

Springfield Plantation by Leize Palmer Gaillard

Provided by David Rutledge April 2024

The story of a house is necessarily the story of its builder, so the beginning must be about my grandfather, Joseph Palmer; or perhaps it would be better to go even farther back and put together all I know of our Palmer forefathers. The earliest record we have is of a Thomas Palmer, an English emigrant who came presumably to Virginia. His wife was Sarah Saunders, daughter of Lambert Saunders, who died in 1721. Where Thomas and Sarah Palmer lived in South Carolina we do not know, but they had four children: (1) David, (2) Joseph, (3) Elizabeth, (4) John. David died unmarried. Joseph left a daughter who married Peter Sinkler. Elizabeth married twice, first, Benjamin Walker, and after his death, Charles Richebourg, by whom she had two daughters, Elizabeth and Catherine and one son. John married Mariane Gendron, daughter of John Gendron and Elizabeth Mazyck. The children of Mariane Gendron and John Palmer were three sons: (1) John, (2) Peter, (3) Thomas, who married (1st) Elizabeth Richebourg; (2nd) Amelia Jerman; (3rd) Harriet Jerman. John married Anne Cahusac and had four children : Anne, John, Joseph and Mariane Gendron. Anne Palmer married first O'Neill Gough Stevens, and after his death Captain Peter Gaillard of The Rocks. John Palmer married Mary Jerman, and Joseph Palmer married Elizabeth Catherine Porcher, daughter of Peter Porcher of Peru Plantation and his wife Elizabeth Marion. This Joseph was the builder of Springfield. In his (Joseph's) father's account book (John Palmer, Jr.) , I find this item:

**"On the 15th of January, 1787 moved the following
named Negroes thirty-nine in number, to my Plantation in
St. John's Parish, bought of Mr. Isaac Couturier which I
have named Springfield."**

On the opposite page is a list of negroes returned for taxation in 1786-39 men, 30 boys, 38 women, and 19 girls, followed by a list of those born up to the year 1793. Another item states that "Francis Benoist began to oversee at my Springfield Plantation, Feb. 1787." Quoting from John Palmer's will, written by him on the second day of June, 1811, and certified by James D. Mitchell, Ordinary, at the Ordinary's office, Charleston District, 7th January, 1811:

**"I give and bequeath to my son, Joseph Palmer all my
lands in St. John's Parish, Berkeley County, which I
purchased from Mr. Isaac Couturier and Thomas Palmer.
Also a body of River Swamp in St. Mark's Parish granted
to Benjamin Farrar;-also two tracts of land in St.
Stephen's Parish, one tract River Swamp, the other**

Pineland-500 acres on Murray's road-also to Joseph and his sister, Mariane G. Porcher a tract called Margarette Swamp-from which they could get fire wood for their homes in Pineville."

To Joseph were also bequeathed forty-five Negro slaves. From Joseph Palmer's own account book, his tax returns for 1817 were:

**4104 acres of land in St. John's Parish;
2900 acres of land in St. Stephen's Parish;
2438 acres of land in St. Mark's Parish, Sumter District;
and 215 Negroes.**

The following are quotations from Joseph Palmer's account book:

"Mr. Champlin commenced on Monday October the 20th, 1817, to build a dwelling house for me 46 feet by 40 feet with a wing at each end 22 x 16 feet at \$60 Per Month. The framing of the house was begun Oct. 21 and finished the 20th of November; finished raising November 26th."

It is quite interesting to note the workmen hired from different people, and price paid for work.

"Mr. Francis Peyre's Bricklayer, William, began to work on the 20th of October 1817-at 50 cents per day. Francis Marion Jr's man Dick began work on September 15. Thomas Cordes Jr's Bricklayer Paul, began work for me, Tuesday, 10th March 1818 at \$20 Per Month. Major Samuel Porcher's 3 carpenters began work 10th of November 1817-I have agreed to give one of them \$20 Per Month."

"Mr. George Champlin's work ended June 17-1818 for which he received \$609."

