

SOME INTERESTING DATA ON THE EARLIER PERRYS

Delivered by Frank B. Perry at the Perry family reunion at the McNair Hotel in Camilla Georgia on July 3, 1938, celebrating the 85th birthday (July 8, 1938) of his Grandmother, Mamie Spence Perry.

Here recently I have been doing a little research in the upper branches of our family tree and have uncovered some things that I think should prove interesting, and perhaps surprising, to most of us.

My great grandfather, Joshua Perry, lies buried in Calhoun county at Salem church about one mile from Edison. The inscription on his tombstone shows that he was born in Warren county Georgia in 1805. We have always known or believed that the original Perrys in Georgia settled there and an examination of our family tree, which was obtained from our late Cousin Ella Perry of Dawson, confirms this fact. I set about trying to find some historical support and, perhaps, some elaboration of our meager data. Now Joshua's father was named John Perry (I am taking this information from our family tree). We can not definitely say where he was born, but undoubtedly he died in Warren county for his father, who was Burrell Perry, a Lieutenant in the Revolutionary war, died there, according to our family tree. It is about John Perry, my grandfather's grandfather, that I wish to speak.

In volume 10, page 692, of "The Colonial Records of Georgia, there is found a copy of a petition dated Dec. 9, 1768 by Joseph Maddock and Jonathan Sell, two of people called Quakers on behalf of themselves and friends lately come from North Carolina. Quakers spoke of themselves as "friends". This petition asked for a grant of 40,000 acres which was given in what was then Richmond county. 1000 acres of this land were surveyed and laid out as the township of Wrightsboro after Governor Wright who then headed the colony of Georgia. I will tell you more about Wrightsboro later. Among the signers of this petition was one John Perry, who was granted 250 acres. That he was my great great grandfather and that he was a Quaker, as were all of the early Perrys, I will undertake to show.

Among the single men signing this petition were Robert and Holland Middleton, Jr. I mention them because we know that we have Middleton forefathers and these could have been among them. In fact, all of the earliest colonists of Georgia settled in a rather narrow area extending from a point near and above Augusta to Darien. This grant was on the outposts. Our Spence forefathers settled in Burke county. I have given my grandmother, in whose honor we have gathered, a copy of the Spence genealogy which, however, contains little more than the barest details. This was taken from a biography of her brother and my great uncle, Judge W. N. Spence, which I found in a volume at the Carnegie library in Atlanta containing short biographies of noted Georgians. My wife's earliest Key ancestor settled in Jefferson county. Another signer was Joel Cloud, whose daughter married Bird Perry, brother of Joshua Perry, my father's grandfather. Joel's wife died in 1832 and was buried in Wrightsboro as disclosed in the family tree. Still another signer was one Richard Bird. Now we know that John's father, Burrell Perry, whom I have already mentioned, married a Bird. This is revealed in our family tree. From a series of volumes known as "Ancestral Records and Portraits" I find

This information on the Birds. The first Bird in this country was William, born in England in 1702. He settled in Berks county Pennsylvania and started the first iron business in this country in 1742. He laid out the town of Birdsboro, about 40 miles Northwest of Philadelphia, and his home is still standing. He married Brigetta Huling and died in 1762. He had 6 children, all of whose names appear in our family tree: Thomas Bird; Mrs. James Wilson; Mrs. George Ross, whose husband was a signer of the "Declaration of Independence"; Mark Bird, a Revolutionary war Colonel who married the sister of George Ross; William Bird, Jr. who was also an officer in the Revolution; and Mary Bird who married our ancestor Burrell Perry. William Bird, Jr., moved to Virginia where Burrell's father, Joseph Perry, was living, having removed from Rhode Island. Later, in 1796, William, Jr. moved to Warren county, Georgia, no doubt being influenced by the presence of his kinsmen already there. Following in his father's footsteps, he established the first iron works in Georgia. His home was called "The Aviary" at the "shoals of the Ogeechee". He had 12 children whom we will not discuss.

Just at this point an explanation should be made of the geographical situation. The grant made to the Quakers was in Richmond county. When Columbia county was created from Richmond in 1790 the Quaker settlement lay in Columbia. In 1793 Warren county was created from Columbia and Wilkes and most of the grant lay then in Warren. In 1870 McDuffie county was created largely from Warren so that the original grant now lies in 3 counties -- Warren, Columbia and McDuffie. Bird Perry, Joshua's brother and cousin Ella's forefather -- it was she, you know, who had the family tree compiled -- lies buried in the Columbia county portion.

All these facts dovetail and fit my theory so exactly that it really should be evidence enough to convince the most skeptical. But I still had a bit of uneasiness about that Quaker angle. It was such a complete surprise. You know the Quakers were very strict and orthodox in their religious beliefs, in fact, they suffered considerable persecution because of their faith, and I just couldn't find hardly any indication of such ancestry among our younger generation. So I decided to go even further back -- back to the original Perry himself, Edward Perry, as shown in our family tree.

