

HISTORY  
of the  
SAMS AND WHITTLE FAMILIES  
by  
CONWAY WHITTLE SAMS

*Excerpt: Elizabeth E. Sams' recollections about her father Berners  
Barnwell Sams as told to her nephew Conway Whittle Sams in Feb 1905.*

*Transcribed July 3, 2020 from a copy in the possession of Ting Sams Colquhoun,  
Beaufort, South Carolina by William A. Riski, Dataw Historic Foundation. All footnotes  
are by Mr. Riski.*

### **Berners Barnwell Sams.**

The following facts in connection with our grandfather Sams<sup>1</sup>, were gathered from his daughter, Elizabeth<sup>2</sup>, during a visit paid to us in Norfolk.<sup>3</sup>

Our grandfather was of middle size, with dark complexion, dark eyes and hair, and had beautiful teeth.

He was fond of reading, medical books particularly, and studied a great deal. He was a practical man, without much regard to the beautiful. He surrounded himself with his children. He loved his orchard and loved to graft trees. He cared little for politics, but loved to plant. He never made a speech nor address nor wrote anything. He lived a great deal to himself, and his family, did very little visiting. He enjoyed his home with his family, was always at home at night. Never travelled. Never heard of his going out of the State of South Carolina. Was a regular attendant at Church and a member of the Vestry.

He took a glass of brandy and water every day at dinner, but did not drink at other times.

The first thing in the morning he would take his coffee and waffle and go over to Datha. He would spend the night, and come back the next day, getting back about dinner time. Always lay down after dinner.

He was fond of duck shooting, made ponds for them on Datha. Doves were also shot there, and bullbats.<sup>4</sup> There were large quantities of ducks, green and blue winged teal; black ducks, and English ducks being the most numerous.

He only practiced medicine with his own family and slaves. His family would have no one else. He was a good physician, a calm man

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<sup>1</sup> Grandfather refers to Berners Barnwell Sams (1787 – 1855)

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Exima Sams (1831 – 1906). Aunt of Conway Whittle Sams

<sup>3</sup> The document is written from the point of view of Conway Whittle Sams (1864 – 1935)

<sup>4</sup> Common nighthawk is sometimes called a "bull-bat" due to the "bull-like" boom made by its wings as it pulls from a dive and its perceived "bat-like" flight. Source: Wikipedia

in a sick room, though at other times he had a good deal of temper; he was a high spirited man, really quick tempered. He was as honest as the day was long, and believed in owing no man anything.

He was fond of fishing, would go in April down to Bay Point<sup>5</sup>, and marooned for about a week, fishing for drum.

Cotton was his only crop grown for the market. This was sold for him by his factors in Charleston, Messrs. Lagare & O'Hear.<sup>6</sup>

He increased his substance by his planting. He inherited the Western half of Datha from his Mother, it having been her property, belonging to the Hext family. This was all he inherited. His other property was purchased by him.

His first wife was Elizabeth Hann Fripp<sup>7</sup>, who was from St. Helena Island, near Datha, just South of it, being cut off by Jenkins' Creek. We do not know where she lived on that Island, and but little about the family. Her brother, James Fripp<sup>8</sup>, my great Uncle, being the only one Aunt Elizabeth knew, the others died long before she was born. He [BB Sams] was a highly educated man, of good family, but lived entirely in the Country, and though a very rich man, saw little of the Beaufort people, and confined himself principally to St. Helena. None of the family live on the island now, they all having passed away.<sup>9</sup>

By this wife he had eleven children, all born in Beaufort except the first two, Washington and Arianna, who died there as infants. She died March 16th, 1831.

He married again in less than a year, a widow lady, Mrs. Martha

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<sup>5</sup> Bay Point is near Bay Point Island, SC. Across Port Royal Sound from Hilton Head Island. It has been in the news recently because of a much contested plan to develop this uninhabited island.