Professor Frederick A. Porcher, nephew of Joseph Palmer, in his article called "Upper Beat of St. John's Parish" and published by the Huguenot Society, speaks of the place and its owner in this way:

"The splendid mansion on the Springfield Tract was completed in 1820, was the abode of the most liberal and unostentatious hospitality. At a time when the roads were thronged with travelers, his house, which was conspicuous from the road, attracted strangers as well as friends, and all were considered equally entitled to its sacred rites. Mr. Palmer was a man of very marked and admirable character. It was characteristic of his race to be impulsive

and while he was a warm friend, he could be a bitter enemy. He was active, enterprising and energetic, he shrank from no labor but seemed to abhor a life of indolence. Public spirited and benevolent, he was always ready to labor and think for others, and to give up his own pleasure to promote the comfort and interest of others. Few persons have ever had so many trusts confided to them as executors; and none have ever discharged them more assiduously and faith fully."

Born at Richmond Plantation, February 1, 1770, son of John Palmer and Ann Cahusac, Joseph Palmer married Elizabeth Catherine Porcher on the 20th of May, 1801. Their children were: 1. Elizabeth Ann, born February 28, 1802, who married David Gaillard. 2. Ann Palmer, born August 10, 1804, married William Henry Cain (1829) . 3. Henrietta Porcher, born January 24, 1806, married Samuel Gaillard. 4. John Gendron, born July 13, 1807, married Catherine Marion. 5. Peter Patrick Porcher, born January 5, 1809, married Harriet J. Palmer 6. Martha Marion, born July 17, 1810, died August 1, 1810. 7. Maham, born August 12, 1811, married Matilda Snowden 8. Esther Simons, born March 27, 1813, married John Saunders Palmer. 9. Mariane Gendron, born December 11, 1814, married Samuel Jerman Palmer. 10. Samuel Porcher, born October 22, 1816, died July 3, 1842. 11. Joseph, born July 17, 1818, married (1) Margaret Allen, (2) M. L. Singleton, (3) Ida Vernon. 12. Martha Catherine, born June 11, 1820, died May 20, 1827. 13. Keating Lewis Simons, born March 10, 1822, died 1872 at The Rocks. 14. Julia Caroline, born August 7, 1825-a twin born dead Joseph Palmer died in Pineville, July 19, 1841, and his wife Elizabeth Catherine died in Pinopolis September 18, 1841. In the will of Joseph Palmer dated July 27, 1837, is this statement:

"I give devise and bequeath to my beloved wife Elizabeth Catherine Palmer my best carriage and her choice of my two best carriage horses. I also give her the use of my Plantation on which I now reside called Springfield, during the term of her natural life, or so long as she remain my widow, and no longer."

Farther on in the will he writes:

"I give devise and bequeath to my son Joseph Palmer his heirs Executors and Administrators all that Plantation called Springfield on which I now reside and comprehending the following tracts of land viz:

"No. 1--Springfield originally left me by my father. "

"No. 2-Rogers and Ervins lands purchased by me from the estate of Rogers and Ervins and another tract of land commonly called Old Goodby's containing about 170 acres and adjoining to East and South said Springfield, and purchased of Peter Couturier. I also bequeath to my son Joseph all that tract of Pineland adjoining lands of Charles Porcher, and Ward Pond Plantation, purchased of one Watkins as named in titles."

It is a long will with bequests of lands and slaves to other children, but we are concerned only with the story of Springfield. After the death of Joseph Palmer and his wife, already mentioned, Springfield became the property of Joseph the 5th, son and 11th child. He, having graduated at the South Carolina, University in Columbia and at the Medical College in Charleston, S. C., settled down in his native community, planting cotton on his patrimonial acres and practicing medicine. The house was closed except for his office, and he took up residence at The Rocks, about a mile and a half distant, with his sister Henrietta. She married Samuel Gaillard, son of Peter Gaillard who built The Rocks house and bequeathed the plantation to Samuel, his youngest son. Samiel died at the age of twenty-nine, leaving his widow with three young daughters. The eldest of these, Elizabeth, married James Gaillard of Walnut Grove, her first cousin, and they lived at The Rocks, he buying her two sisters' shares of the place. Dr. Joseph Palmer continued living at The Rocks, going to Springfield every day to attend to his business affairs. All these years the house was unoccupied. One of the slaves, old Maum Hagar, looked after things after a fashion, and I have heard that she was very much pleased when any of the children of the family came to Springfield and would give them clabber to eat. On specially favored ones, she would bestow the plate also-"Yo' Grandpa's plate to 'membah him by." Her daughter, Puddy, was the wife of Hector, and I remember both very well. Hector as a boy would go with my father, Dr. Joseph Palmer, to open gates, and later was his foreman. They always remained at Springfield, living to an old age; and some of their descendants are still there. In October, 1864, Dr. Palmer married Margaret Carrington Allen of Richmond, Virginia, and once again the old house was open and its old spirit of hospitality revived. Everything that could be done to aid the Confederacy was done. My father being a physician, and over age for military service, remained at home and attended the sick over a large area of country. His partner, Dr. P. Sidney

