

Dr. David Ramsay.

One of the most frequent and vivid methods of illustrating how, in this country of equal opportunity,

“Honor and Fame from no condition rise,”

is to portray and preserve the birthplace of eminent men. The log cabins and stone huts, in which Presidents and statesmen, poets and philosophers, scholars and scientists, have been born, are made familiar by painting, steel engraving, lithograph and postal card. It is the exception when pillared mansion or stately homestead is displayed as sheltering the cradle of genius. I want to call your attention to a picture—happily taken before the crumbling ruins of the edifice were swept forever from the landscape—which perpetuates the birthplace of probably the most celebrated man who was native to the soil of Lancaster county. Buchanan and Stevens, though fairly claimed by reason of their long representation of a local constituency, were not of local birth or ancestry. Reynolds, alone of our citizens of the first file in fame's roll, was both born and buried in his own county. Fulton and Ramsay, “to the manner born,” early escaped their native environment and achieved national fame outside this locality; but we have a right to cherish their mem-

ories; and the feeling which prompts the higher civilization to mark the birthplaces of eminent men and women ought to be emphasized by this Society.

Far down in Drumore (now East Drumore) township, near where it corners "with Little Britain and Fulton," just north of the road from Centreville to "Bethel," on one of the tributaries of the Conowingo creek, on the farm now owned by Leander Shoemaker, there stood, long before the American Revolution, a whitewashed stone hut, which must have been one of the first edifices in that early-settled section of the county. Its outlines can still be traced.

In that house were born, and out from under its lintels passed into the active world, three lads who were to become conspicuous in public affairs, and to win fame from the country, to be reflected upon the county of their birth.

David Ramsay.

The most conspicuous of them, David Ramsay, was born April 2, 1749. He and his brothers were sons of James Ramsay, an Irish immigrant farmer, who cherished high ideals of religion and education. Their mother, nee Jane Montgomery, died young, and her surviving husband sent his motherless boys to classical schools and college. David was graduated with distinction from Princeton College at the age of sixteen; he taught some time, and it was 1773 when he took his diploma with honor from the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania, winning the special commendation of the learned Dr. Rush. He went, with a considerable tide of Scotch Irish emigration, from lower Lancaster county, to South Carolina. He made Charleston his residence, and soon attained eminence as a physi-

cian and prolific writer on medical topics. He was an active spirit and ardent orator in Colonial affairs, and in the agitation which preceded the revolt from England. He was a surgeon in the army and for a time a captive of the British. He was President of the South Carolina Senate for seven years and a member of the Continental Congress from his adopted State. With all his professional labors and political activity he joined a keen and cultivated taste for history and literature, and, besides being the author of several medical text books and many contributions to the journals, his "History of the United States," "History of the Revolution" and "Life of Washington" are among the earliest standard works relating to these phases of our history as a nation. He was also the State historian of South Carolina. To a natural aptitude for contemporary historical work he added laborious research; and he shared most advantageously the friendship and confidence of such men as John Witherspoon, Benjamin Franklin and George Washington. It is related that a copy of Ramsay's "Washington" was the first book Abraham Lincoln ever owned, and he worked three days in a corn field to pay for it.

Dr. Ramsay's individual distinction was supplemented by two noteworthy marriages. The great Witherspoon was the father of his first wife, and thus he became a brother-in-law of that other famous native Lancaster countian, Rev. Dr. Samuel Stanhope Smith, of Pequea, who married Witherspoon's eldest daughter when he was President of Hampden-Sydney and before his call to Princeton. After the death of the first Mrs. Ramsay her bereaved husband married the brilliant daughter of Henry Laurens,

Minister both to England and France, who had accompanied her father to both Courts and made herself famous abroad by numerous acts of religious charity. It will be remembered that Ramsay met a violent death on the streets of Charleston, May 18, 1815, being shot with three bullets by a maniac named William Linnen, to whose mental unsoundness he had testified in Court.

It is gratifying to find that Dr. Ramsay never lost interest in his native county and its people, among whom there was a large family relationship. A generation after he had settled South he wrote the following letter to his cousin, James Patterson, 2d, of Little Britain township, to whose descendants I am indebted for making the first copy from the original manuscript in their possession:

Charleston S. C. August 21st 1805.