<sup>6</sup> Probably Legare and O'Hear.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Hann Fripp (1795 – 1831)

<sup>8</sup> James Edings Fripp (1793 – 1848)

<sup>9</sup> Odd statement. While true, the family no longer lived on St. Helena Island cause of the Civil War evacuation, not because they passed away. For completeness, the last of BB Sams' 15 children to pass away was Rev. James Julius Sams in 1918.

Fripp, nee Edwards.<sup>10</sup> She was living in Beaufort when married. She was a very nice person, placid, quint and mild, with a sweet face. She had two sons when she married, Lawrence Fripp<sup>11</sup> and Oliver Fripp<sup>12</sup>, both died not long after the War. Lawrence had nine children, five of whom survived him, Anna Fripp<sup>13</sup> being one of them. Oliver had no children.

Our Grandfather had four children by this wife, Adelaide, Bonham, Clement and Sarah, our half uncles and aunts.

This second wife survived him two years. She died in the big brick house in Beaufort in the East front room, in the year 1857.<sup>14</sup>

He died in Aunt Elizabeth's house<sup>15</sup> and room, March 15th, 1855, of pneumonia, caught by standing in the cold wind looking after the building of the brick house. The attack went to his head. He took off his coat sitting in the sitting room, to the surprise of his daughters. He was induced to go to bed and never got up.

He was a democrat in politics. Never held an office, nor made a speech. He conducted the following plantations, "Datha," "The Bluff," across the river opposite Beaufort on Ladies' Island, "Laurel Hill," about four miles North of the Bluff. These he was conducting personally the latter part of his life.

He gave his son, Bainbridge<sup>16</sup>, "Black's Point," situated on the Northern part of Ladies' Island, on the South side of Coosaw River.

This property was bought by him from the Talbirds. It had a good two story frame house on it, which he built. Uncle Bainbridge died at thirty-

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<sup>10</sup> Martha Fripp Edwards (1799 – 1857). Martha was a first cousin of BB Sams first wife, Elizabeth Hann Fripp

<sup>11</sup> James Edings Lawrence Fripp (1816 – 1864) married BB Sams & Elizabeth Fripp Sams daughter, Evelina Edings Sams (1822 – 1861)

<sup>12</sup> William Oliver Perry (1819 – 1879)

<sup>13</sup> Unclear why Elizabeth singles out Anna Fripp.

<sup>14</sup> "Big brick house" is still standing today at 201 Laurens Street, Beaufort, South Carolina

<sup>15</sup> Aunt Elizabeth is Elizabeth Exima Sams. The house referred to here is standing today at 313 Hancock Street, Beaufort, South Carolina

<sup>16</sup> Berners Bainbridge Sams (1814 – 1850)

six, before the War. He left a wife and three children, one living now, Mrs. Dunlap, of Atlanta, Ga. Mr. Dunlap, now dead, was a lawyer. This family was not of the first standing.

He gave "Bolus Point" to Donald<sup>17</sup>. This was next to, and South of Bainbridge's, on the North side of Lucy Point Creek. There was no house on this plantation. It was merely cultivated. Franklin attended to it for Donald. This was confiscated after the war.

He gave "Burgamot" to Franklin<sup>18</sup>, this was named from a burgamot tree, a fruit tree similar to the lemon, which was on it. This had a two roomed house on it. He did not often stay there, living with the family in Beaufort. This place was confiscated after the War.

He gave "Laurel Hill" to Clement<sup>19</sup>. This was next to and North of the place he gave to Franklin. This probably had a house on it, as Clement used to spend nights there. He lived with the family in Beaufort.

To Melvine [sic]<sup>20</sup> he gave a place on St. Helena Island called "Oaklands." This plantation had a one story house, good enough for him and his family to live there in the Winter. This was just on the other side of Polwanna [sic] Island from Datha. He spent his Summers first at St. Helena village, and then when his children grew larger, he bought a house in Beaufort and moved there.

This property first belonged to Dr. Lewis Reeve Sams<sup>21</sup>, our Grandfather's nephew, and was bought from him, and he gave it to Melvine.

He owned it up to the War, after which it was either confiscated, if not sold by him before the war, as he bought a place on "the main," that is, on the West side of Broad River.