Kirk, a much younger man, went into the army. All cotton was given to the Confederate government, and even the leaden weights at the windows were removed and given to be melted into bullets. During Hartwell's raid through the country some of his soldiers visited the place and committed their usual depredations-meat was carried off, flour and meal emptied on the ground, and molasses poured on top! Maum Hagar had the table silver in a bag tied around her waist under her voluminous skirts, so that was saved from the raiders. At the close of the war, like all Southerners, the owner of Springfield faced life under vastly changed circumstances-his fortune depleted, his slaves gone, under a hostile government, but with an undaunted spirit. In 1866 his first child, a daughter, was born. In March of 1868, Mrs. Palmer, driving with her little girl to visit one of the neighboring plantations, was instantly killed when the horse became frightened and dashed off, throwing her from the vehicle. The little girl was unhurt and later, by the mother's formerly expressed wish, was taken to her mother's family where she remained until her education was completed. In 1870 Dr. Palmer married Mary Louise Singleton and they had two children who died in infancy. The mother also died at the birth of the second child. On the 7th of March, 1875, he married Ida Vernon, and of this union there were four children: Russell Vernon, Edmund Gaillard, Ella Vernon, and Margaret Allen. The latter lived only eighteen months. The eldest son never married, and died in December, 1929. Edmund Gaillard Palmer married in January, 1906, Agnes Tate Simons. In October, 1911, Ella Vernon Palmer married John James Simons, brother of Agnes T. Simons. From this point on I can give only my own personal recollections of Springfield. When my mother was killed and I went to live in Richmond, Virginia, with my grandmother and my aunts, I was too young to remember anything of my mother or of my South Carolina home. When I finished at a private school in Richmond, June, 1884, my father wrote to say that he felt it was time for me to know something of him and of my stepmother and brothers and sister, and that he wanted me to spend a winter or so with him before I began to teach. Accordingly, early in the following November I returned to Springfield. The beautiful old place was not in as good condition as it is in now. The lean years after the "War between the States" had not permitted improvements, or even repairs. I may not be correct, but I believe the original black cypress shingles were still covering the roof. The house is built of black cypress on a ten foot brick foundation, with six rooms on the ground floor, six rooms on the first floor, and a broad piazza across

the length of the house in front reached by a tier of beautiful brick steps which at the time of my return were almost inaccessible, as the wooden strips which formed the edge of each step had worn away. The eastern wing room, with its own porch and steps, was used as a living room and entrance. The second floor, reached by a graceful mahogany staircase, had a wide hall and four large rooms. Above was an unfinished attic. The house has fourteen closets. The interior had evidently been painted in very dark colors-slate, dark green, dark blue, orange-in some places almost obliterated. But nothing could hide the beautiful carving, all done by workmen on the place with their own hands, the little case of tools with which it was done being still in the house. Every door and window has its carved frame and cornice, and there are carved mantels and cornices and paneled wainscots in every room. The front rooms on the first floor have each an entrance door on the front piazza, and these rooms have mantels carved from floor to ceiling and very wide and elaborately carved cornices around the ceiling and over their doors and windows. In the yard were still the old carriage house, kitchen, and a brick oven. The oven is still there, though it has not been used for years, and ferns are growing on top of it. My father (Dr. Joseph Palmer) told me how well he remembered the things that were baked in it, particularly the half-bushels of sweet potatoes baked at a time-for there were many children to have lunch and "yams" were a favorite "in between food." For over fifty years Dr. Palmer practiced medicine in the community. He was "Uncle Joe" to many of the whites, and "Mausse Josie" or "Mass Josie" to the negroes. For years after age and ill health forced him to give up active practice, he went to all the family and kept his office open for the negroes. I have just glanced over his account book and wondered as I did so what our modern physicians would think of items such as these: "So and so-wife and child-prescription and medicine, 75 cents"; "So and so's child-50 cents"; and so on and on. Sometimes the fees were never paid, sometimes they were paid in chickens, eggs, corn, or peas. Always medicines were furnished, and I have seen bills for drugs running up into hundreds of dollars. His skill in diagnosis was almost uncanny; time and again, often at his request, doctors from various places were called to see some of his patients, and always his diagnosis was confirmed. Like father and grandfather, he was often called upon to act as executor for friends or kinsmen, and, like them also, he faithfully executed his trust. He was everybody's friend and the most generous of men. One of his great interests was the breeding of horses. He had a strain of cream-colored horses, and

