

THE TIMES DISPATCH

May 8, 1904

GENEALOGICAL COLUMN

The Houston Family Again.

Editor Genealogical Column of Times-Dispatch:

Dear Sir,—In the record of the Houston family in the Times-Dispatch of April 24th, the rise of the family is given as from Sir William Houston, who was born in 1766, and married in 1803. It is further said, that his grandson, Sir George, of Blackadder, married in 1847, to Euphemia, the daughter of Sir James Boswell, the biographer of Dr. Samuel Johnson. Boswell says he was born in 1740, and married in 1759. Dr. Johnson writing to him, August 4, 1771, says: "Make my compliments to Miss Veronica. The rest are too young for ceremony." Veronica was evidently the oldest. If Euphemia was one of the "rest," she was more than 70 when she was married in 1847. If she was born at a much later period, say as late as 1790, which is entirely improbable, she would have been 57, when she was married in 1847.

time Samuel Houston, son or grandson of the emigrant is said to have been born.

The account under consideration is confined principally to the one descendant, and omits entirely his relations in Rockbridge, mentioning only one other Houston, my young friend R. H. or "Harry" Houston, of the Hampton Monitor, who, as I shall show, is descended from another Samuel Houston, who lived near the Natural Bridge, in the southern part of Rockbridge county. In what follows I endeavor to give some account of the two branches of the Houston's of Rockbridge, as far as my knowledge goes. As the Houston's appear in Rockbridge before 1733, when Gen. Samuel Houston was born, the "emigrant" must have antedated Sir William, their alleged ancestor, born in 1766, and married in 1803, as well as his grandson, as already shown, who was married to Euphenia Boswell in 1847. Another remarkable fact, in this confusion of dates, is, that Sir William was created a baronet in 1536, when he was 70 years old, there must have been some mention of Sir William's family, who "emigrated."

Leaving the question, as to the "emigrant," "from whom the family descended in England," I mention a tradition which contains a reference to the Coat of Arms, furnished by your informant. It is said that one of the family was a courier in a battle in the olden time, in Scotland, and during the conflict of arms, carried a message under difficult circumstances with so much promptness that his commander, being highly pleased, secured the emblem in which appeared the reindeer and the greyhound, and the words, "on time." A copy of this relic was in the possession of Mrs. Janetta Gilmore, a daughter of Rev. Samuel Houston, and is, I presume, still in the possession of some of the family. Every one who knows the Houston's, will testify, that the motto, or the quality that earned it at first, has produced an impression that clings to the family by heredity. Punctuality is a characteristic of the generation always and everywhere.

As the Houston's who settled in the northern part of the country, or at least, north of Lexington, I am not accurately informed. Gen. Sam Houston, as shown by your correspondent, was of that family. I have never before heard that he taught a "grammar school" near the Natural Bridge. This may have been, or there may have been a mistake, confounding him with Rev. Samuel Houston whose celebrated Academy was in that vicinity.

As to the near relatives of Gen. Sam Houston, who remained in Rockbridge after he left for Tennessee with his mother, after the death of his father, about 1820. I have the following information: Major Finley Houston, of Lexington, Va., long in charge of the commissary of the Virginia Military Institute, and his brother Wm. G. Houston, of Fairfield, in the same county, are the sons of George W. Houston, deceased, of Fairfield, who was a second cousin of Gen. Sam Houston, of Tennessee. Judge Samuel Houston Letcher is a grandson of Mrs. William Letcher, of Lexington, whose maiden name was Houston, and who was a first cousin of Gen. Sam Houston.

Of the Houstons, who resided in the neighborhood of the Natural Bridge, the first generation consisted of two brothers, Samuel and Matthew.