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<sup>17</sup> Donald Decatur Sams (1820 – 1898)

<sup>18</sup> Franklin Fripp Sams (1824 – 1885)

<sup>19</sup> Charles Clement Sams (1837 – 1865)

<sup>20</sup> Melvin Melius Sams (1815 – 1900)

<sup>21</sup> Dr. Lewis Reeve Sams (1810 – 1888)

By his will he gave his half of Datha to my father, Horace<sup>22</sup>, Uncle Julius<sup>23</sup> and Clement.

His town property, already separately described, he gave to his daughters, Elizabeth, Adelaide and Sarah.<sup>24</sup>

In Beaufort he had a four seated carriage and kept a pair of horses. After his death his children also kept a saddle horse of Uncle Randolph<sup>25</sup>, and a buggy horse of Uncle Franklin.

Of the nineteen servants all told at the town house, there were, a man cook, Jimmie, who filled that position for forty-two years; a coachman, Cicero; two dining room servants, Jacob and Boz; three seamstresses, Affie, who belonged to my father later and came to Norfolk, she also served as maid to our step-grandmother. Harriet served only as seamstress, and Louisa, who also served as maid to Aunt Elizabeth; two maids, Nancy, who waited on Adelaide, and Diana, who waited on Sarah; Jacob also served as valet to my father . Two washwomen, one of whom was also named Nancy; one boat hand, Christmas, a bought negro, and Cicero, who also served in that manner; four children, Joe, Emma, Elisha called Mannie, and Winters. The garden was worked by the coachman.

Only three of these slaves were bought, Juliet, Nancy and Christmas, all the others were born in the family. They had little to do and had an easy time.

When the family moved over to Datha for the month of December, all these slaves were taken with him except one, who was left to protect the property in Beaufort.

Over on Datha there were scores of slaves, some of whose quarters were some distance to the South-east of the house on Jenkin's Creek. There were about four of their houses here. There was a long row of

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<sup>22</sup> Horace Hann Sams (1829 – 1865)

<sup>23</sup> James Julius Sams (1826 – 1918)

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Exima Sams, Adelaide Arianna Sams, Sarah Stanyarne Sams

<sup>25</sup> Robert Randolph Sams (1827 – 1910)

their cabins to the North of the house.

On the road coming up from Mink Point was, first, a big cotton house, on the left hand side of the road near that, on the same side of the road, was the gin house, where the seeds were gotten out, and the cotton was packed. Then came the dairy, then a brick well, to the East of the dairy, and then the tabby fodder house, near the barn and corn mill, the corn being ground on the place. To the West of the house was the overseer's house, of frame. The overseer was always a white man, one was named Cummings, a severe man, whom the servants hated. He was there for several years. Our grandfather finally parted with him; Mr. Reynolds succeeded him. The overseer's house was one story with three or four rooms in it, with a kitchen in front. West of the overseer's kitchen, across the road, were two small tabby houses for the servants' quarters. The overseers lived on the place the whole year, and in the absence of the owner, had direct control and management of the place and the slaves. The negroes complained that Mr. Cummings whipped them unnecessarily, and was very exacting of them. The overseer and his family were the only white people living on the plantation eleven months of the year. No complaints were made about Mr. Reynolds, and the plantation got on just as well.

On the place besides the cotton which was raised for sale, there was grown for home consumption corn, peas, potatoes, turnips, sugar-cane, tanyas, a vegetable like a turnip, pomegranates, pears of every variety, different varieties of figs, apples, ground nuts, black walnuts, persimmons, bitter-sweet oranges, cattle, pork, chickens, geese, ducks, guinea fowls, turkeys, in large quantities, and sheep. He cured all the meat, made hams, gams, sausages, sides, lard, but bought butter, using but little that was made on the place.

The provisions grown on Datha supplied the Beaufort house throughout the year, leaving only tea, coffee, sugar, molasses, rice and other condiments, which were bought in large quantity from Charleston.