My Dear Cousins

I was made happy by information from the bearer of your success in life. Many years have elapsed since I had heard anything from the place of my nativity. I have now nine children, of all ages between twenty & three; my eldest son is graduated at New Jersey College, has spent his last winter and probably will the two next in Phila attending the medical lectures. He has always gone and returned by water. I long very much to revisit my native country, but am so entangled with business that I cannot leave Charleston. I often think of the friends of my youth & am particularly anxious to be informed of my relations. Will you be so good as to inform me by the bearer of the situation of & numbers & circumstances of all my cousins and their offspring, these and your family

and the daughters and grandchildren of our uncle Thomas and James Montgomery. I suppose the old people are no longer of this world. Is my cousin, Campbell, the daughter of my Uncle Thomas, alive and where does she live. How many children has she had and where are they. Three nephews of mine, the sons of my brother, William, followed me to Charleston. two of them are dead, having left twelve children in their two families. The other is alive with a family of seven children, all young. He was bred to Physic, but has turned cotton planter by which he makes crops of from four to six thousand dollars worth in the course of each year. What has become of the families of 'Thomas Porter, of the Moore's, Andrew McIntyre, of James Grier, who was my father's neighbor; W. M'Teer, I have heard, bought the plantation on which I was born. What is the plantation now worth. what does it produce. Is the house standing in which I was born. What new buildings are there erected on it. Have you any preacher at Chestnut Level or Little Britain; what is the state of religion among you. These and many other questions I would be glad to have answered by the return of the bearer. James Morrison and Robert King were two young men of my own standing. The former married the daughter of Rev. Sampson Smith, my tutor. I would be glad to hear of them. I see the name of General Steel sometimes in the newspapers; who are your high militia officers, Assemblymen and other leading characters.

"With much regard, I am your affectionate cousin,

"DAVID RAMSAY."

Nathaniel Ramsay.

But for the greater fame of the elder brother, probably it would be better known that Nathaniel Ramsay, born in this same house, May 1, 1751, also was graduated from Princeton, at the age of sixteen. He studied law and was admitted to the Bar of Cecil county, Md., March 14, 1771; the same year he married Margaret Jane Peale, sister of Charles Willson Peale, who was destined to become the great American portrait painter of the Revolutionary period. He was active in the Revolutionary cause during the political agitation preceding the outbreak of hostilities. He left his law office at Charlestown, Md., and a good practice to become a Captain in Colonel Smallwood's battalion, in 1776. He was commissioned Lieutenant Colonel of the Third Battalion of the Maryland Line in the Continental Army in 1777.

When Lee wavered at Monmouth, it was to Col. Nath. Ramsay that Washington turned with well-placed confidence. He was cut down, left for dead, captured and suffered long and much in confinement, being attended in prison by his faithful wife, who was also with him at Valley Forge. After the close of the war, Baltimore, where he had made his home, sent him as a delegate from Maryland to the Continental Congress of 1786-87; he was Federal Marshal, and, in recognition of his eminent public services in war and in peace, he was continued undisturbed as naval officer of the District of Maryland under five successive administrations. He died October 23, 1817.

William Ramsay.

Another brother (and older than the two more distinguished) was William Ramsay. Like the austere Presbyterian of his day, his father destined

the "firstling of the flock" for the holy ministry, and William Ramsay was "ordained and installed pastor of Fairfield Presbyterian Church, May 11, 1756."

It is to be regretted that the humble Drumore house in which were born these three eminent men—severally distinguished in what were then called the three different "learned professions"—has been obliterated and no permanent marker as yet designates its site. No fitter task could engage this Society than to erect, or to stimulate the erection of, enduring memorials at some of the more famous places in our great county, where men of distinction were born or lived, and where the more notable events have happened. I have reason to believe the present owner of the Ramsay farm would cooperate, and many citizens of the locality would contribute, to suitably mark and effectually preserve the site of this lowly cottage where the Ramsay brothers were born.

Historic Spots That Should Be Preserved.

In the same neighborhood, though in an adjoining township, Robert Fulton's birthplace still stands, but a bronze tablet or granite pillar should point out its significance to the passer-by. The noted "Riot House," in the Chester Valley, east of Christiana, has long since been a ruin, and every vestige of it is being obliterated rapidly. It ought to be fenced off and fitly marked. The land is, I believe, now the property, or under control of, the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. On the south side of its line, between Downingtown and Philadelphia, there is a little mound surrounded by an octagon of palings which I scarcely ever fail to

note as I pass by train. There nearly three-quarters of a century ago were buried a score and a-half of Irish immigrant laborers, who died of cholera that suddenly broke out in a railroad construction camp. Reverent hands and considerate care have ever since guarded and kept green their common grave. It is the touching tribute of a "soulless corporation" to the spirit of historical reverence. I have no doubt that if the suggestion was properly brought to its notice the same company would set apart forever, and even permanently commemorate that tenant house and lot in Sadsbury, where, sixty-five years ago, was fired the tragic shot of the fleeing bondsman, heard 'round the entire land, then torn by the conflict of Freedom and Slavery.

The Ramsays and Their Lancaster County Relations.