one of his favorite gifts to the nieces or nephews was a colt. His father before him had given land to the church, notably a part of the Springfield tract on which the Parish Church (Church of Epiphany, popularly known as The Rock's Church) still stands, with cemetery inclosing graves dating back to 1807 or earlier; so my father gave a place on Springfield to the negroes for their church and school, the buildings now standing near Gignilliat Creek. The Negro race has had no more sincere friend than Dr. Joseph Palmer. I often heard him say, however, that although he worked them on his plantation and practiced medicine among them for over fifty years, each day he felt that he really knew and understood less about them! He lived to a serene old age, the loved member of the family and community who went to everyone in sickness, counseled and helped those in difficulty, and prayed with the dying. The most unassuming and least ostentatious of men, he loved mercy, did justly, and walked humbly before his God. After his death in February, 1905, a letter came from Bishop Ellison Capers (who had married his niece) saying: "I always think of Uncle Joe when I read the 15th and 24th Psalms, they well describe him." And one of his nieces wrote: "We always think of Uncle Joe as one of the 'pure in heart'." His lifelong friend, Mr. Charles Sinkler, said of him: "Joe Palmer had a heart of gold"; and I have heard my father say: "Charles Sinkler is the wisest man I ever knew, and I am never in his company but that I learn something worth while." In June of 1897 my brother, Edmund G. Palmer, left the Porter Academy in Charleston and instead of returning in the fall for his last year, he remained at home and took charge of Springfield Plantation. The house was sadly in need of repairs, there were no modern conveniences, and the lands had deteriorated during years of my father's ill health and failing strength. Edmund Gaillard Palmer brought to the task of restoring depleted lands and dilapidated buildings an unbounded enthusiasm and energy. Nothing gave him more real and satisfactory enjoyment than to take a worn out, run down piece of land, and by patience and right treatment and hard work restore it to fertility. He had the faults and the virtues of his people, being quick tempered and fearless, full of energy. He never spared himself any hard work, and he loved every foot of soil and every stick and stone of the place. Like his forefathers, he was generous, and always ready to help those in need. The house was given a tin roof and was painted, and from time to time, various other things were done. A flowing artesian well several hundred feet in depth took the place of the old open well which had furnished limestone water; bathrooms were installed; the house