The Rev. Samuel Houston, was pastor of the High Bridge Presbyterian Church, two and a half miles southwest of the Natural Bridge, for about fifty years from the time of the Revolutionary War, when it was organized till some years before his death in 1876. He was a soldier in that war, and was in the battle of Guilford Courthouse. His diary embracing the whole period of his military service is preserved and is printed in Toole's Sketches of Virginia, Second Series, with many interesting particulars of his long and useful life. He was probably the author of the Constitution of the

State of Franklin, which its promoters proposed to form out of a part of South-western Virginia and Tennessee. This Constitution contained a more distinct recognition of the Christian religion; than that of the United States. Besides his pastoral work at High Bridge, Mr. Houston supplied, previous to 1820, Falling Spring Church, seven or eight miles from his residence, and perhaps, sometimes, Oxford Church, about the same distance over a mountain. At the same time, besides the care of a large family; he taught a school, the Rural Valley Academy. He had scholars from distant places, who boarded with him; some of his pupils became eminent men. Young James H. Piper, afterwards State Senator Piper, of Wythe county, Va., was one of his scholars; and while at his school performed his celebrated ascent on the east wall of the Natural Bridge, climbing on small projecting rocks till he reached a chasm or fissure, out of which he walked to the ground above.

Elisha Burritt's absurd fiction represents that he climbed up the smooth wall on the west side, cutting holes in the solid granite with his pocket knife, until he was high up in the arch, and was then hauled up by a rope let down from the top. Mr. Burritt told this story with thrilling effect in his lectures, and it was printed in one or more school readers, but the daring youth might have worked to this day and worn out all the pocket-knives in the land and would not have cut one hole, especially when he had nothing to rest upon or hold by.

What he did do showed most remarkable courage and nerve, as any one may see. The true account was published in the New York Knickerbocker: It was written by Mr. William A. Caruthers, a fellow student who witnessed the performance. It may be found in Howe's History of Virginia, in the history of Rockbridge county. It is said that Mr. Piper never would speak of this adventure, so fearful were his impressions of the perilous experience. Rev. Samuel Houston's tombstone at High Bridge Church contains an epitome of his life and labors; as patriot, soldier, teacher and minister of the Gospel. It may be found in Foot's sketches. Hon. James G. Blaine visited the Natural Bridge during my residence in that vicinity. He came to the cemetery at High Bridge Church, seeking information of Gen. Sam Houston, with whose history as Congressman and in Texas he was familiar; thus showing that the distinction between the two Samuel Houston's is not generally known.

Samuel Houston's eldest son was Samuel Rutherford Houston: he was a minister of the Gospel. About the year 1835 he and Rev. W. Leyburn, of Bedford county, Va., established a mission in Greece. After a few years it was broken up by the government, and they were forced to leave the country, but not before they had begun the training of M. D. Kalapothake, who was afterwards brought to this country by their efforts, and educated as a minister and physician, and went back as a missionary of the Southern Presbyterians, to his native country, where he still lives and labors in the service of the American Bible Society. From Greece Mr. Houston and Mr. Leyburn went to Smyrna, where was born the Rev. Rutherford R. Houston, now and for many years a minister of the Gospel in Botetourt county, Va., and father of Mr. R. H. Houston, of the Hampton Monitor.

From Smyrna his parents went to Cairo in Egypt, where his mother died and was buried.

Rev. S. R. Houston returned to this country and was pastor in Monroe county, W. Va., and a leading man in the Synod of Virginia until his death at an advance age. Rev. George W. Leyburn labored in Bedford, but in his old age, joined his son, Rev. George L. Leyburn, now of Missouri, at a mission in Alexandria (where the Apostle Paul preached), and there died and was buried. Rev. Rutherford R. Houston's children, besides the one already mentioned, are Mrs. William McMiller, of Charlotte county Va.; Mrs. Dr. Plecker, of Hampton, Va.; Mrs. B. C. Patterson, medical missionary, Enchuse, China, wife of Rev. B. C. Patterson; Mrs. Hall, wife of Rev. S. A. Hall, of Tazewell, Va.; Mrs. Spearard, wife of the member of the House of Delegates from Craig county, Va., besides four single daughters.

Rev. Samuel Rutherford Houston's first wife, who died in Smyrna, was of the Rowland family of Rockbridge. After his return to this country he was married to a member of the Paxton family. Of this marriage, are Judge W. P. Houston, of Lexington, Va.; Mr. Adqu Houston, lawyer, of Monroe county, W. Va., and another son.