Since the foregoing was written and read, I have had additional evidence of the continuing interest of the Ramsays of South Carolina in their Lancaster county relatives. Following is a copy of a letter written almost fifty years ago—and yet nearly a-half-century after the one heretofore quoted—by Dr. David Ramsay's son to his kinsman, James P. Andrews. As it throws additional light on the relationship of all parties, I append it to the Ramsay sketch, as a valuable addition. The letter has also considerable inherent literary interest, showing how careless as to punctuation and "capitalization" in letter-writing many men of position and learning were two generations ago; what were then considered entirely pardonable omissions and slips would now be deemed inexcusable

slovenliness in a schoolboy and hopeless ignorance in a typewriter:

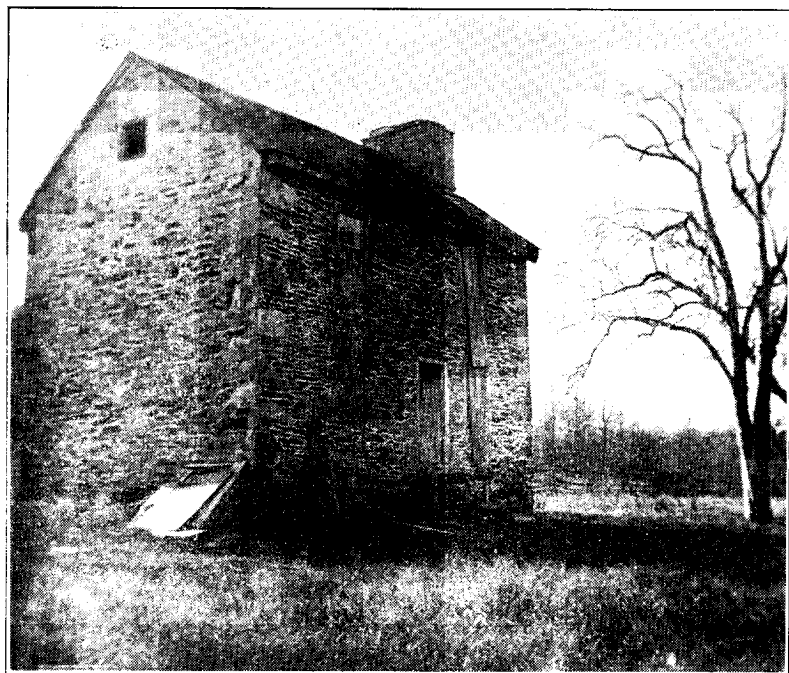
“Hot Springs Bath Co

“Virginia

“30 August, 1859

“James P Andrews Esq

“Dear Sir A letter of your dated July 25th 1859, to my deceased brother Dr James Ramsay has followed me to



ANOTHER VIEW OF RIOT HOUSE.

these mountains Permit me to take his place in your acquaintance and if possible to strengthen and improve that. your enquiries after the 'montgomery' line of my ancestry, I cannot well answer here, separated from our family record, except imperfectly

Jane Montgomery married James Ramsay and had 1) William deceased in 1771 and connected with the Elmers of New Jersey. his decendants in the 4th & 5th generation are scattered in the Southern States and only a few are personally known to me. 2) Nathaniel a colonel in the Revolution who had several children, of whom Ramsay McHenry is the only one I know. 3) David, a President of the American Congress & writer. all of his decedants are either dead or unmarried except myself, David his grandson & a cousin Mrs. Bellinger I am therefore great grandson of Mrs Jane (Montgomery) Ramsay. It is traditional with us that she was an Aunt or cousin of General Richard Montgomery. of this I cannot here either examine or offer the proofs. she was the niece of the Hon. John C Calhouns mother's father or rather first cousin to that statesman I have now given some identification of myself and what I can remember of my Great Grandmother's connexions. My brother Dr James Ramsay had and I as his sole brother & heir now have a card of Mrs. G Andrews Phila. 'Grandparents James & Letitia (Montgomery) Patterson.' My aunt Miss Catharine Ramsay an old lady unmarried will be in Phila on or after the ninth September She may be heard of or addressed through 'Paul T. Jones' of that place. I shall be in New York about the 16th of September. I expect to be there a week or two & to return through Phila to Charleston my residence where I practice as a Lawyer. I trust to commence an acquaintance or some of your family which I confident will ripen with further intercourse. Be kind enough to address me a line at New York about 16th Sept. my simple address thro' the general delivery will be sufficient.

and now my dear sir permit me to remain with kindest regards

“Yours Very Truly

“DAVID RAMSAY

“(Attorney at Law).”

The James P. Andrews to whom this letter was addressed was a member of one of the notable families in the “Lower End,” whose name is long time associated with the moral and material development of that section, and with that most picturesque and permanent structure spanning the Octoraro at one of its finest stretches of rippling streams and verdant meadows—“Andrews’ Bridge.”

The Andrews and Ramsays were inter-related with the Wilsons, Pattersons, Galbreaths, Russells, Calhouns, Gardiners and other foremost families of the Irish-Presbyterian people who settled Lower Lancaster county.

Mrs. John S. Stahr, of this city, her sisters, the Misses Andrews, and her brother, the late Prof. James P. Andrews, who long maintained a classical school at Union, Colerain township, were grandchildren of James P. Andrews’ brother; and “grandparents James and Letitia Montgomery Patterson”—referred to in this letter—were their forebears in the fourth or fifth degree of ascent.

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