Most of the information concerning him which I now give comes from biographies of Oliver Hazard and Matthew Calbraith Perry, brothers, and noted American Commodores. During their time this was the highest command to be attained in our navy. Oliver Hazard Perry won world wide renown by his defeat of the British on Lake Erie. Students of history affirm the fact that this victory insured and signaled the defeat of England in the war of 1812. His name is imperishably enshrined in the memory of this nation. Matthew Calbraith Perry is equally renowned for opening up Japan to world trade. How he succeeded in this long and hazardous undertaking makes interesting reading and is one of the most noteworthy and brilliant achievements in our annals. There is a monument in his memory erected by the Japanese in Japan where he was deeply admired and respected. It is agreed by all historians that the Perry name is the greatest and most illustrious in our navy. A list of the Perrys and their descendants who have served this country honorably and well on land and sea, in peace and war, would be a long one and would reveal many of our most distinguished heroes.

But to get back to Edward Perry who was their ancestor as well as ours. He was born in Devonshire England and settled in 1639 at Sandwich Massachusetts. And note this - he was a pronounced Quaker and fled England to escape persecution. Sandwich was a favorite resort for Quakers and was a colony of Plymouth Rock. He married Mary Freeman, whose father was Lt. Governor of the colony. He refused to marry by any other than the Quaker ceremony, which was not recognized by Massachusetts, and throughout his life he stubbornly refused any other ritual, although constantly tried and heavily fined by the colony officials. He was one of the earliest New England writers, all of his works being religious and mostly controversial. Many of our present day traits may be ascribed to this old battle -- I refer particularly to "bull-headedness". He died about 1695, well liked by his fellow townsmen and a man of property. He had 9 children. One daughter named Rest married Jacob Mott and their daughter, Mary, married The Quaker preacher, Nathaniel Greene, whose son was General Greene of Revolutionary fame. Two of Edward's sons, Samuel, from whom we are descended, and Benjamin, moved to Rhode Island in 1702 and purchased land in Kingston. This property is now known as the "Perry Memorial" and was the ancestral home of all the Perrys who always came back for the birth of their children. A visit to the "Perry Memorial" at South Kingston should prove most interesting. All of our early New England ancestors are buried there and they were all Quakers down to Captain Christopher Raymond Perry, father of Oliver Hazard and Matthew Calbraith. They were Episcopals. Christopher Raymond's father, Judge Freeman Perry, a distinguished man in Rhode Island, was a most devout Quaker and lived to a ripe old age, dying shortly after receiving the news of his grandson's great victory on Lake Erie. You will remember that Commodore Perry immortalized the lines: "We have met the enemy and they are ours".

Now I want to tell you something about Wrightsboro which was the town founded by the Quakers in Georgia. This is taken from a book by Lucien Lamar Knight entitled "Georgia's Landmarks, Memorials and Legends", published in 1913.

"Some 8 miles to the North of Thompson in McDuffie county may be found the moss-covered remnants of an old town which has played an important role in Georgia's annals -- the historic old town of Wrightsboro. During the Revolutionary period, when the state was overrun by Tories and Redcoats, tradition has it that the law-making power of the state took refuge at one time in Wrightsboro. To-day the quaint old town presents a typical picture of Goldsmith's "Deserted Village". But more than one page of Georgia's history has been written among the ruins of this deserted village. At the outbreak of the Revolution the Quaker colony at Wrightsboro embraced some 200 hundred families. The late St. Elmo Massengale, whose ancestors were pioneer settlers of Wrightsboro, speaks thus of a recent village to the old town. 'The little place is almost deserted. Some few of the old homes are left, but they are gray with age, forlorn and desolate. I failed to find the old house which was used as the State Capitol, but it survived for more than a century, one of the most conspicuous landmarks of the village. It was a treat to wander among the old ruins, with each of which there was associated some precious bit of romance, some legend of the old days, full of the spice of historic interest. I could almost fancy myself back in the Wrightsboro of a 100 years ago, wandering among trim box-hedges and quaint gardens of roses and hollyhocks -- watching time flit by on ancient sundials. I seemed to be once more in the company of gay belles, patched and powdered and dressed in brocaded gowns and picturesque hats, and gallant beaux with silver snuff-boxes and knee buckles and gracious ways. The

old Seay home where many a stately minuet had been danced was only an old ruin, haunted by memories -- but to me these memories were sweet and fragrant like the breath of violets."

The little church in which the Quakers worshiped still stands in Wrightsboro (at least it did in 1913) surrounded by tall dark cedars. Equipped with highback pews, and long narrow windows, it represents a style of architecture severely simple but characteristic of the pious sect whose weakness was not for outward show. Yellow with age, the tombstones here cluster thick in God's acre. Fragments alone remain of some; while over most of them weeds have grown, and into the deep cut epitaphs have crept the green moss. It should be worth a visit to Wrightsboro if only to wander among the grim memorials of the little church-yard, where --

"Each in his narrow cell forever laid

The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

There are doubtless a number of patriots of the first war buried there. When the time came for fighting, the Quakers were not laggard. In the neighborhood of Wrightsboro lived Col. William Candler, whose wife was a Quaker preacher. This Candler was the founder of the noted Candler family of this state. One of Col. Candler's daughters, Mary, married Joel Perry, Bird's son. They removed to Early county where their descendants still live. They were among the earliest settlers. Joel wrote a history of Early county which is the oldest county in Southwest Georgia, Mitchell county once having been a part of it.

In closing I want to say that it has been written and often noted concerning the Perrys, from the earliest times, that they were a clannish family -- sticking to one another through thick and thin -- in truth, it has been said and written that Death was the only champion that ever successfully resisted their fraternity. May we of our generation live to emulate our forefathers, both ancient and modern.