat Company dotted the pages of the Advertiser, calling the men to drill. They were led by men that were elected to their positions and who possessed the leadership qualities necessary to mold a cohesive fighting unit. John Hill was elected Colonel of the Edgefield Light Infantry and he proudly carried this title for the rest of his days. It is even etched on his tombstone. Although he continued to farm his father's lands, his standing in the community required more. On January 3, 1844, the Edgefield Advertiser reports that John Hill intended to run for the office of Ordinary of the District in the election of January 8th and 9th. His opponents were William Simkins, William Moss and Wilson Coleman. The issue of January 16, 1844 announced that John Hill had won capturing 945 of the 2266 votes cast. Duties of the Ordinary were much the same as the Probate Judge of today and they decided matters involving the disposition of estate holdings. After his installation, John would sign his name John Hill, Esq., O. E. D.

John made Nancy Griffis his first wife. She was the daughter of Nicholas Griffis (son of John Griffis, shoemaker and pre-war resident of the District) and Judith Hardy (most probably the daughter of Benjamin Hardy and Polly Chandler, but not documented). They had four children: Joshua, who married Frances Evans (she was the daughter of Daniel Evans and Nancy Wrenn and both of her grandfathers, Batte Evans and Bates Wrenn, fought in the War); Jesse, who died in camp in Pueblo, Mexico during his service with the Palmetto Regiment in the Mexican War (see the Quill, Volume XIII, number 4); Joel P. Hill, who served with his brother in Mexico, and married Margaret Parr; and Sarah Ann Melinda Hill who died quite young. Nancy Griffis died two days before her young daughter in 1831. The following year John wed Elizabeth McPatrick Welch, widow of Edward Welch and the daughter of John and Elizabeth Sullivan McPatrick. John and Elizabeth had seven children: John Wesley Hill, who died unmarried at 32; William Holcomb Hill, who married Ann Lockley; Mary Ann Hill, wife of Virgil M. White; Susan Caroline Hill, wife of Lewis Bookout; Thomas Jefferson Hill who married Jane S. White; Margaret Elizabeth Hill never married; and Martha Anna Hill who died in infancy. John's wife Elizabeth died in 1849 and just over three months later, John married Sylvesta Wrenn Dunton (widow of the late Hollis Dunton, who had formerly been the husband of the late Eliza Laborde, daughter of Peter Laborde and sister of Nancy Wrenn above). John and Sylvesta had two sons, Virgil Marion Hill, who died in infancy, and Edward Young Hill, husband of Maude Grant of



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Paris, Texas. In the 1850 Federal Census of Edgefield, John, Sylvesta and the younger children are enumerated together and four Dunton boys, sons from her previous marriage, are together in the house next door. They were to stay with their mother when the family chose to leave.

It's not known why, but John, Sylvesta and family moved south after 1852 and settled in Marietta, Cobb County, Georgia. John left Edgefield reasonably well off as his property value listed in the 1850 census exceeded \$3000.00 at age 49. No local records exist in Cobb County for the period prior to the War Between the States as the courthouse in Marietta was burned by Sherman. It is also at this time that the story of this Hill family becomes poignant. Joshua Hill, John's oldest son had moved his wife Frances and his eight children to Webster Parish, Louisiana. Early in the war, Joshua enlisted in the 19th Louisiana Infantry at Minden, Louisiana and unit activities eventually brought him to the battlefield at Chickamauga. Joshua was wounded on day two of that battle and was evacuated to a field hospital in of all places, Marietta, Georgia. Joshua died of his wound within the month but the family was consoled by the fact that his father knew details of the battle which would indicate that he had spoken with his son and would have been there to comfort him as well. At that time all of the children of John and Nancy Griffis were gone, Joel having died in 1854. Six of the remaining nine survived beyond the war. John Hill died July 28, 1873, but sadly left an impoverished widow. Sylvesta filed court papers with the Cobb County court requesting an appraisal of her late husband's estate and the return on the appraisal amount to a paltry \$458.00. The court ordered that the estate be sold and the proceeds be given to Sylvesta for her sustenance. It is known that the home of John Hill was destroyed by the Northern army as a family story explains that photos of John and his second wife Elizabeth dating to the late 1840's were hidden in a tin box and buried beneath the house before it was destroyed. The photos as well as the Bible were saved. Bibles told much of the story. Besides John's Bible, the Bibles of Joshua and Frances Hill, ~~two generations of Griffis family Bibles beginning with Nicholas and Judith, the Daniel and Nancy Evans Bible are all extant and filled with valuable family data.~~ Local records in North and South Carolina, Georgia and Louisiana provided the rest.

In June, while finishing up some research at the Courtesy Center in Edgefield, I confirmed the story of another hero of Edgefield little known amongst so many others from this town. Colonel William B Travis of the Alamo accepted his fate as inevitable after learning that Colonel Fannin and his troops could not come to their aid in time. After the fall of the Alamo, forces of Santa Anna soon engaged these men under Colonel Fannin and after a day and a half battle the troops of Colonel Fannin surrendered with assurances of mercy. All but a handful were executed in spite of these promises and today the place-name of Goliad holds an equally solemn place in the hearts of all Texans. In that group was a young man named ~~Allen Bates Wrenn, brother of Nancy Wrenn and Sylvesta Wrenn, above who had enlisted in Alabama with the Huntsville Regulars to go to the aid of the Texans in their fight for independence against Mexico.~~ It's ironic that so many freedom-loving men from one small town in South Carolina would meet their ends in far-off Texas. During this same trip, I visited the Old Edgefield Pottery and spoke a bit with Stephen Ferrell who queried me as to the nature of my visit to Edgefield and I explained my genealogical quest told him of the surnames that I was searching locally. On mention of the name Wrenn, Stephen asked if it might be the family of Bates Wrenn. It was. He walked me to the showcase and to a large photograph of a jug with classic patterns of alkaline-glazed design which had recently been sold at auction for \$30,000.00. On the jug was written: Bates Wren, No. 6, 1851. It had been commissioned as a gift to Bates Wrenn, Jr. resident of the District on his fiftieth birthday and is such a fine example of the art form that the photo is included in the McKissick Museum's publication, *Crossroads of Clay.*

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### Finding Maiden Names:

In the lower left-hand corner of most deeds, you will find signatures of two to four witnesses. The first one is always from the husband's side. The next one is always from the wife's side. This is to protect her 1/3 dower right under the law. Nothing you will ever use will give greater clues to maiden names than witnesses to old deeds.

Also, in the 1880's and before it was traditional when the daughter married, as part of her dowry, the father either covered the loan or carried the note for his son-in-law. If you know the husband's name, but not the wife's maiden name and you can find out to whom they were making their mortgage payments, about 70% of the time it was her father.