There were few pictures at either Datha or the Beaufort home. There

was a piano at the town house, Adelaide and Elizabeth playing on it. It fell to Uncle Julius in the partition. There was a small collection of books at Datha, but very few in the Beaufort house.

Our grandfather kept a great deal to himself, but had an agreeable manner. His brother Lewis was of a much more social disposition. His turn of mind was democratic. He talked little of his family affairs. He was head of his house, always acknowledged so, his children were perfectly obedient to him, whatever he wished was done promptly without question. Of all his children Franklin had the best mind and soundest judgment. Instead of practicing law, which he had studied, he preferred to plant cotton, he succeeded at this, but was impoverished by the war. After the war, he did not continue to plant, but studied pharmacy, and took a position in Dr. Stewart's drug store at \$60.00 a month. He was there for several years. Later he kept the books at the Sea Island Hotel. Mrs. Odell, the wife of the Proprietor, told Aunt Elizabeth, that it gave an air of respectability to the hotel to have a man like the Major seen there.

Grandfather never spoke of his father, William Sams, nor of his Mother. He never entertained any of the prominent persons in the State, nor knew them personally. The bent of his mind was not that way, he was above all things a cotton planter. When he went to Charleston it was purely on business, and he paid no social visits there.<sup>26</sup> He had no relatives there, and only stayed one or two days. The community at Beaufort was like a set of moles, they never went anywhere, except to move to their plantations in the Winter.

His particular friends were Col. Robert Barnwell<sup>27</sup>, a distant cousin, old Dr. Guerrard<sup>28</sup>, and Dr. Henry Fuller<sup>29</sup>. He was fond of smoking, cigars being his favorite form. He never played cards, this was not then

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<sup>26</sup> May be true, but BB Sams' brother John and wife Catherine Deveaux lived near Charleston and had three children. Though John died about 1800, his wife remarried and lived until 1839. Since Elizabeth E. Sams was only nine at that time, it's very possible BB visited his sister-in-law during Charleston trips but Elizabeth was unaware.

<sup>27</sup> Probably Robert Woodward Barnwell (1801 - 1882), a distant cousin of Dr. BB Sams

<sup>28</sup> Probably Dr. Jacob DeVeaux "J.D." Guerard (1793 – 1863)

<sup>29</sup> Dr. Henry Middleton Fuller (1807 – 1871), a distant cousin of Dr. BB Sams



considered genteel. Never drove nor rode for pleasure, but used sometimes to go sailing. He had two sail boats, the "Lizzard" and "Sheer Water." Our father afterwards owned the latter and Franklin the "Lizzard."

He was not a member of any militia company, nor was he a Mason or Odd Fellow. He dressed very neatly, even when going in to the Country, never was seen without his coat, even on the hottest day. He wore a stock and boots almost to the knees. His clothing was made in Charleston. He had two tailors of his own, who made his country clothing.

Business was done on a yearly basis, pass books being sent to the stores, and the accounts settled at the end of the year. He was one of the most honest men who ever walked. When he died there were no debts. He had inherited some property and steadily increased it during his life. He studied medicine at Charleston at the Medical College. With a large family he went steadily ahead. He gave good educations to all his children, all his sons except Clement studied a profession, Melvin, Donald and Randolph studied medicine, Franklin and Horace studied law, and Julius and Bonham studied for the ministry. Clement did not study a profession on account of his health. The girls studied the usual English courses and Music and French. Elizabeth and Adelaide went to boarding school at Montpelia [sic]<sup>30</sup>, in Georgia, and Eveline and Sarah went to boarding schools in Charleston.

The attractions of the easy life of a cotton planter, diverted his sons from prosecuting their professions. It was the aristocratic thing to do, and they naturally adopted it, employing a large number of slaves in the cultivation. Only the two Ministers really followed their professions.

I have heard the above sketch of my father's life read, and believe it to be substantially correct.

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<sup>30</sup> Probably The Montpelier Institute at Montpelier Springs, Monroe County, Georgia, established in 1841.

*Elizabeth E. Sams*

Feb. 21st, 1905.