was screened; the brick steps were repaired, with treads of concrete where wood had been used. The interior was painted, and the lovely carving with its white dress slowed up its lace-like duality to perfection. Barns and stables and a silo were built; a saw mill and grist mill and store were installed and operated; herds of Jersey and Angus cattle, sheep and hogs were provided with pasture; and carefully conserved manure added fertility to the soil. Dr. Palmer's will had provided that his widow have the use of the place during her life, and at her death it should be divided among his four children. These wishes were carried out. After his mother's death in November, 1911, my brother purchased my sister Ella's and my own share of Springfield, and became sole owner. As before stated, he married in January, 1906, Agnes Tate Simons, and they had one child, a daughter, Dorothy Agnes, who in June, 1931, married Thomas Francis McGuinness, and who since her father's death in August, 1930, with her mother owns Springfield. For two or three years an increasing number of strangers have come to see the house, its exquisite carving being a particular attraction. There are not many things in the way of furniture at Springfield to attract lovers of antiques. The family of Joseph the elder was too large and the division too long to have left many pieces there. There are still a very handsome mahogany sideboard, a dining table, a combination secretary and bookcase of comparatively rare light mahogany, and some attractive small tables; also a set of chairs of wood painted dark green, with bunches of gold grapes, and cane seats. Just last spring an antique dealer while rummaging in the secretary with the hope of discovering a secret drawer, found a pair of beautiful old Sheffield plate candle snuffers. There are the remnants of a lovely old Wedgewood tea set. My father while showing the pieces to me once, told me it was a double set of 24 cups, saucers and plates, two tea pots, two cream pitchers, two sugar bowls, and two cake plates. They are of the very old type made before the famous Wedgewood brothers began using a trademark. They are of glazed white china with raised lilac figures, and the cups and saucers are octagon shaped. There remains only one tea pot, a few cups, and I believe one sugar bowl, which are sometimes used by my sister-in-law, Agnes Tate Simons Palmer, when tea is served highly famed guests. In 1935, on Sunday following Christmas, there was a reunion of the Palmer clan at Springfield. They came from far and near, more than a hundred descendants of Joseph Palmer, the builder of Springfield, and his wife Catherine Porcher. The huge fireplaces blazed with big log fires. Memories were exchanged among older members of the family, and acquaintances

were made among younger members. There were then three living grandchildren: Mr. William Palmer of Charleston, then over eighty years of age, and who died only a few months ago; my sister, now Mrs. John J. Simons; and myself. How long will Springfield remain in its setting of oaks sycamores, cedars, walnuts, holly and crape myrtles - each with their long streamers of gray Spanish moss? Who can tell! Progress, the insatiable monster, demands that all that area of St. John's Berkeley, with its beautiful homes and historic associations, be submerged by the muddy waters of the Santee. Who are we, the last of a family of kindly, hospitable, gentlefolk, to withstand such demands?



Joseph Palmer



Springfield and Its Carving In Valley of Santee Dam Lake

NEWS & COURIER

Sep. 29, 1935

One Hundred and Twelve Year Old House Overlooks Fertile Fields at Border of Berkeley and Orangeburg Counties

By F. M. KIRK

Eutawville, Sept. 28.—Special: When Joseph Palmer built his mansion at Springfield plantation in 1817 he built for posterity. He constructed his house of hand-hewn black cypress which defied the elements. The building today is in as good condition as it was a century ago.

Construction of the house was under way about the time that stockholders were sadly realizing that the old Santee-Cooper canal was a financial failure, and none dreamed that a second Santee Cooper canal would be projected.

The old canal, completed in 1800 probably helped Joseph Palmer. It gave him an opportunity to lease slaves, during an agricultural depression, on the construction work. The second canal, if materialized, will flood the fertile fields, still cultivated by his descendants. It will necessitate the destruction of the magnificent mansion he built.

Springfield is now the home of the widow of the last male owner, Edmund G. Palmer (grand-son of the builder), and of her son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas S. McGuinness. It is located in Upper St. John's parish, Berkeley county, six miles east of Eutaw Springs. The plantation has never passed out of the hands of the Palmer family.

Family Name Changed

Thomas Palmer, who spelled his name Pamor, the English emigrant, left three sons: Joseph, David and John, and a daughter, Elizabeth. John is the ancestor of the Springfield line.

John Palmer, who made a fortune out of turpentine on his plantation, Gravel Hill, in St. Stephen's parish, commanded in his will that his sons forever after spell their names "Palmer" rather than "Pamor."

The last will and testament of "Turpentine John", as he was known, has been rigidly carried out by his descendants in the spelling of the name. In this section, however, the pronunciation of the original spelling has been retained.

It was Turpentine John's son, Captain John Palmer, who purchased the tract now known as Springfield, some time probably before the Revolution, from Isaac Couturier and Thomas Palmer, the latter being the captain's brother.

Captain John Palmer, apparently, never lived at Springfield. He settled Richmond plantation, St. Stephen's parish, in 1769 and lived there until his death in 1817. Though his chief interests centered in St. Stephen's parish, his journal, now at Springfield, has many interesting entries regarding his activities on his "lands in St. John's Parish". As late as 1783 he mentions "planting indigo at Springfield". Many planters were beginning to forsake indigo about that time.