Of their several sisters, Miss Janet is a missionary in Cuba, as is also Miss Edith Houston, daughter of Judge W. P. Houston. Another of Judge Houston's sisters has been in the missionary field.

Rev. Samuel Houston had, besides Samuel Rutherford Houston, another son, John D. Houston, who resided at the old home, "Rural Valley." He was married first to a daughter of Rev. S. B.

Wilson of Union Theological Seminary at Hampton-Sidney, and second, to a Miss Steel, of West Virginia. He was the father of a large family. One of his sons, Rev. J. L. D. Houston is a Presbyterian minister at Dodd City, Arkansas. Time would fail to tell of all the descendants of these families deceased or living in Rockbridge, but noted everywhere for useful Christian lives, intelligence and public spirit.

Of the daughters of Sam Houston, besides one already named, we can only mention Mrs. Maria Walkup, mother of Rev. Joseph A. Walkup, lately deceased, who was the father of Professor George Walkup, of the University of South Carolina.

Matthew Houston, the brother of Samuel Houston, of High Bridge, was a merchant, and a ruling elder in that church. He was the father of Dr. David Houston, of whose thirteen children, the only surviving one, is the only daughter, Mrs. Trevillian, wife of Captain Charles Trevillian, of Williamsburg. Several of his sons were gallant soldiers in the Confederate war; the last of them that died was Judge Thomas D. Houston, of Charleston, W. Va. Dr. Hale Houston, of Wheeling, W. Va., was a son of Matthew Houston. He was the father of Rev. W. W. Houston, deceased, formerly pastor at Salem, Va., and of Rev. Dr. Matthew Hale Houston, still living, who was a missionary in China and afterwards secretary of the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions of the Southern Presbyterian Church. Another son of Matthew Houston was Andrew Houston, deceased, whose surviving family are well known residents near Blacksburg, Va. Rev. Dr. Samuel Rutherford Houston prepared and published, after much correspondence and travel, a history of the Houston family, tracing its connections all over the United States; and showing in wide and diversified cognate family, an extensive influence in the social commercial, political and religious history of the country.

P. B. PRICE.

No. 917 East Leigh Street, Richmond, Va.

NOTES ON THE HOUSTON FAMILY.

General Sam Houston was born near Timber Ridge Church, six miles north-east of Lexington, in a house long occupied by Rev. Horatio Thompson, of the Associate Reformed Church.

William A. Caruthers, who witnessed James H. Pipe's ascent of the east wall of the Natural Bridge and published the true account of it, to which reference has been made, was the author of "The Knights of the Golden Horseshoe" and of "The Virginia Cavaliers." The writer of the article in The Times-Dispatch of the 24th, after saying that Sam Houston's mother and her children removed to Tennessee "about 1826, after the death of their father," says that Sam Houston entered the army under General Jackson, in the war with the Indians in 1813. Why the later of these dates is put first does not appear, but if he entered the army in 1813, when he was only twenty, he must have gone to Tennessee before his father's death and before his mother went. "He then," says the writer, etc., after his military service, studied law, and in 1823 was elected to Congress.

This is inconsistent with the belief that he studied law in Lexington. Howe says he studied law in Nashville.

On examining Mr. Caruthers's account of James H. Piper's ascent of the Natural Bridge, I find that most of the party, including Mr. Piper, were students of Washington College at Lexington, fourteen miles distant. These were Mr. Piper, Mr. Caruthers, William Bersby and William Wallace. "We were joined," says Mr. Caruthers, "by Robert P. of Amherst, then a pupil of Rev. Samuel Houston's grammar school in the immediate vicinity." He says "It was in the summer of 1818."

The writer of the article of the 24th April took his data and what facts could be gathered from Howe's History of Virginia, American Biography of the Nineteenth Century, The Educator, and other standard works. He solicited information from a descendant of the family, but could get none. Whatever "inconsistencies" our reverend correspondent finds is to be regretted, but are dates as given by other authors.

E. C. M.