Finest Carving in County

Isaac Couturier and Thomas Palmer apparently secured the

lands they sold to Captain Palmer by royal grants considerably before the Revolution. Captain Palmer and his son, Joseph, to whom the plantation was willed, constantly added to their holdings, as a number of old plats at Springfield indicate. Some of these tracts so added date back to grants made in the early years of the eighteenth century.

There is no record when the earlier house was built or when it was taken down; for apparently, there was an earlier residence on the place. Joseph Palmer was living at Springfield when he commenced construction on the present house. It is said by some that Joseph Palmer was born there in 1776.

No house in Berkeley county, and few anywhere, can boast the elaborate and beautiful carving that adorns the interior of Springfield. Hand carved by slaves with tools still in possession of the family, the stateness and intricacy of the designs present an unrivaled picture of beauty. In her account of the Palmer reunion held there last December, Miss Flora B. Surles aptly describes the woodwork as "giving one the impression of something made of lace rather than of wood."

The two front entrance rooms, serving as drawing room and dining room, have high mantels elaborately decorated to the ceiling. The cornices above doors and windows and the wainscoting and frieze carry out the same design. Other rooms have simpler decorations. The rooms are large and well proportioned. A small wing on either side of the main body of the house, gives the building excellent proportions.

Founder of Pineville

Captain John Palmer, father of Joseph the builder, was an active partisan during the Revolution, and served as an aide to General Marion. In 1794 he was one of the founders of the village of Pineville which soon became the summer home of all planters in the community. He took an active part in the affairs of the parish and wrote an historical sketch of St. Stephen's Parish for Ramsey's History of South Carolina, which was published in Charleston in 1809.

The captain's father, "Turpentine John" of Gravel Hill, and his uncle Joseph, of Webdo, were both too far advanced in years to take active parts in the Revolutionary struggle. Both, however, were ardent Whigs and earned the hatred of the Tories during that bitter partisan period. Both were seized by their ene-

which was then a British post. There the two brothers were thrust into the dark and clammy confines of the Colleton family vault. Not so much as a blanket was given them to keep off the chill air of their gloomy prison.

When they were eventually liberated from their dungeon the brothers were so weakened that it took

them two days to reach Gravel Hill, only ten miles away. Such was their condition, and such their fear of further imprisonment that each took turns carrying the other on his back.

Executor for Many

Joseph Palmer, I, of Springfield, was outstanding in his community for the regard and affection in which he was held by his neighbors. "Few persons", says Professor Frederick A. Porcher, "have ever had so many trusts confided to them as executors; and none has ever discharged them more assiduously or more faithfully."

He seems to have been impulsive at times in speech and action. On one occasion a minister preached a political sermon in the lower parish which gave offense to all St. John's. So offended was Joseph Palmer with the sermon that he declared that the clergyman should never enter his house. (Famed though it was for its hospitality).

Not long after, while Mr. Palmer was away from home, the political parson drove up to Springfield and asked for a night's lodging. The mistress of the house, fearful of the scene to follow, bade him welcome, and nervously awaited the return of her husband.

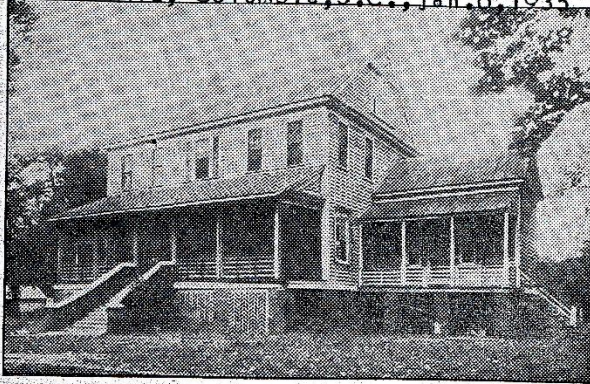
It was night when Joseph Palmer returned, but Mrs. Palmer met him before he entered the house to warn him of the unwelcome guest.

"Damn him", cried Mr. Palmer. "Is he here?" Then he strode into the drawing room to greet the minister with every courtesy that hospitality demanded. Never did the minister realize the relief to his hostess of that warm welcome.

Springfield today retains the charm of former years. The dwelling is located in the midst of a yard filled with moss-draped trees. The house has been kept in perfect repair, and all lands are extensively cultivated. Historic Rocks church (Church of the Epiphany) is located about a mile north-east of the house, and is surrounded on all sides by the plantation lands.

Palmers From Far and Near Reassemble In Reunion at Old Springfield House Near Eutawville Built 117 Years Ago

THE STATE, Columbia, S.C., Jan. 6, 1935



Melcher's Studio, Charleston.

Springfield House, Springfield plantation, near Eutawville. Built in 1818 by Joseph Palmer and famous for its ornate interior woodwork. Although 117 years old and never painted until after the World war, this house of cypress is in almost perfect repair today. The original plaster covers the walls of the drawing room and the dining room.

By Miss Flora Belle Surles.
Eutawville, Jan. 5.—The strength of blood ties and the grip which the soil had upon the lives of early South Carolina families and which continues in the present generation were manifest at old Springfield plantation near Eutawville last Sunday when almost a hundred descendants of the English emigrant, Thomas Palmer (Pamor), gathered for a reunion in the home built by Joseph Palmer in the year 1818, upon lands which probably have been in the family continuously since before 1700.

Mrs. Edmund Palmer, widow of the late grandson of the builder of Springfield house, and her daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas McGuinness, present owners of the plantation, were hosts to those who answered the call, hastily sent out Christmas eve, to bring members of the "clan" together on soil from which had sprung sacred ties and traditions and many common interests. The house and grounds had been especially prepared to receive them. Every room from basement to attic was thrown wide open and in the huge fireplaces glowed log fires such as many of the younger members of the gathering had heard of or read of, perhaps, but had never seen. Indeed, the old house presented much of its pre-Confederate war atmosphere as Negro boys passed in and out from room to room replenishing the fires with logs so heavy as to require two persons to place them. Tables had been prepared under the trees for the picnic dinner and great bowls of punch and pots of hot coffee had been made ready.

From the four corners of the state these Palmer descendants came bringing with them baskets filled with food prepared from recipes which have made Palmer plantations famous. In the words of Joseph Palmer of Sumter, great-grandson of the builder of Springfield house, "There are lots of Palmers here that I never heard of before—good looking fellows, too!" From 11 o'clock in the morning until late afternoon relatives made or renewed acquaintances, repeated family anecdotes and traditions, compared family records, examined old wills and other documents; in fact, steeped themselves in family history.

The house itself had much attention, particularly from those who saw it for the first time. A two story frame building on a high brick basement with two large central rooms, each opening upon a broad piazza and flanked by smaller wings at either

side, constructed of hand hewn black cypress in the style of the early American republic and surrounded by large live oaks, cedars and holly trees, Springfield house presents the usual picture of the old plantation home of South Carolina. But its interior differs from many of them in that the woodwork is remarkably ornate. In fact, the carving of window and door frames, both inside and outside the drawing room, gives one the impression of looking at something made of lace rather than of wood. This effect is carried out also in the panels bordering the huge fireplaces in the drawing room and dining room, both of which contain elaborately carved mantels extending to the high ceiling. The cornice in these two rooms is unusually wide and delicately and elaborately carved.

Among the relics which have passed down from Joseph Palmer, builder of the house (1776-1874), are the tools with which the carving was done and an old account book containing information relating to the construction of the house. An entry in the clear and exquisite style of handwriting of the period states that G. W. Champlin commenced Monday the 20 October 1817, to build a dwelling for me 40 feet by 40 feet with a wing at each end 22 by 18 feet at sixty dollars per month. There are records also of the hiring of skilled carpenters and bricklayers from neighboring plantations, among them "Francis Marion, Jr.'s man Dick," and others from Maj. Samuel Porcher of Mexico plantation. Francis Peyre, Sr., and the estate of Thomas Cordes, Jr. The prevailing wage was 50 cents per day. Whether it was merely the custom of the times, the advantage of cheap labor or foresight which prompted the builder to provide so spacious a house for his family the book does not record but from a family tree displayed Sunday by one of the descendants it appears that Joseph Palmer and Elizabeth Porcher, his wife, were the parents of 15 children. Eleven of them reached maturity and nine of them married and left descendants.

The late Prof. Frederick A. Porcher of Charleston college said of Joseph Palmer:

"His home was the abode of a most liberal but unostentatious hospitality. At a time when the roads were thronged with travelers his house, which was conspicuous from the road, attracted strangers as well as friends and all were considered equally entitled to its sacred rites." Indeed, the broad brick steps leading to the piazza

above the basement floor offer a tempting invitation to the passerby. So large is the piazza that with no feeling of crowding it accommodated the basket dinner Sunday when a persisting rain necessitated moving in from the grounds.

The most picturesque figure in the Palmer family was the grandfather of this Joseph, "Turpentine John" (1713-1783), remembered to this day not only because of the fortune he made from his pine lands but because by his will, dated May 4, 1782, he decreed a change in the spelling of the family name: "Item, I will and order that my three sons, instead of spelling their names, Pamor, shall forever hereafter spell their names Palmer." From these early Palmers (Pamors) have come a host of descendants in South Carolina and other Southern states who have made distinct contributions along many lines. Among them there have been and are ministers, physicians, lawyers, educators, nurses, engineers, planters an abusiness men and women.

The old account book of Joseph Palmer was used to register those who attended the reunion Sunday. The oldest descendant to inscribe his name was William Cain Palmer of Charleston, the only surviving grandson of the builder of Springfield house. Other descendants who attended were: P. Porch Gregorie, Miss P. G. Porcher, Francis C. Porcher, Misses Elizabeth D. and Caroline B. Porcher, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Jerman Palmer and their daughters, Samuella J. and Grace B. Palmer, Mr. and Mrs. B. Cola Palmer, their son, Paul, Jr., and their daughter, Penelope Palmer, Miss Louise P. Palmer, Miss Alice Gaillard Palmer, Mrs. Robert Wilson, Miss Harriet C. Wilson, James M. Wilson, James J. Palmer, Mrs. Mildred Palmer Warren, Miss Maude Warren, Mrs. Edward Allston and her sons, Edward Francis, Jr., and Pierre Bacot Allston, of Charleston, Mrs. Dora Kirk Palmer, Miss Harriet Woodward Palmer, Miss Harriet E. Palmer, Lucien Kirk Palmer, Fayssoux P. Palmer, Beverly Palmer, Norman H. Palmer, Lucien K. Palmer, Joseph W. Palmer, Berkeley Palmer and Mrs. Norman W. Palmer of Ridge way; Mrs. Arthur T. Wayne, Mrs. Catherine P. Langley, Miss Clara A. Langley, Miss Catherine P. Langley, Miss Florence M. Porcher, Mr. and Mrs. Ferdinand Gregorie and Dr. Anne King Gregorie of Mount Pleasant; Mr. and Mrs. J. Palmer Smith of Meggett, James Hill Palmer, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Tucker Smith, Lewis Smith, Charles Smith of Columbia; Mr. and Mrs. F. K. Simons, Edmund Simons, Mr. and Mrs. John J. Simons, Miss Josephine Simons, Jack Simons, Miss Lydia Simons, Miss Julia Gaillard Palmer, Mrs. W. P. Palmer, Miss Julia Palmer Simons, Frank Simons, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. William Henry Sinkler, Elias P. Sinkler of Eutawville; Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Palmer, Miss Marianne Langley Palmer of Sumter; Miss Katherine Macbeth Cain, Joseph Palmer Cain, Joseph Palmer Cain, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. F. M. Kirk and Miss Elizabeth Ravenel Cain of Pinopolis; Mr. and Mrs. J. Palmer Smith, Jr., and their small sons, J. Palmer Smith and Orlando Flye Smith of Kensington, Md.

The last two descendants named, being too young to sign their names, registered by making their marks.

Specially invited guests included: The Rev. D. Nathaniel Peebles of Eutawville, Robin Matthew and Charles Richardson, Jr., of Charleston, Miss Flora Belle Surles of Mount Pleasant and Mrs. Maria R. Gaillard of Charleston, who gave a program of original readings.

Our ancestor, Joseph Palmer, grandson of Turpentine John Palmer built Springfield Plantation and remained in the family until it was destroyed in the 1930's to make way for Lake Marion. Attached is a story by Lieze Palmer Gaillard. Also, many photos of the plantation which were passed down in the family

Provided by David Rutledge April 2024.

See email from David on Sunday, April 14, 2024 for more photos.